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Work, affection, and moral economy among Albanian domestic workers in Greece

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Abstract

The moral economy framework sheds light on how economic activities and workplace practices are influenced and structured by moral sentiments, norms, and social relations. The concept of the moral economy is particularly applicable to domestic laboring spheres, where employee-employer exchanges and relations are not merely contractual, but are embedded in moral and cultural values. This article builds on moral economy theory to analyze informal relations and workplace practices among 19 Albanian domestic workers in Greece and their employers. The study reveals how social and economic relations are constructed and shaped through the emotional and intimate nature of domestic work, as well as through moral/ethical sentiments, norms, and behaviors. The everyday working practices and emotional attachments between the employers and the employees seemed to reproduce, construct, and rebuild home-like settings, kin relations, and feelings. While such emotional affection impacted some women positively, other women considered it a burden because of their inability to claim their rights.

KEYWORDS
domestic worker, Greece, labor market, moral economy, relations

1 | INTRODUCTION

There is growing academic research interest in the globalization of domestic work (Anderson, 2000; Cox, 2006; Lutz, 2002, 2008; Parreñas, 2001). These studies explore the precarious nature of domestic work in the context of power relations and negotiations that take place at the nexus of gender, ethnicity, age, and class (Andall, 2000; Nare, 2009; Vullnetari, 2012). On a global scale, domestic work has been widely perceived as a typically immigrant occupation (Moya, 2007; Nare, 2009), with migrant women often occupying these segmented sectors of the host countries' labor markets (Gallotti & Mertens, 2013; Reyneri, 2004). An increasing number of studies have analyzed the exploitative and precarious nature of domestic work, observing that this work is generally undervalued, underpaid, and poorly regulated (ETUC, 2012, p. 10; Gallotti & Mertens, 2013). It is argued that domestic work has generally a downward impact on women's empowerment since migrant women often find themselves employed in very precarious sectors that produce inequalities (Este'vez-Abe and Hobson, 2015; Lutz, 2016). Domestic work constitutes an international division of reproductive labor (Parrenas, 2001, p. 29) as this pattern of work reproduces the traditional women's work. This globalizing division of domestic work is highly gendered, "racialised", and "ethnicised" (Nare, 2009, p.4). Due to its private nature, this work has rather blurred boundaries in terms of the tasks and responsibilities workers are expected to take on, but also in terms of relations and negotiations of social space between employers and employees (Nare, 2011). While there is a general assumption that household work involves a range of activities and chores performed inside the household, including cleaning, cooking, ironing, washing, gardening, and caring for children, and elderly and infirm people (Nare, 2009) the emotional and mental dimensions of this work are largely ignored (Eichler & Albanese, 2007). Indeed, studies have suggested that there is an ambiguous social space that is constructed out of complex relations, expectations, and interests between domestic workers and their employers (Bakan & Stasiulis, 1994, p.23). For informal migrants, this social space becomes even more precarious because of their labor market insecurity, and their fear of being deported due to restrictive immigration policies (Anderson, 2000; Nare, 2009, p.6).

In recent years, several scholars have explored domestic work in Greece, with a particular focus on Albanian migrant women (Danaj, 2019; Vassiliko, 2007; Vullnetari, 2012). However, much less attention has been paid to the social space, the employee-employer power exchanges, and the emotional dimensions entailed in such relations (Gallotti & Mertens, 2013). This paper seeks to help fill this research gap by deepening our understanding of the work relations and workplace practices experienced by Albanian migrant women. This article builds on the moral economy theory (Bolton & Laaser, 2013; Sayer, 2004; Thompson, 1971) as a conceptual framework to analyze these kinds of informal relationships and workplace practices, and the affective dimension of relations between Albanian domestic workers in Greece and their employers. This article lays on Thompson's assumption of economic practices as embedded in the social sphere, and deeply rooted in social and human aspects of work (Thompson, 1971; Thompson, 1991).

The research question we address in this paper is:

How are the workplace practices and relations among the Albanian domestic workers and their employers built and maintained and to what extent does the emotional and intimate nature of such work shape power relations?

The concept of the moral economy is particularly applicable to domestic laboring spheres, where employee–employer exchanges and relations are not merely contractual but are embedded in moral and cultural norms (Nare, 2011) or silent "moral contract". Moral economic theory argues that work is based not just on economic profit maximization, but also on the concept of moral values: that is, that labor relations rely on good/bad, just/unjust, and moral/immoral contracts that are always unwritten and under constant negotiation (Nare, 2011). In this article, we seek to identify the kinds of emotional, family, and kinship relations that are developed between domestic workers and employers, and to determine to what extent the precarity or the invisibility of this kind of work further complicates the relationship between them.

