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Between 'sisters' : a study of the employment relationship between African domestic workers and African employers in the townships of Soweto.

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Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

Domestic service in South Africa continues to be one of the largest sources of employment for black women. According to the September 2007 Labour Force Survey (LFS) report, there was an increase in the number of domestic workers from 6.9% to 7.7% of total employment. Domestic workers are often described by scholars as forming part of the invisible labour force, as their work occurs behind closed doors within private spaces. The nature of domestic service is such that workers are isolated from each other resulting in difficulties in being mobilized by trade unions.

Much research has been conducted on the nature of domestic work not only in South Africa but in Africa as a whole. The focus of these studies has been on revealing the exploitation of domestic workers by their employers, focusing on the racial, gender and class divisions between the domestic workers and their employers.

Literature on domestic workers has been useful in showing the transformations and changes that have been occurring in domestic work. Historical studies (Van Onselen 1982, Gaitskell et al. 1984, Hansen 1989, Boddingtons 1983, Swaisland 1993) provide useful understandings of the nature of the development of the institution historically, pointing out its relations to ideologies of colonial servitude and its gendered and racialised construction as an occupation dominated by black people. Van Onselen (1982) shows how during the period 1890 to 1914 the bulk of domestic labour was provided by black house boys. The employment of black women in domestic service became more

prominent with the rise of mining and the shift of many black men from houseboys to miners.

The second wave of literature came as a result of the domination of black women in the service sector. The emphasis of these studies (Cock 1980, Gaitskell 1984) was to show the oppression of women domestic workers by their white female employer. These authors argued that there can not be talks of 'sisterhood' while most of the oppression that the domestic workers experience is at the hands of white women through low wages, long working hours and racial domination by employers. The domestic sector became increasingly characterized by racial inequalities where white women dominated black women.

Contemporary scholars still focus on the racial inequalities that exist in domestic work. However they have also included the post-apartheid state (King 2007, Fish 2006, Ally 2007). Contemporary literature shows how the recognition of domestic workers by the state led to the shift from working as servants to being recognized as workers. Most emphasis is placed on the legislative rights that were extended to domestic workers which included a national minimum wage that is subject to statutory increases every year, unemployment insurance, set hours of work, overtime pay, and registration of domestic workers by their employers and being provided with contracts of employment. These were rights that were meant to improve the employment conditions of domestic workers. These scholars show how these rights served as improvements only on paper but in practice not much has changed for domestic workers. The domestic workers that are

working for African employers are reported as receiving low wages and working long hours (King 2007).

There have been scholars that have written on the South African black[1] employers focusing on the rich black elites of Cape Town, Graham town, the northern suburbs of Johannesburg (Fish 2006, King 2007, Russell 2002, Carroll 2004). These studies argue that the black employers here in South Africa have a reputation of being seen by domestic workers as the worst employers. They are often described as arrogant and mean (Carroll, 2004).

The broad aim of this study is to show how despite the comprehensive literature that exists on domestic workers, there has been little focus on the relationship between African[2] employers and their African domestic workers. Particular attention was given to middle and working class Africans living in townships as that has received little attention. The interest in the nature of the employment relationship between African employers and domestic workers is produced by the speculation that this relationship is different to that of the traditional white employer and African domestic worker. There are many dynamics that make this relationship. For instance, some African employers have a pre-existing relationship with their domestic workers, hiring is based on familial relations. The focus of this study was on the role of kin relations and culture in the relationship between the

[1] Fish uses the historical and legal definition which includes Africans, Coloreds and Indians.

[2] In this study the term African will be used instead of Black, as black in South Africa is a broad and inclusive term that includes many groups which the study will not be focusing on.

domestic workers and their employers. The focus on African employers and African domestic workers provides a shift away from the focus on racial divisions that have characterized this sector to an emphasis on class as a defining characteristic. It presents an analysis which includes an examination of the interactions between 'African sisters[3]'.

To achieve the above objectives, the report is organized into five chapters. Chapter two provides a review of the work that has been conducted on domestic service. Looking at the changes that have occurred in domestic service and outlining the transition of domestic workers from servants to workers. This chapter will also look at the 'entry' of African employers and the nature of relationship that they have with their domestic workers. Chapter three will provide a discussion on the methodology that was used in this research, the aim of which was not to provide an examination of domestic service as a whole but rather offer an analysis of a small number of domestic workers and employers and the perceived manner in which they understand their roles and interactions that they have with each other. The chapter also discusses the difficulties in accessing the respondents and the limitations of the research. Chapter four discusses the main findings and themes of the study and provides an analysis based on the interviews that were conducted with the domestic workers and employers. This chapter provides both an analytical and descriptive understanding into the perceived nature of the employment relationship between African employers and African domestic workers. Chapter five concludes by discussing the theoretical conclusions, possible policy implications and

[3] Taken from Cock's (1980) term "Sisterhood".

offers a set of recommendations for the improvement and strengthening of the working conditions of domestic workers.

Chapter Two

LITERATURE REVIEW

INTRODUCTION

Much of the literature on domestic workers focuses on the inter-racial relationships between white employers (madams) and black workers (maids), and therefore the exploitative practices of white employers (Whisson and Weil 1971; Gaitskell 1983; Cock 1980). More current literature focuses on how this relationship has, or has not, been affected by the introduction of rights for domestic workers (Fish 2006; King 2006; Ally 2007). Some scholars have begun to also look at the so-called new black 'madams' (King 2006, Fish 2006, Nyamnjoh 2006, Russell 2002).