2 | THEORETICAL BACKGROUND: THE EMOTIONAL AND INTIMATE NATURE OF DOMESTIC WORK

Despite the recent growth in the literature on domestic work (Anderson, 2000; Gallotti & Mertens, 2013; Lutz, 2002, 2008), few studies have adequately considered the social space, relationships, and power dynamics that exist among employers and employees in these types of occupations (Nare, 2009, 2011; Xypolytas et al., 2017). These studies have offered a more comprehensive view of household work that includes four dimensions: physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual. They have also observed that these aspects of household work may be performed on a paid or unpaid basis, and can change over the life course (Eichler & Albanese, 2007). In addition, more recent feminist research has highlighted the emotional character of domestic labor (Gutierrez-Rodriguez, 2014; Lan, 2006). By analyzing the emotional aspects of domestic labor relations, scholars have pointed out that this kind of reproductive labor is mediated by and derives from affective nuances (Gutierrez-Rodriguez, 2014). From a positive point of view, these relations could enable the further integration of migrant women and their families into the host society, because the boundaries between the formal and the personal in such work environments are often blurred (Vullnetari, 2012). These intimacy bonds often emerge because the DW plays a key role in addressing the emotions and feelings circulating in the household (Nare, 2011). These bonds are also essential to the understanding of domestic labor not as labor performed under contractual obligations, but as labor based on patronage (Xypolytas et al., 2017). Thus, the relationships between the employers and employees in these kinds of jobs are not perceived in terms of the employment relationship, and the workers are not perceived in terms of their human and labor rights, which makes them more vulnerable to exploitation (Gallotti & Mertens, 2013).

Our efforts to understand the employment practices among Albanian domestic workers in Greece are further illuminated by the literature on moral economies. The moral economic perspective is broadly defined as "a system of economic transactions that invoke social relationships and moral norms of society" (Waite & Lewis, 2017, p. 966). This framework argues that all kinds of economic activities are influenced and structured by moral sentiments and norms; and that these particular norms may be negotiated, diminished, or reinforced by economic pressures (Sayer, 2004).

Building on this approach, several studies (Nare, 2009, 2011; Xypolytas et al., 2017) have provided a deeper account of such informal relations, pointing to the tendency of domestic workers and employers to transform labor relationships into family-like relationships. Strong familial relationships, feelings of care and responsibility, and women's feminized cultural capital—are all features embedded within the moral economy (Marks et al., 2023). This occurs because domestic work is performed within the privacy of households. Therefore, domestic labor relationships are highly personalized, and tend to involve emotional work. This emotional and affective labor is highly gendered (Hochschild, 1983; Glinsner et al., 2019). In addition, domestic work requires the adoption of "feminine" attributes, such as empathy, cooperation, sensitivity needed to engage in emotionally appropriate behavior. Another study conducted by Xypolytas et al. (2017) showed that domestic workers are emotionally attached to their employers while undertaking domestic duties; and that in their everyday interactions, these relationships seem to mimic familial relationships (Xypolytas et al., 2017, p.96). Yet, such intimate and emotional labor is not always beneficial for the workers, as they can be subject to physical, mental, and emotional abuse and harassment (Spitzer et al., 2022).

3 | CONTEXT: MIGRATION AND LABOR MARKET SEGMENTATION IN GREECE

In recent years, Greece has been the leading destination country for Albanian migrants, and an estimated 500,000 Albanian citizens are currently living in Greece (Speed & Alikaj, 2020). The migration trajectories of Albanians in Greece are very dynamic and diverse, ranging from formal and informal labor migration to family reunification, to seasonal work. Albanians could be regularized only in the late 1990s and early 2000s, following the regularization schemas for illegal migrants by the Greek authorities (Gemi, 2014). The Greek labor market is highly segregated in terms of gender and ethnicity. Albanian women migrant workers in Greece are mainly concentrated in female-

dominated occupations, such as the service sector and domestic work. According to Lazaridis (2000), Albanian women had to fulfill the stigmatized job sector gap of domestic workers that was abandoned by the Greek working class, who due to internal migration flows in Greece and increased living standards refrained from working in this sector. Men, on the other hand, worked overwhelmingly in niche areas that are unskilled or semiskilled labor, such as construction, agriculture, and manufacturing (Vassilikou, 2007; Xhaho et al., 2021).

Although immigrant women in Greece play an important role in the economic and social life of the Greek family, their visibility and social recognition tend to be obscured. As these women mainly work in the low-income and informal segments of the labor market, their social status is often devalued (Danaj, 2019). The Greek labor market is highly segregated in terms of gender and nationality. Albanian migrant women who work in Greece are mainly employed in female-dominated occupations, such as the service sector and domestic work.

4 | METHODOLOGY

4.1 | Data collection

The article is based on 19 biographical interviews with Albanian migrant women who were employed as domestic workers in Greece. We adopted a qualitative approach in order to get detailed accounts of the experiences of Albanian migrant workers from the micro perspective. All of the interviews were conducted in Albanian language in Greece between March 2014 and November 2016.

4.2 | Data management and analysis

The interviews were transcribed by the researcher while preserving the original language and were coded using the qualitative program MAX qda 12. version. The main codes, the code families, and then the themes were identified using an inductive approach (see Table 1). The codes were partially translated into English, and were then transcribed verbatim and analyzed jointly. The researcher assured all of the respondents that the information they gave during the interview would be used for academic research only. Throughout the article, the interviewees are referred to by pseudonyms. The interviews took place either at the migrant's home or in a coffee bar and typically lasted two to 4 hours.

4.3 | Participant profile and background

See Table 2. Although all of the interviewed women had been working as domestic workers, some of them had worked in other low-level jobs. The majority of them were married and had children. They first entered Greece through family reunification procedures, and thus by joining their husbands; and later becoming irregular migrants. All of the women had the option of regularizing their immigrant status after 1996. Most of the women had been working for the same families for more than 15 years, and they were working in an average of three to four households at the time of interview. The hours they spent working in each household varied, and changed during the economic crises in Greece, which made their situation even more precarious.

4.4 | Researcher positionality

Speaking the same language as the women was probably (indisputably from my experience) extremely helpful to build trust. The richness of the narratives provided was also possible thanks to this trust and perhaps cultural similarities

TABLE 1 Main codes and themes.

A good domestic worker	Trust and honesty as the most important qualities	• A good maid is a good person • Being straightforward and sincere • Being sincere and work with sincerity
	The trust gaining process	• Recommended by entrusted people • Provocations • Trust as time passes • Keeping family's secrets • Punctuality and correctness
	Reciprocal respect	• Respect as a person, as a woman and as an Albanian • Gaining respect through empathy
Feeling good and as part of the family	Being treated humanely and part of the family	• It feels like home and as part of the big family • Sharing personal problems/emotional support and attachment • Asking opinions and appreciating • Kiktive kin-family relations (being like the daughter/sister/as parents) • Being best friends • Fear of abandonment/becoming irreplaceable
Invisible exploitation	Unwritten rules of the moral contract	• Do everything • Available to do the extra hours, without break • Adapting to the employer's lifestyle • Flexible to change the work schedule according to the employer's wishes • Availability to do the extra hour without pay • Do really hard work • Sexual harassment • Work in black market • Precarious work • Unwritten rules

with the research. On several occasions, I (as the main researcher) was invited by the participants to attend their informal social gatherings and observe the everyday activities in their communities, which helped me to gain their trust.

5 | ANALYSIS SECTION: THE EMOTIONAL AND PRECARIOUS NATURE OF DOMESTIC LABOR: SHEDDING LIGHT ON INFORMAL WORKPLACE PRACTICES AND RELATIONS

This section provides an analysis of the working relations between Albanian domestic workers in Greece and their employers.

5.1 | Moral values and personality fit for domestic labor

The narratives of the Albanian domestic workers in Greece indicate that when their employers were hiring a DW, they were looking for specific moral norms (Nare, 2011) and personality traits, such as being a good person, and being honest, trustful, punctual, and moral. Trust was considered a crucial element in these kinds of jobs, and it was the reason why these women continued working in the same households for several years. In determining who was

TABLE 2 Migrant's profile.

No.	Name	Occupation	Age	Migration year	Education	Civil status
1	Mira	Domestic worker (DW)	54	1993	High school	Married
2	Entela	DW	58	1991	High school	Married
3	Marsi	DW	52	1992	High school	Married
4	Fabiola	Hairdresser/DW	36	1993	High school	Married
5	Ani	Hairdresser/DW	32	2002	High school	Married
6	Bela	DW	47	1997	High school	Married
7	Sofia	DW	65	1997	High school	Married
8	Tatjana	DW	22	1991	High school	Married
9	Xhuli	DW	50	1993	High school	Married
10	Romina	DW/cooker	42	1995	High school	Married
11	Lajda	DW	26	1997	High school	Married
12	Estela	DW/office cleaner	35	2001	University	Married
13	Dafina	DW	52	2004	High school	Married
14	Fati	DW	36	1997	High school	Married
15	Ori	Agriculture/DW	35	1998	High school	Married
16	Ela	Cleaner/DW	41	1999	High school	Married
17	Tatjana	Waiter/DW	22	2003	University	Single
18	Luljeta	DW	54	1997	University	Married
19	Monda	DW/seller	38	1997	High school	Married

the most suitable for the position, employers tended to prefer candidates they believed were less risky and had more integrity than the others. Mira, a 54-year-old DW, explained: "If you are a good person, honest, punctual and behave decently, they will trust you and never let you go anymore." Trust is the basis for building good relationships with the employees. Another worker said that her employers appreciated her openness and sincerity:

> Sincerity—this has always been the most powerful tool I have ever used. I was honest, given the whole family relied on me. It was not that difficult for them to spot this quality. They considered me part of their family, someone whom they could all trust. I tried to do my best. I never betrayed their trust. My strong point is that I have always told them the truth. I have been straightforward and open with these women and that's why I have been successful in maintaining these jobs for such a long time. I have never made any attempt to lie and you know how much sincerity is appreciated in these kinds of jobs. This personal attribute made me quite unique and stand out from the rest of other women.
>
> (Marsi, 52)

According to many of our informants, punctuality, and rectitude were two other characteristics that were highly appreciated by their employers.