Despite this, there is a dearth of literature on the relationship that African employers have with their employees within townships. This is the gap that this research is aiming to address. There have been scholars (Hansen 1990, Pape 1993, Nyamnjoh 2006) who have written on the rise of African employers and the relationships that they have with domestic workers. Hansen (1990) shows how in postcolonial Zambia the rise in African employers failed to meet the servants' expectations of a new and better life, instead it brought the knowledge that their bosses had not changed at all, but they just look different (p. 362). Similarly, Pape (1993) shows how in Zimbabwe the major change in the domestic sector came after independence with the enormous increase in the number of black employers; most of these employers were working class people who could not afford the real minimum wages. Nyamnjoh (2006) shows how 'maids' in Botswana and South Africa would rather work for white people, because they are more likely to pay

better and mitigate the arrogance of impunity of black employers, especially those in the townships (p. 125). These scholars also revealed that money (low wages) seems to be one of the major problems faced by domestic workers who work for middle class or working class blacks.

Entry into democracy in South Africa also resulted in the transformation of domestic service; domestic workers were given rights and benefits that were meant to end their exploitation (by ensuring that the workers are registered, receive minimum wages and work hours) and in many ways this also formalized the status of domestic workers as workers. The introduction of basic conditions of employment was not the only change that the domestic sector went through; the rise in the African middle class has also broadened the market for domestic workers.

According to a 2004 Financial Mail report Black Middle Class on the Rise almost 300 000 black South Africans have become middle income earners over the past three years. The study used a benchmark of an average household income of between R6455 per month to R11 566 per month to indicate middle class status. Also in 2004 *Business Report* indicated an increase in the black middle class of about 25% from 18% in 1996. This has come to mean that some African women on the strength of class are increasingly employing domestic workers as well. The change that the increasing entry of African employers has caused is largely due to the somewhat different nature of the relationship that exists when compared to the traditional white ‘madam’ and African ‘maid’ relations.

It is argued that many African employers and employees already have a pre existing relationship in the form of distant cousin or family friend from rural areas, when they hire their domestic workers. These rural women are used as a reservoir for cheap labour to which family members have first access. In some ways hiring them is seen as a favor, taking them away from the rural life which lacks hope and prosperity (Carroll 2004).

Carroll (2004) also reveals that in addition to the pre-existing relations, the 'madams' find themselves with 'maids' that are older than them and they assume a motherly/sisterly role which immediately dis-empowers the employer in terms of giving instructions. In this case, cultural beliefs also play a role in shaping the nature of the relationship between the 'maids' and 'madams'. For example in African culture it is considered unacceptable for a young person to give orders to his/her elder. This creates difficulties when the elder is the 'maid' and employer cannot give orders for fear of being viewed as disrespectful. The 'maids' in some cases use their status as elders not only to redefine the roles in the household but also to challenge the authority of the employer.

Despite the transformations that have occurred in domestic service the domestic workers continue to be exploited and remain largely invisible to the public. The aim of this research was to explore this area of domestic service which has received little attention.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF DOMESTIC SERVICE IN SOUTH AFRICA

Historical studies provide useful understandings of the nature of the development of the institution historically, pointing out its relations to ideologies of colonial servitude and its gendered and racialised construction as an occupation dominated by black people (Van Onselen 1982, Hansen 1989, Cock 1980).

During the colonial period, from the 1820s when there was an increase in emigration from Britain to the Cape, many of the settlers came with their own domestic servants and through out the 19th Century domestic service came to be constituted largely by British women who usually lacked education and alternative occupational opportunities. Xhosa and San women and children were also employed by Dutch farmers as domestic or agricultural servants, and some were abducted by the Dutch for slavery (Cock 1980, pp. 178-228).

Between 1890 and 1914, the majority of the servants in the Witwatersrand were black houseboys (Zulu). The rising white lower-middle and working classes which made up the bulk of the white population mainly made use of houseboys as their domestic servants. The result of this was that black people became the majority of domestic servants (Van Onselen 1982). These houseboys were praised for their capacity for hard work; quiet nature; and willingness to learn, even going as far as describing them as 'invaluable assets'. These houseboys received basic training and were mainly taught cleaning, washing, ironing, and cooking (Van Onselen 1982).

At night some of the houseboys assumed a new identity, they were men of the Amalaita, a gang of houseboys that openly challenged the society that sought to oppress them. Amalaita was a movement of young black domestic servants (of both sexes) and their unemployed peers mostly Zulu and Pedi speaking on the Witwatersrand between 1906 and 1914. It was a movement which sought to give its members a sense of purpose and dignity (Van Onselen 1982).

It was used more by the houseboys as a way of reaffirming their masculinity and manhood, by behaving in an aggressive manner by night (Van Onselen 1982, pp. 54). The gang was also a way in which the domestic servants redressed the exploitation that happened by day. The gang would break into the houses where the members complained of low pay or if they were not being properly treated by the 'missus' (Van Onselen 1982, pp. 60).

Hansen (1990), Pape (1993) and Bujra (2000) show that the employment of houseboys as domestic servants was not only unique to South Africa, it was also common in other African societies during the colonial period. In South Africa the growth of the mining industry resulted in an increased demand for labour in the mines. As black men went to work in the gold mine, more and more black women were hired as domestic servants (Van Onselen 1982). This was the first major transformation in domestic service in South Africa, from a mainly male dominated sector to a female dominated sector.