> Reliability and rectitude; rectitude to the greatest extent possible. You need to be on time, work hard, be fair, and productive.
>
> (Estela, 35)

> Punctuality and rectitude at the workplace are priceless. For example, if you cannot make it to be there at the set time, then you have to let them know beforehand and you need to have strong reasons for showing up late. You cannot lie to them that you have the stuff to do and then you go for coffee. Understandably, you need to be punctual and do your job well.
>
> (Ani, 32)

5.1.1 | Building and maintaining trust

The domestic workers claimed to be guided by certain ethical beliefs or principles that they considered to be part of their personality. In their narratives, the women argued that certain behaviors cannot be taught, but are part of who a person is. They noted that because their workplaces were also intimate family spaces, keeping family secrets and not gossiping were very much appreciated by employers:

> You have to show them you are someone they can trust and that you are a reliable person. Never ever think of picking up and dropping gossip. It is so wrong to convey to someone else what you heard there. Indeed, they trusted the keys of their apartments to me.
>
> (Xhuli, 50)

> You don't need to learn or understand certain things; they are just common sense. For example, you don't need to be told that the conversation you heard is confidential. Sometimes, the way you behave shows who you are; it shows a trait of your personality. You cannot learn it; you cannot buy it.
>
> (Ani, 32)

Moreover, the narratives of our informants showed that trust was often built either through getting recommendations from social networks or resisting provocations. The majority of women in our study said they found their jobs through personal recommendations from their female friends or acquaintances, pointing to the gendered nature of such social networks.

> Listen, finding a job is similar for all Albanians, through acquaintances. For example, a friend of mine told me that my skills were needed in a certain household and so once I got the job and the household owners saw my good work, the landlady recommended me to her sister, her mother and friend and so on. And this passes on among people who know and are related to each other.
>
> (Monda, 38)

The women's narratives indicated that they often had to go through several provocations before they were trusted to work in the employer's household. In some cases, the women did not even realize they were being provoked. They realized this only later, but they had to go through these experiences to gain their employer's trust.

> They trusted me, even though this process took some time. Sometimes they would make small provocations, such as leaving money, mobile phones or precious things, such as rings in different places at the apartment. I had to clean the whole apartment, and make sure such things were exactly at the same place where they left them.
>
> (Monda, 38)

This empirical evidence suggests that recruitment and working relations in these kinds of occupations are often based on the moral characteristics and personality traits of the employees, rather than on labor market regulations.

In addition, keeping family secrets, being recommended by someone, and resisting provocations were cited as important elements of building and maintaining trust.

5.2 | Workplace as a home and the employer as a "family"

In their descriptions of their relationships with employers, the women seem to have forgotten the physical work they had to put into the daily maintenance of the household. Instead, they were more likely to emphasize the familiar nature of their relationship. The women observed that in most cases, the workplace resembled a home, and the work therefore involved having intimate relations with the people being cared for. Hence, the workplace became a space of intimate relationships. Many women we interviewed had been working for the same households for 15–20 years, and they saw these families as their own families. This familiarity was reciprocal, as they were considered members of the family. For example, Dafina (52) commented:

> It felt like home. I could talk with them freely and established quite good relations with them. I am happy I have been working for these families for such a long period. I have acknowledged how important they have been for me and I used to thank them a lot.

The idea of the workplace as home and the employers as family members resonates with the "workplace familism" which emphasizes the familial interpersonal processes in the workplace (Restubog & Bordia, 2006).

5.2.1 | Building familiarity through time

As we noted above, trust and credibility were important elements upon which a sense of familiarity and connectedness was built over time. Workers were considered and perceived to be part of the family. This kind of familiarity was manifested in many forms, including the transformation of the workplace into a home-like setting. Several of the respondents reported that their own family members had been welcomed and shown respect by their employers. Luljeta, for example, described how trust emerged from a family-like situation:

> Yes, it used to be great, because I was their trusted (house) person for 9 years. They were wealthy and I had a good time with them. They should respect me and my family. When my parents from Albania would come to Greece to visit me, my host would welcome them with presents. It was a great relationship between us.
>
> (Luljeta, 54)

> No, they trust me as their family member. Whatever happens in their house, I will always be there, whenever they need my help. For example, when my father passed away, they came here to express their condolences. The idea is that they don't follow these rules with anyone. There is something special about the families I have worked for: the moment they trust you they will never let you down. I have their apartment keys, but this is part of our trust relationship. If they trust you, there is no chance they could fire you, despite your age. There comes a moment when you realise that you have spent more time with them than with your family, so they become your second family.
>
> (Monda, 38)

Performing daily rituals together, such as drinking coffee while chatting or eating lunch together, also brought the women and their employers closer:

> I have become like a family member for them. They leave me with the keys to their house and ask me to clean and cook for them so that they have everything ready for the next day. They also ask me to cook for the family during the holidays. They are wonderful people and I love them just like my family. They trust me so much now; they ask me to go out with them, to have a coffee or dinner with them; I feel so at ease with this family and I go to their house as if I go home.
>
> (Entela, 58)

Other women described similar experiences, emphasizing the activities they engaged in with their employers, which helped them form a bond:

> We are like a family. They wait for me before they eat. They know my children's names; they know my husband. It is like family relations. I am attached to these families and we have quite strong relations.
>
> (Xhuli, 50)

Ori (35) offered similar observations:

> Once you have gained their trust and friendship, you have no problems. For instance, I go to a Greek woman's house just like I go to my place or my mother's. She calls me and asks me over for a coffee or go out with her for a stroll. I have made a lot of friends in these jobs. Indeed, when you go to a place and settle there, you will make new friends.
>
> (Ori, 35)

As the narratives of these everyday practices show, the women were able to create a sense of home in the workplace/household, and, at the same time, strengthen their emotional bonds with their employers. Both the employers and employees become emotionally attached and the expectations of emotional affection were highly gendered as well. As the years passed by, they created a sense of familiarity. Some of the women described the time they spent having coffee with their employers as a pleasant part of the day, as it helped them bond. In many cases, their women considered their employers almost as close friends, which meant that they perceived their employers as people they could easily open up to and have confidential discussions with. Being able to receive and give advice in difficult moments was highly appreciated by both the employers and the employees. Thus, the employee was no longer considered simply a "worker," but also a member of the family the employer could rely on.

> I have been working for her for so many years, but we don't have that formal employee-employer relation… she is like my friend. I must admit we have been quite close with each other. When she has problems with her son, I am the only one she would open up to without hesitation. We have opened our souls to each other.
>
> (Luljeta, 54)

> We have very close relations. I was working for a lady whose husband died a couple of years ago. She went through a difficult time and she could not even talk with her mother. I tried to comfort her and talk to her as a sister. Her children could sense what she was going through because her loss was quite unexpected.
>
> (Monda, 38)

These narratives clearly demonstrate the ongoing bonding process that takes place within the domestic setting. All of these ritual acts performed together shaped the women's everyday domestic practices and the ways they perceived and behaved with their employers. Talking about their inner dilemmas generated a high level of emotional attachment, mimicking familial relationships. Taking on domestic duties for the elderly involved

performing specific tasks that generated quite a high level of emotional attachment. In a similar vein, it appears that the women's relationships with their employers were perceived as being far more meaningful than their economic value as workers would suggest.

5.2.2 | "Quasi-family" and emotional bonds

Many of the women reported that they felt like they were part of their employer's extended family. This was illustrated in various ways, such as getting closer to the family, having a confidential conversation, or sharing meals. These relations resembled family relations. In many cases, the employer looked like the employee's family member, acquaintance, parent, sister, and close friend. There were constant negotiations over these different roles.

> I still think of that lady any minute, any time (tearful eyes); she will always be in my mind. I feel we spent many happy years together like best friends, like sisters. I can't find words to describe it. She would give me a lot of advice on my children, for me, for my life, for anything. She was just perfect.
>
> (Entela, 58)

> They are nice people. We get along together as friends, as sisters. Imagine working for 22 years for the same household. They felt more comfortable sharing their problems with me than with their mothers. The lady I go to every Tuesday does not have any sisters or close acquaintances… I am like a goddess for her. What else can I say for them? She is my best friend. She always comes with gifts for my birthdays or baptism celebrations. They are very happy with me and I am happy with them, too. I earn my living thanks to them … so you cannot easily dismiss this fact. I do all the household chores I am supposed to do, but when get paid for your hard work, then it is worth it.
>
> (Mira, 54)

The above narratives reveal that the transformations in the relationships between the workers and their employers resulted in a new perception of family, which was not necessarily based on lineage or blood ties, but that looked "pseudo-familial" (Xypolytas et al., 2017, p.96). These relationships evolved through everyday practices; and, at some point, the workplace turned into a home space.

5.2.3 | The despair of separation: Finding new alternatives to keep up the emotional attachment

The emotional attachment embraced in these family-like relationships made the separation process quite difficult for the women when they could no longer work due to retirement or health problems. While the physical work could easily be done by someone else, the emotional labor could not. Some of the women reported that their employers continued to rely on them, regardless of their age or physical ability to do the housework.

> I feel so tired now. Maybe at this age, you start to realise that you need to stop working, but I don't have any idea for how long I can work. Maybe I will continue to work for the next 2 years and then I will quit. When I tell these ladies that I can't work anymore, they feel bad. One of the ladies is almost my age and the other one is 10 years older and they keep insisting I should not leave them. Once she told me: 'Please, don't leave me! I will retire in a few years and we will do the household chores together slowly. At this point we can't afford to let you go, so you are not going to leave me'.
>
> (Marsi, 52)

These emotional attachments made the process of separation difficult. Many of the women said that even when they were no longer physically capable of doing the housework because of age, their employers would not accept their departure. Their fears of abandonment and isolation led many employers to use a number of strategies to keep their employees. The women reported feeling a sense of gratitude to their employers that was linked to notions of duty, respect, and familial responsibility.

Xhuli, for example, said that her employer would rather let her finish her work early and pay for her transport than abandon her:

> To be a trustworthy person—this is the main thing you will need in this kind of job. But it is not all about trust … you have to be irreplaceable for them so that they cannot live without you. What does this mean? I was working for one of these ladies who could not live without me. I told her that I had to leave her because I had to move a bit far away, but she told me that it was difficult for her to find someone else or to trust another woman. She told me that she would pay for the transport and that I could leave work earlier than usual. This is all you have to do: to be irreplaceable so that she could not find someone else. The more familiar you get, the more difficult the separation is. That is why I have continued to work for the same families for so many years. I have worked so hard, but at the same time, I have been among the very few people she could trust and rely on for every problem. Otherwise, you could easily be substituted.
>
> (Xhuli, 50)

This story illustrates that at some point, Xhuli acquired a level of power that made her "irreplaceable" for her employers. As her narrative revealed, trust seemed to emerge from these family-like situations. These attachments and emotional bonds should be considered in conjunction with many external factors that characterize the Greek family and society. The women reported that these elderly ladies were not living with their extended family members, and that they often felt isolated. Their children would sometimes look after them or come to visit them, but they were not as close to their children as they used to be. The employees seemed to overcompensate for these "missing bonds" by performing emotional as well as physical labor. In some cases, the women were more concerned about being close to their employers to deal with their emotional demands than they were about their housework. This shows that workplace relations and intimate emotions are often linked in personal spaces, and that work is based on the concept of moral economy. It appears that these domestic workers served as an emotional support by allowing their employers to express their feelings of anguish. In their narratives, the employers were expressing their emotions while the employees were regulating their negative emotions. By contrast, none of the domestic workers reported expressing their emotions while their employers listened empathetically. While employers had the chance to express their negative emotions and release themselves, domestic workers rarely talked about their own problems and they were less likely to get comfort and consolation from their employers. In the meantime, this one-way relationship points to the inequality of such relations. Thus, the domestic workers had to absorb the negative affective burden ingrained in this work, while also providing their employers with opportunities for emotional catharsis.

5.3 | The other side of the coin: The unwritten rules of the "moral contract"

5.3.1 | Do everything you are asked

The narratives of our migrant women showed that not all stories of fictive kin relationships played a positive role in the moral economy of households. We will show below how this injustice and exploitation could take form.

> The tricky thing is that you have to figure out what they want and do what they like most and whatever they want. Never say 'no' to anything.
>
> (Sofia, 65)

However, many women reported that the domestic work was physically demanding, because they were required to exert a lot of energy within a short period of time.

> Yes, this type of job runs me out. Cleaning the toilet every day; doing all other house chores every day, like dishwashing, laundry, ironing, mopping, dusting—all these household works exhausted me. I did my job well because if you do your work superficially, you do not get tired at all. My doctor said that my health was getting worse because of the heavy weights I lifted. There was no one at the house to lift the heavy weights. I had to do everything on my own because the landlady was at work all day.
>
> (Estela, 35)

5.3.2 | Working on the black market

As domestic work is work performed inside the household, social insurance is seldom paid for these employees. Albanian migrants were not able to work in Greece legally until 1998. However, even after this year, many of these women continued to work on the black market without social insurance. Their narratives indicated that most of them did not feel that they had a choice.

> No, it was all black work; no chance at all to have formalised employment. Very few people had formal work papers. Note that we are speaking of years 1996-1997; the Greek government either did not want to legalise or turned a blind eye to the phenomenon; no social insurance was provided by the employer. As a domestic worker, I did not have these fringe benefits; no one ever paid them—you were afraid to ask your employer because you already knew that none of these women were insured. I did not dare to ask—I was afraid I would lose the job. All these years are simply lost.
>
> (Ori, 35)

All of the women in our study worked without insurance. It was very difficult for them to claim their rights because their domestic work was performed inside homes, which made it hard for them to prove that they were working. The employers did not want to insure their employees because they would have to pay much higher compensation. At the same time, these women needed to earn a living, and could not afford to lose a job just because it did not come with insurance. Women were aware of the informal labor market and workplace rules, but due to structural constraints, they faced they did not have many options to choose. If they refused to work without insurance, they would risk being kicked out. It is against these background factors and constraints that their working relationships should be understood.

5.3.3 | Precariousness—Unwritten rules about time schedule, wage and the silent agreement

None of the women we interviewed had a contract with their employers, and this made it quite difficult for some of them to arrange a fixed work schedule, or even to negotiate their wages. Instead of a formal contract, they had an "invisible moral contract" based on trust.

> Generally, there is a standard wage that both the employer and employee know of, but you build all your relations based on trust and there is an unwritten law, which you both agree upon. Our work depends on the psychology of the other person. She sacrifices her own money to pay me, instead of buying something for herself. She trusts me in her house and I sacrifice my time for her.
>
> (Monda, 38)

While the majority of the women were working an average of two to 3 days a week in each household, some were working the whole week for only one family, and had a heavy schedule (up to 18 h). The women who were working part-time for a family could easily arrange their work schedules and their free time. Nonetheless, a few of the women had a full-time job working for only one or two families. While they would usually agree to work within certain hours, they would sometimes get an unexpected phone call from an employer that cut short their work day.