However Hansen (1990) and Pape (1993) have shown that in Zambia and Zimbabwe this change in gender composition of the domestic workforce did not result in the displacement of male domestic workers by women; as was the case in South Africa. By 1990, Zambian domestic service still had a relatively large number of male servants compared to female servants (Hansen 1990) and in Zimbabwe the wealthy white and black households used men as cooks, house workers and gardeners (Pape 1993, pp. 401). Bujra (2000) shows how by 1986 Tanzania was similar to Zambia and Zimbabwe, as domestic service continued to be dominated by men. Even though women became more available as domestic workers and were cheaper than male domestic workers, employers still preferred men over women and regard men as better than women in terms of domestic work.

Elsewhere, when women came to predominate in the sector, the focus on gender in addition to class and race became more and more important. Scholars such as Cock (1980), Gordon (1985) and Gaitskell (1984) began to show the oppression of women domestic workers by their white female employers. The relationship between 'maids' and 'madams' was usually characterized as a close relationship, but these authors argued that there cannot be talk of "sisterhood" (Cock 1980) when black women are faced with triple oppression: oppressed as workers, blacks, and women. Most of the oppression they experienced in the hands of the white women; through low wages, long working hours, and domination by employers. Gordon (1985) provides life stories of twenty-three domestic workers during apartheid. The life stories reveal how some employers viewed their 'servants' as a commodity, being made to work long hours for little wages. The

domestic workers were also treated with little respect by their employers and their children. These scholars were able to show how race and class inequalities allowed some women (white) to displace their responsibilities for housework and childcare on to other women.

Cock (1980) argues that the ‘maids’ were treated with reserve and personal interaction was limited to the work situation. The employers used the living arrangements as a way of controlling ‘maids’. The employers would control the number of visitors that the domestic workers had and living-in meant that work never stopped because the employers could call the domestic workers anytime when they needed them. With limited legal accommodation for ‘natives’ in Johannesburg, and the tying of urban residence to employment, domestic workers had no choice but to accept a live-in arrangement (Ally; 2008:2). According to Cock (1980) the law was such that it gave power to the white ‘madams’ to dominate and control their ‘maids’. The domestic sector increasingly became characterised by racial inequalities where white women were dominating black women. These studies were relevant during the apartheid period as they showed how the system made sure that the jobs provided to black women was limited to domestic work (Cock 1980). Poverty, labour controls and lack of employment alternatives combined to “trap” a large number of black women into domestic service (Cock 1980).

The racial, class and gender inequalities that characterized domestic work in this period had their origins in the colonial period as it reserved domestic work for women of colour, immigrants and ethnic minorities. The state further ensured this during apartheid by not

allowing black people permanent residence in urban areas unless they were working, and domestic work became the only legal option for less educated women from rural areas (Ally 2008).

But domestic workers were not just passive victims to the exploitation that they received from their employers. The domestic workers were able to exercise their resistance in more covert ways, for example stealing the possessions of their employers, breaking plates, taking longer to finish chores (Cock 1980 and Gaitskell 1984). The private and isolated nature of domestic service is such that the domestic workers have to fight their own battles and find strategies for themselves that would help them deal with their own situations. It has been reported that the lack of citizenship of domestic workers during apartheid created a dependency on their employers and did not allow for the workers to be able to form a collective and organise against their employers.

However this does not mean that the domestic workers did not have more forceful and overt forms of resistance. The South African Domestic Workers Union (SADWU), which was launched in 1986, was the largest domestic workers union with 85 000 members. The main aim of the union was to bring improvements in the relationship between workers and employers so as to be able to negotiate better working conditions (Ally 2008, p. 5).

Despite the comprehensive literature that talks about the history of domestic workers, little is out there that addresses the research question. The interest of this study is on the relationship that African employers have with African domestic workers. There is little

data on the history of African employers except for Cock's (1980) *Maids and Madams* where it is mentioned in passing that there were cases where Xhosa farmers also employed San women and children as servants.

DOMESTIC SERVICE IN POST-APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA

Democracy, not only in South Africa, but in Africa as a whole brought with it the hope for domestic workers that things would change for the better. Domestic workers had a long struggle for their inclusion in the legislation and recognitions as workers. Grossman (1996) shows how domestic workers were actively organizing for better conditions and refusing to be victims of the past. The struggle and resistance was motivated by the domestic workers' need to build an alternative future for their children and themselves.

The struggles of the domestic workers were finally won more than decade after democracy, when the government in 1998 awarded them legislative rights. There was a general belief among domestic workers that political freedom and equality would automatically translate to freedom in other areas including the workplace. However, compared to the past, the position of domestic workers as part of the labour force has improved at least in theory. There are a number of provisions and rights that the state provided to the domestic workers. In 1998 the domestic workers in South Africa were awarded certain rights according to the Basic Conditions of Employment. They had a national minimum wage which was subject to increases every year, Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF), set hours of work, paid extra for overtime, domestic workers could

be registered formally as workers and have contracts of employment. The state was formally recognising domestic workers as workers.

As a result some scholars began to look at what democracy and the improvements made on the sector meant to the domestic workers (Grossman 1996/2004, Fish 2006, Russell 2002, King 2006, and Ally 2007). Ally (2007) found that most workers expressed positive sentiments about the legislative intervention for the sector and they repeatedly expressed the importance of the requirements for dismissal: of the human dignity and security attached to the new procedure. It was important to the workers that their employers could not just dismiss them without a valid reason. To the domestic workers choosing not to be live-in workers and rather commuting everyday from home to work meant that they can be mothers to their children; the workers could have more freedom; and in some ways it also meant that legal working hours could be enforced. The law seemed to have given the domestic workers greater ability to fight for better conditions.

It has been argued by some scholars (Fish 2006) that even though there have been improvements in the domestic service sector, domestic work is still structured by severe social inequalities that have their origins in colonial and apartheid time. African women still continue to reproduce daily life for the privileged (predominantly white) population. The periods might have changed but the conflict and troublesome relationship between domestic workers and their employers remains the same. Some of this inequality is perpetuated by the meagre salaries many domestic workers continue to recur. In a way this serves to keep African people in domestic service and reproduces the racial ordering

of class in South Africa. The lack of educational opportunities still affects domestic workers more than a decade into democracy, leaving domestic workers with little other opportunities (Fish 2006).

Unlike Fish who places importance on the unequal and exploitative nature of domestic work as trapping African women, Khan (2006) argues that it is the socialisation within African families that traps African women in domestic work. The author argues that the way that African girls are socialised plays an important role in them choosing domestic work as a 'career'. An African girl child is socialised either knowingly or unknowingly under the influence of a patriarchal society towards domestic work. Looking at women in rural Kwa-Zulu Natal an area which according to Khan is very patriarchical, the girls there are prepared from childhood to take care of their husbands and little financial and educational support is given to the girl child because her husband will take care of her. Once their husbands leave them or pass away the women are left to work for themselves and domestic work becomes the easiest option because that is what they know best.

The limitation to Khan's argument is that the author does not seem to recognise the number of women who over time resisted domestic work by choosing not to go do domestic work but rather start their own informal businesses, brewing beer, some selling food in the streets or selling clothes. Fish's (2006) findings point out that domestic workers are trying to break the cycle by using the money that they earn to develop the future of their children by taking them to school so as to ensure that they get better jobs and can take care of themselves (teaching their children to be independent). This

complicates Khan's more functionalist analysis of the channeling of African women into domestic work through their socialization in the family, suggesting more agency for African women.

The transition from apartheid to post-apartheid may have resulted in some changes in domestic service in terms of the law but it has had little change in terms of the working conditions of domestic workers. This is one theme that seems to run through the literature written post independence, the focus is on the disappointing effect that the introduction of the legislative rights had on domestic workers. There seems to be a need for reinforcement of the law in order to make sure that the employers comply with the law.

Grossman (2004) shows that to the domestic workers covert forms of resistance are sometimes seen as more effective than relying on the law to protect them as workers. The author argues that the apparent silence of domestic workers may appear as though the domestic workers are passive and silent victims; however in reality the silence shows the presence of strategic and tactical thinking. He argues that the domestic workers would sometimes assume silence and ignorance as a way of protecting themselves, or as a way of making a fool of the employers.

AFRICAN EMPLOYERS

Another complexity exists within the domestic service sector, and that is the rise in what some scholars term the 'new' employer (Fish 2006), i.e. the black employer. What makes

black employers even more interesting is that class divisions become even more important in understanding the question of inequality and understanding the relationship between domestic workers and employers.

There is evidence that points out that the employment of domestic workers by African people is not a new phenomenon, although very little has been written on this, during the colonial period San women and children were employed by Xhosa farmers who wanted servants (Cock 1982). Although the number of African employers has risen, whites are still majority of employers of domestic workers. There have been studies in some African countries (Zimbabwe, Tanzania and Zambia) on African employers, focusing on the rise in African employers in the post colony (Bujra 2000, Pape 1993, and Hansen 1990).

As mentioned above there have been some scholars that have written on South African employers, focusing on rich African elites. The African employers here in South Africa are reported as having a reputation of being seen by 'maids' as worse than whites. They are often described as arrogant and mean, even the employers who are ANC MPs (Carroll 2004). The focus of this paper will be on the middle and working class African employers in townships. This is the gap that this research is aiming to fill. Pape (1993) shows that, most exploitation occurs in working class families, the low levels of income in these families when compared to the white employers leads to the domestic workers in these households being paid far less than the minimum wage.

The main contrast that African employers have when compared with white employers is the importance that they place on hiring someone that they know. It has been argued that the employers in some cases hire people that they know either as distant cousins or family friends that are from same village as the employers (Carroll 2004 and Nyamnjoh 2006). The employers see the relationship as helping each other out, taking you out of the rural life with no real prospects to a life in the city and a chance to get an education, and in return you will clean, cook and do washing (Carroll 2004). Most employers use more informal ways to get their domestic workers because hiring someone that they know makes it easier for the employers to trust their workers and if it happens that something happens between them it would be easier to trace back the domestic worker.