> You have to be patient with this kind of job. I have put up with so many things during my work day; they are never satisfied with your hard work; they will exploit you to the last breath. For example, they call you one day before and tell you not to come to work for the next day but show up the following week. What are you saying? Why shouldn't I come to work? I have already accounted for that day's pay. That 50-euro pay will buy me food, will pay for the tuition. I will have to look for another tiresome work to make up for the lost work day. Women have the ability to endure all. You need to be patient and think about how to make up for that day off.
>
> (Luljeta, 54)

The women's narratives showed that they generally did not have a fixed work schedule, and that they would sometimes not have any days off at all. Some of the women said they found it very difficult to set a work schedule, as they would go to work whenever they were asked. These women reported feeling pressure because they were constantly on standby or on call, which blurred the lines between work and leisure time. Other women said that they had an unpredictable work flow that was physically demanding, or had few or no weekly or annual breaks. Moreover, some women indicated that even if they agreed on a schedule with an employer, they would be asked to work additional hours or days.

Although there was no fixed wage for domestic work in the labor market, the women said they knew what to expect. Being friendly with their employers often made it difficult for them to articulate their rights. They could not even ask about how much they would be paid. The "quasi friendship" relationship made this situation even more precarious. Monda described this dilemma:

> You don't know exactly how much you will be paid and in certain cases, they won't even pay you. There were these two ladies in front of my apartment who would often call me to accompany them to do shopping. It is not that we are friends, but kind of pretended companionship. Sometimes we drink coffee together and chat. But there is no prior agreement that, for example, I will assist you for two hours and I will get paid 5 euros per hour. You don't talk about this, you only wait. It is like a silent agreement conditional on how much she is willing to pay you and whether she would pay you at all, but it is not fixed. You go whenever they need you, but you don't know how much you get paid and up to what time will you have to work. You don't know what will happen the next day.
>
> (Monda, 38)

Sometimes there was a discrepancy between the actual wages the women were paid and the average market wage. The women were expected to take the first step and negotiate their wages. This took effort because there

was often no verbal communication on this topic between the employers and the workers. Many of the women said they could not think about asking for higher wages in response to an increased workload or longer work hours.

This sort of familial identification, which had no legal basis, involved power dynamics between the worker and the employer that went beyond a simple business-like contract. The fact that this relationship was built on trust rather than on the performance of the work made it difficult for these women to speak up and demand more rights. Employers preferred to wait for their employees to step up and negotiate their wages. However, this situation was challenging, because the domestic workers always had to guess when the right moment was for them to speak up. Because of this quasi-familial relationship, blurred boundaries, and ambiguous social space (Bakan & Stasiulis, 1994; Nare, 2011) they both hesitated to talk about a wage cut.

> She expects me to tell her how much I ask for a day's work. As a rule of thumb, I expect her to tell me how much she can afford. Of course, I will not tell her to cut my pay and she will bluntly tell me that she cannot afford to pay me what I ask for. Hence, she will hire someone else who is willing to work for less. And I will go to replace somebody else in some other job for less than what the former worker got paid for. And that's how the payments for domestic works are cut. When I come to my senses, I see that I have no right to complain, because the landlady asked me if I would be willing to work for less but that I had refused. As I said, it all depends on the relationship you build, on the character of the employer, and on the trust she has in you. In this case, regardless of economic distress, she offers to keep you employed and will not replace you with somebody cheaper.

In a few cases, the line between work and friendship was blurred, which created a lot of frustration for the women when they had expected to be paid.

> There are two old women here that I keep company with. I ask them to go shopping and nothing else. She calls me to accompany her to do shopping, to visit places. Time passes quite well with her. I also help her with some of her house chores. They supposedly call her for company. That's not a job. It's not that I go there and she will pay me 5 euros per hour. There is no work like that. If she pays me, fine; if not, that's fine again. Sometimes she pays me and other times not. Most of the time she does not pay. It's like a consensus. I keep her company, but she doesn't understand that I should be paid for the time that I could spend otherwise. She may pay if she sees fit and feels like it at that moment. There are no negotiations on how much to pay. There is no such thing as 'I will come to work for two hours at a rate of 5 euros per hour'. Mine is not the kind of job that somebody might offer once you have bargained.
>
> (Romina, 42)

Romina experienced in a very stressful way the contradictions between her double role as a friend and as an employee. This quote highlights how the boundaries between work and daily life could be merged, and how some employers took advantage of the relationships that linked them to these workers. These situations often came about because the women were restricted in their ability to get a legal job due to their lack of work and residency permits. These structural constraints caused the working conditions of the domestic workers to deteriorate, forcing them to work with oral contracts, unregulated working hours, and unsafe working conditions. The women were often unable to negotiate the terms and conditions of their employment, tasks, work schedules, and breaks. Therefore, they had to negotiate or renegotiate their access to work through gendered relations and power dynamics (Nare, 2009, 2011) in the private household space.