The characteristics that the employers are looking for in their domestic workers are similar to those of the white employers, they use the same stereotypes. For example the African employers look for immigrants (usually from Lesotho) or women from the rural areas because they are seen as hard working, quiet, and they are less likely to want to go home all the time because home is far (Carroll 2004). Nyamnjoh (2006) shows how Tswana employers in Botswana hire people from the minority groups such as Basarwa or Bakgaladi and immigrants from Zimbabwe. Basarwa have a long history of exploitation as herdsmen for Tswana cattle owners and as servants for Tswana and other families (Nyamnjoh 2006, pp. 152). To the African employers the ability to hire a domestic worker reassures a certain level of class status, in order to maintain their power they hire people that are desperate and can be easily exploited. Most Tswana women refuse to hire

Tswana domestic workers because they claim they are rude, they talk back, they are lazy and some end up wanting to take the wife's place (Nyamnjoh 2006).

Nyamnjoh (2006) argues that African employers often start the relationship with their workers in a very informal way. They would hire them on the basis that they are 'helping' out, and that they must feel at home. They hire with the sense that they do not want to treat their domestic workers they way that their mothers were treated in the white families, and therefore the boundaries are not set from the beginning. It becomes easy for both parties to take each other for granted because the formal boundaries between the domestic worker and the employer have not been formally defined.

Most of the domestic workers will have no contracts, or benefits. They will sleep in the same room as the children or if they do have their own room it is not a separate room outside. For the workers there is no sense of privacy and it easier for the employer to call them anytime when she needs the domestic worker, the working hours never end for the worker. Employers feel that because being a domestic workers includes being part of the family, and family domain requires flexibility given the unpredictability of family life it is unrealistic to expect a formal job description or contract (Nyamnjoh; 2006: 158). Some employers justified the long hours by saying that "they treat their 'maids' the way they treat a child at home. According to Setswana culture, when there is a young girl in the home, whether it is your child or not you send them to do chores as if they were your own child and they can work until anytime. We do not take it like this is a worker, so we do not observe working hours" (Nyamnjoh; 2006: 167).

Hansen's (1990) study on postcolonial Zambian domestic service looked at the emergence of middle class black employers. Her study showed how initially the employers would agonise about not treating their domestic workers the way their mothers used to be treated, but as soon as troubles with servants emerge, it forced the employers to adopt the same practices they were trying to resist. There is also a lack of trust between the employers and their female 'maids'. The 'maids' have been accused of wanting to replace the employers in their houses, they are also considered to be unreliable because they tend to leave without any notice. Therefore many Zambian employers still prefer to hire male servants (Hansen; 2004).

Fish (2006) argues that the biggest problem that the domestic workers have with African employers is with wages. The African employers tend to pay the domestic workers much less when they are being compared to the white employers. This is why in some cases domestic workers would prefer to work for white employers. African employers would try to shield the fact that they are paying their workers less by giving them food and old clothes for their children or themselves. Fish (2006) showed how even the Members of Parliament (MPs) paid their domestic workers very low wages.

The literature shows that changes have occurred in the domestic service sector that were aimed at improving this sector. However the prevalence of colonial structures of employment continues to define the sector and causes divisions even within the relationships between the previously disadvantaged groups. The othering does not occur

because one comes from a particular race or culture, now the othering and divisions between African employers and workers because they are from different classes. The hope and the expectation that things will be different has subsequently led to African employers being labeled 'the worst employers', because the domestic workers soon find out that things have not changed at all. Fish (2006) argues that when employers and employees share the same racial identity, social position differentials are severely lessened, therefore those in privileged positions must strongly assert their social power because it is far more threatened when only class defines privilege. She uses this to explain why black people choose to hire women from rural areas as a way of enabling them to assert their status.

Child domestic workers

In many countries using child domestic workers is still a common practice. These children are often scattered across several households and their employment is often informal, with some employers passing them off as their own children. The employers of these children are sometimes members of their extended family. Child domestic workers are estimated to make up a large proportion of the 200 million child workers worldwide, with 200 000 child domestic workers in Kenya alone (Kifle; 2002). Some of these children are as young as seven years old, working for as long as fifteen hours and in some cases unpaid, as some employers consider food and accommodation to be sufficient remuneration. Child domestic workers are sometimes assigned tasks that go beyond their capacities, such as carrying heavy loads and although they still kids themselves they have to look after their employer's children. In such circumstances school is out of the

question, even for those that are allowed by their employers to attend evening classes as they are often tired by the end of the day. The job often has negative health impacts for the child domestic with some suffering from backaches; respiratory problems, headaches, cuts, burns, etc. (Kifle; 2002).

According to Kifle (2002), domestic work is the traditional domain for a girl child in Ethiopia. Child domestics are a vulnerable section of society in Ethiopia. Their work is likely to expose them to exploitation and verbal, physical and sexual abuses at their tender age when they need the utmost care and protection by adults. Many of the children's activities violate basic provisions of the UN Conventions on the Rights of the Child, which Ethiopia has ratified. The Convention provides a set of universally accepted standards for the well being of children and provides a legal framework which can be used in their progress of the protection, survival and development of children. Nevertheless, these rights appear to be a distant goal and unachievable for the working child. First, working children are not aware of them, and secondly, they are not enforceable. The situation of many child domestic workers also violates the ILO Convention on the Worst Forms of Child Labour 1999 (No. 182) which has not yet been ratified in Ethiopia (Kifle; 2002: 11-34). .

The child domestic work environment has unique characteristics as children work in another family's house, cut off from their own family and friends. Child domestic workers are expected to provide cheap domestic labour during which they are subjected to household chores and treated with utmost incivility. They are less visible than other

categories of workers and are under complete control and authority of their employers (Kifle; 2002).

An ILO report on decent work for domestic workers revealed that in countries where child domestics are being used, most of the child domestics (59%) are paid and the rest (41%) work without fixed monetary compensation. This latter category of children serves in return for food, clothing and lodging, and, in some cases, going to school. Among those who are paid, almost a third regularly get their pay, while close to a quarter of child domestics are not regularly paid. There are small numbers of child domestics who do not know whether they are paid or not. It could be that this group of children does not know whether they are paid a monthly salary because the employers often transfer money directly to their parents or other representatives. A large number of child domestics pay all or a portion of their wages to parents directly or through employers. Under these circumstances, the contribution to family income derived from children's work appears to be minimal. The children's earnings to the family's subsistence are not that significant. It does not appear to compensate for their exclusion from the educational system, nor does the work contribute significantly to the child's personal development.

CONCLUSION

Unlike in countries like Zimbabwe, Tanzania and Zambia were intensive research on African employers has been conducted by scholars such as Pape (1993); Bujra (2000) and Hansen (1990) South African has been lagging behind on literature that deals solely with

African employers. The aim in this study was to therefore shift from the focus on racial inequality as a defining factor of societal inequality. While race and class superiority allowed white employers to exploit and dominate black domestic workers, the class inequalities within African people has allowed African employers to produce the same exploitation and domination over their domestic workers.

Most of the literature on Africans has tended to portray them as ‘bad’ employers that pay their domestic workers low wages and make them work long hours, the literature has been one sided looking at the African employers from the perspective of the domestic workers. This research is aimed at understanding the views of employees and employers to find out the issues that they have to deal with when choosing to hire a domestic worker and also what it means for them as African people to hire another African woman to come work for them in their houses.

Chapter Three

METHODOLOGY

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this research was to understand the relationship that African domestic workers have with their African employers. To achieve the above, objective qualitative research methods were utilized using semi-structured interviews as the primary research technique. According to Greenstein (2003) the main weakness in using a qualitative research method is that the size of the sample may not be generalisable. However for the purpose of this research, the main reason for the use of qualitative research method was that it would be best suited to answer the research question. This is because the question deals with trying to understand how the respondents feel and understand their situation; this involves allowing the respondents to convey their own perspectives of their own realities. The qualitative methods also allowed the researcher to ask respondents about their opinions, beliefs and also about their past and present behaviour.

DATA COLLECTION TECHNIQUE

As mentioned above, the technique that was used to collect data was in-depth interviews. The in-depth interviews ensured that the respondents were free to answer the questions in any manner they were comfortable with, as their response were not limited to a yes or no option. In allowing the respondents to give detailed answers about their experiences, their responses offered the researcher new insights. The interviews offered both the respondent

and researcher much more flexibility, and the ability for the researcher to be able to follow up on particularly interesting avenues that emerged in the interview and the respondent was able to give a fuller picture. The interviews were run in a more conversational manner where the respondents were given the opportunity to share their history, how they knew their employers, and if they had any prior relationship with their employers. These are some of the factors that could help provide an understanding into the relationship that the domestic workers have with employers.

Interviews with domestic workers

Face-to-face interviews were carried out and they allowed the researcher the opportunity to also observe the surroundings and the way the respondents were reacting to certain questions that they were asked. As some of the interviews were conducted in the houses that the respondents worked in, it was easy to spend some time looking at the place that the respondent is working in and how free she is or is not during the interview. In some cases the researcher was also exposed to the way that the domestic worker interacted with the children in the family that she was working for. The face-to-face interviews were advantageous because they allowed the researcher to interact with the respondents at a deeper level, although in some cases that also meant that the interviews would deviate a little when the respondents were talking about their personal experiences that did not form part of the interview.

The interviews were conducted over a period of two months. The two months also included time that was spent going to Soweto to look for the respondents. Some of the

areas that we visited during the process of identifying respondents were, Bester; which is a ‘suburb’ in Pimville; Klipspruit Zone1 Pimville; Diepkloof extension 3 and 4; and Dobsonville extension3. The interviews ranged from at least half an hour to more than an hour in some cases. Some of the interviews were recorded and some respondents were not comfortable with being recorded, those that were recorded also tended to be the ones that were long. The data that was received from the respondents included their views about their daily activities, the nature of the relationship between the domestic worker and employer i.e. whether the relationship was based on trust, and if they feel that things would have been different if they were working for a white employer.

Interviews with employers

Interviews with the employers were also conducted in order to get their views on the relationships that they had with their domestic workers. The aim of these interviews was to understand how the ‘madams’ feel about having a ‘maid’, especially if they grew up in a house where they did not have a ‘maid’. The research intended to find out issues such as: whether race influences the way that the employer interacts with her ‘maid’; does the employer see her more as sister than employee? The data shed light on the role that the domestic worker played in the lives of the employers. For instance, if the domestic worker is older than the employer it could be easy for the domestic workers to assume a motherly role and that could be disempowering to the employer in terms of giving instructions.

The interviews provided the researcher with detailed information about their daily interactions with each other. It also allowed the researcher to be exposed to information that the researcher would not have found in a questionnaire, which provides limited answers. The interviews were scheduled according to the respondents' free time and in an environment that they felt comfortable in or that was more convenient for them. A tape recorder was used in some of the interviews and that allowed the researcher the ability to pay more attention to the respondent instead of spending time worried about writing every word that the respondent was saying. Writing down while interviewing the respondent disrupts the flow of the interview as the respondent feels that they have to pause in between their answering and allow the researcher time to finish writing and as a result respondents tend to give shorter answers.