6 | DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In this article, we discussed the informal relations and workplace practices among Albanian domestic workers in Greece and their employers. Drawing on the biographical data of 19 domestic workers, we found that these relationships were highly dynamic and quasi familiar, but also often unequal and exploitative. In line with this emerging body of research, the moral economy framework sheds light on the particular social relationships that were built between employers and employees in the workplace setting. From a more positive point of view, these women reported having many personal and moral characteristics and norms (Nare, 2011) that their employers saw as beneficial, such as trustworthiness, rectitude, punctuality, and being a "good person." These narratives show how the domestic space, which was supposed to be a work setting, turned into a private home space where emotions of joy, gratitude, and kindness were displayed. Trust served as a building block for affection, sympathy, and respect toward these women, and it paved the way for the development of family-like relationships. Moreover, giving their employers advice and guidance, listening empathetically to their problems and worries, and showing affection and appreciation were among the types of emotional work the women performed. Fictive kin relations were bound up with affective relations, as treating a person as part of the family evoked considerable emotions. The fact that these women came every day and soothed at some point their employers' isolation helped them form a strong bond and close relations with them, which again point to the emotional nature and moral economy of such relations. This article offers some important insights into the complex interplay of emotional dynamics, intimate spaces and places that shape and reconstruct the unwritten rules and working relations and feelings emerging from such relations.

Often, the moral and social relations within the intimate workplace enabled exploitation and limited workers' resistance to unfair practices, since the friendship and affection they experienced made it difficult for them to articulate their rights. On the other hand, these women were experiencing constant pressure and were highly vulnerable due to the informal and precarious nature of their work. Restrictive migration policies added another layer of vulnerability for the migrant women, who did not have other viable employment opportunities. Women tried to negotiate the unwritten emotional and moral rules in a quite agentic fashion. The fact that these women did not quit their job and kept working in such occupations was not related to their passive position and docility. In order to understand the choices they made at a certain time, we should be aware of the precarious position immigrant women found themselves. They rather negotiated their position and made a choice to keep working, regardless of their precariousness because that was the only available option within the structural constraints they faced in the host country (illegal migrant status; segmented labor market). The empirical evidence pointed to women's capacities to act autonomously and negotiate their position in quite a flexible manner.

In line with other studies (Nare, 2009, 2011), our findings indicate that the boundaries between daily routines and work are often blurred in these kinds of quasi-familial relations. The women were exposed to several forms of exploitation, but they could not voice their demands because they were afraid of losing their jobs. Confirming Gallotti and Mertens (2013) study, the informal working practices obscured women's human and labor rights as workers. Thus, their vulnerable position and lack of a written contract often led her to comply with no objections.

These stories illustrate how the ambiguous social space of the workplace practices (Bakan & Stasiulis, 1994) can reproduce relations of inequality and reinforce power hierarchies. The narratives shed light on the exploitative and coercive relations that are embedded in the notions of moral economies. Interestingly, they show how the economic value of productive work was understood as an exchange of reproductive labor, underpinned by expectations of "servitude" and as Xypolytas et al. (2017) embassies, labor based on patronage. Thus, our study reveals how social and economic relations may be constructed and shaped through the "exchange and an associated spectrum of interpersonal dynamics and emotions" (Waite & Lewis, 2017), which are invoked, and which depend on moral/ethical sentiments, norms, and behaviors (Sayer, 2004).

The overall contribution of this article is to show how workplace exchanges in the domestic sphere create and reproduce through moral economies a spectrum of social, economic, and emotional relations, which are neither inherently exploitative nor purely empowering. The article pointed out the asymmetries of powers in such relations

(Nare, 2009, 2011; Xypolytas et al., 2017). On the one hand, employers had power over their employees due to their precarious economic situation. The exploitative elements of informal labor relations (precarity, wage uncertainty, etc.), exacerbate the precarious position of domestic workers. On the other hand, employees exercised their power by becoming "irreplaceable" emotional buffers for their employers. The moral economy elements of domestic work, such as trust, familial relations, and affection created an enabling environment for further integration of women in the labor market. This article sheds light on how the moral economy of domestic work reveals the coexistence of two contradicting features of this highly complex occupation and to what extent the vulnerability and power coexist and are part of the same coin.

This research contributes to the moral theory of economy, by expanding the concept and offering some important insights into the complex interplay of power relations and emotional bonds established between employers and employees in the domestic setting. Based on the work of previous studies the study confirms how the illegal status of migrant women makes them more vulnerable to discrimination and exclusion with limited possibility to renegotiate their salary, working hours and raise their professional development. The "invisible" nature of this work creates a high predisposition for exploitation. By analyzing the informal working practices the study enriched our understanding of the vulnerability and precariousness of such gendered work practices that are very much in line with Hochschild (1983) work on emotional labor.

Thus, the moral economy approach is a useful framework for understanding how relations are built and maintained through sharing and exchange activities, especially when they are based on unwritten informal rules. This article provides new insights into the emotional and intimate nature of domestic work, which is often based on a moral contract between the worker and the employer. In this light, the workplace becomes a space where power relationships are enacted and negotiated.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

None of the authors have a conflict of interest to disclose.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

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