An interview schedule was used in the interviews and it served as a reminder of the important themes and questions that should be covered during the interview. Most of the questions were open-ended except for the demographic questions. The demographic questions included age; highest standard passed and country of origin. The demographic questions were important so as to provide information on the characteristics of the sample. Language in some cases became important because it meant that the interviews could be carried out in the respondents home language and that allowed the respondents the ability to express themselves better.

Field notes were used as a way of documenting the researcher's observations and they provided a way of understanding what the researcher had observed. Field notes were used

to record the data that was collected from the 'casual' conversations that were held with the respondents and the observations that were made during the interviews. A research diary was also used as a tool of recording the observations made from the interviews conducted earlier in the day. Since a tape recorder was used during some of the interviews the notes that were made were on the non-verbal observations.

SAMPLE

Twelve semi-structured interviews using semi-structured questionnaires (or questionnaire guides) were conducted. Six interviews were conducted with the domestic workers and six interviews with the employers. The respondents were found in three areas Klipspruit, Diepkloof and Dobsonville. The sample also included an interview with the committee members of the South African Domestic Service and Allied Workers Union (SADSAWU) in their offices in Johannesburg. Only one person was interviewed per household which could be either the domestic worker or the employer. The reason for this was to avoid intimidation of the worker by the employer. This was a technique that I used which was meant to establish trust and ensure confidentiality and put the respondent (particularly the domestic workers) at ease.

The ages of the domestic workers ranged from 31- 73 years. The oldest respondent was a woman that worked part-time as a domestic worker. Her duties include doing washing and ironing for one family. She was previously employed as a cleaner in Baragwanath Hospital. Most of the domestic workers did not go beyond standard five at school, except for one that had reached Matric level. Only one of the domestic workers which were

interviewed was a live-out domestic worker and she was not a full-time worker. The ages of the employers ranged from 31 to 42 years and all of them where working and three were also postgraduate students doing their Masters at Wits University.

Due to the difficulty in finding respondents in their private homes, public places such as churches were used to find them. For instance, some respondents were found at the Methodist church and Grace Bible church, both in Pimville. Some of the respondents were approached by the researcher and some respondents were found by asking the respondents that were already found if they knew other people that would be interested to participate in the research. Neuman (2006) refers to the technique that was used as snowballing. Snowball sampling is sampling through referrals and networks. Snowball sampling is a multi stage technique that begins with one or a few people and spreads out on the basis of links to the initial person. The limitation of purposive and snowballing is that the researcher cannot be entirely sure whether the cases selected represent the population. It is therefore important that it is made clear that, the concern of this study was not with numbers and sample representation but with depth of the information that was gathered.

ACCESS

Gaining access to any research site is always difficult, but gaining access to domestic workers was exceptionally difficult because it involved going into peoples' private spaces and in a way invading their privacy. It is difficult to ask someone to share details of what happens inside their house and it is even more difficult for domestic workers because

they are outsiders in the houses that they work in. It was therefore difficult to gain access primarily from the nature of the sector.

Access was the biggest challenge that faced this research. Workers worked behind locked doors. The domestic workers are very afraid of their employers as they refused to be interviewed or even to be approached in the presence of their employers. There were instances in which the respondents would agree to an interview over the phone. However, they would refuse to be interviewed when the employer was present and they would pretend to be busy. In most cases the researcher would go to the interviews but not find anyone. A great problem is that unlike domestic workers in the suburbs, the domestic workers in the townships do not congregate in parks. They are always inside the house and never get out. Similarly the employers were difficult to access because all of them are working and they are not at home during the day, in order to get them the researcher had to go to the houses around 5pm and on weekends.

The difficulty in getting access to the respondents is the main reason why the sample size ended up being less than it was supposed to be. Initially, the study had envisaged to have a sample size of twenty, of whom ten would be domestic workers whilst the rest would be employers. . However due to difficulties in access the research ended up with twelve in-depth cases. It was relatively easy to gain access to the union and the women were willing to help and be part of the research.

ETHICS

Participation in this study was voluntary (all the respondents participated on their own free will; I also avoided enticing the participants to participate in research by offering them any form of reward (money)). All the respondents knew that they were free to leave or stop participating at any time. Confidentiality was guaranteed and pseudonyms were used in occasions where the respondent did not want their name to be used. The participants were asked to sign a consent form that clearly outlined the research and what was expected from them. Interviews were conducted in places where the respondents felt comfortable.

LIMITATIONS AND CHALLENGES OF THE RESEARCH

The size of the sample does not allow for the generalisation of the findings. However as mentioned above the purpose of this research was not to find generalisation but it was rather to provide an understanding of the relationship between African 'maids' and their African 'madams' based on a few select cases.

The domestic sector is such that it is difficult to penetrate and get into and that difficulty affected the sample size and the type of sample that could be used. Initially non-participant observation was going to be used as a second technique. Non-participant observation would have been used as a way of complementing the data that was collected from interviews. Part of the observation would have included spending time with the

respondents on weekends and trying to get integrated into the environment of the respondents, without conducting any interviews. The aim was not to ask the respondents about their feelings, views, or attitudes; but rather to watch what they are doing and listen to what they say. The strength of this is that it can be used as a way of revealing the discrepancies between what people say and what they do. The disadvantage with this is that the respondents may act differently if they know that they are being watched. The primary data that would be derived from this will be based on my interpretations as the observer, on what is happening around me.

The main reason for not using participant observation was that it is time consuming and it would have been extremely difficult to get the families that would be needed for the study. There were also ethical considerations as it would be difficult to not tell the families the real reason for the researcher being there as the researcher would be involved with the people at the most personal level and would be exposed to their most intimate daily lives and interactions. Based on the personal nature of the work the researcher would have been forced to tell them the real reason for being there and that would have compromised the kind of data that would have been retrieved as the people would be aware that they are being studied. Adequate participant observation requires spending long periods of time with the respondent so that they get used to the researcher and start to relax and see researcher as part of the group, however the amount of time that the researcher had for fieldwork did not allow for such a method to be used in an effective manner and hence it was not used.

Language in some instances was a problem as most of the domestic workers either spoke Tswana or Sotho and was not able to understand English or Zulu properly. That created difficulties with some interviews and in some ways limited the amount of information that could be retrieved in an interview.

Chapter Four

FINDINGS

This chapter discusses and analyses the findings through seven themes. *What's in a name?* Looks at how the African employers choose to call the domestic workers and the meaning attached to the name that they use. The theme *the politics of space* looks at the challenges that live-in domestic workers in the township are exposed to. What it means for the employers sharing their homes with another woman. *Between Cup and Lip: domestic workers as part of the family,* looks at the familial relations that may or may not exist between domestic workers and the employers. The theme also focuses on the different understanding that the domestic workers and employers have about what it means to be part of the family. *Family affairs: how much do you love your domestic worker,* focuses on the almost inevitable competition and jealousy that the employers sometimes feel towards the domestic workers. The theme also looks at the prevalence of the sexual competition between domestic workers and African employers, and how the employers have chosen to deal with the competition. *Struggle for better wages* looks at the wages that the workers receive in relation to the minimum wage that was set by the state. It also looks at the alternative ways that the employers have used in order to supplement the low wage that they sometimes give to the domestic workers. G*etting time-off* focuses more on live-in workers and their struggle in getting time-off to go home and be with their families and children. The last theme *unions and resistance of domestic workers* focuses on the lack of membership of domestic workers in the township and the diminishing role of SADSAWU representative of the domestic workers. These themes taken together draw on data from interviews with employers, domestic workers and union

representatives from SADSAWU, as a way of offering the respondents understanding of the relationship that they have with each other as workers and employers. The interviews will also be incorporated with literature to provide a more analytical discussion.

4.1. WHAT'S IN A NAME?

There seems to be a 'new generation' of domestic workers emerging in South Africa called "helpers"[4]. There is a debate among African employers on what is the appropriate name to use when referring to domestic workers. Part of this debate is due to the desire of some African employers to create a relationship with their domestic workers based on equality and unity.

The debate shows the unique nature of domestic work. It reveals how the activities that domestic workers performed are still not fully recognized as work. The tasks that are performed by domestic workers in the households are activities that are generally regarded as women's work and are unpaid. The same tasks when performed in a different space, for example by a chef in a restaurant or janitor in a building, do not raise debate about whether the people performing the tasks are workers or 'helpers'.

[4] It is worth noting that referring to domestic workers as 'helper' is not unique to South African employers. The Labour and Immigration department in Hong Kong refers to foreign domestic workers as "*Foreign Domestic Helpers (FDHs)*" (Constable 1996, pp. 448).

Capitalism resulted in a situation where it took work away from the household and community; work was recognized as to produce a product or service that could be sold as a commodity, and derive a profit from the sale of that commodity (Webster, Buhlungu, and Bezuidenhout 2001, pp. 9). However, the current definition of work has been expanded to include not only the sphere of production but includes also social reproduction. Webster, Buhlungu, and Bezuidenhout (2001) define work as a social activity where an individual or group puts in effort during a specific time and space, sometimes with the expectation of monetary or other kinds of rewards or with no expectation of reward, but with the sense of obligation to others. This definition goes beyond the factory and recognizes as work those activities performed in the households by women which are in most cases unpaid.

There is great importance in the way that people are viewed by others; the way that society defines an individual could influence the way that person will see him/herself. Labeling theory shows how the self-identity and behavior of individuals may be determined or influenced by the terms used to describe or classify them, and is associated with the concept of a self-fulfilling prophecy and stereotyping[5] (Thomson 2004, pp. 13). Domestic workers come from a history where they have been referred to in negative and derogatory terms such as 'servants' and 'maids' under apartheid and colonialism. These are the labels that were meant to show the inferiority of African 'maids' and their lower social standing when compared to the white 'madams'.

[5] Labeling theory (also known as societal reaction theory) focuses on the linguistic tendency of majorities to negatively label minorities or those seen as deviant from the norms.

Similar to white employers who refused to call their domestic workers ‘maids’ because they argued that the term suggested inferiority, African employer are experiencing the same struggles as they insist on calling their domestic workers “Helpers’. They argue that ‘helper’ shows equality, unity and that they value their domestic workers.

Existing studies show that even white employers in the past also had difficulties in trying to find polite terms to use when referring to their domestic workers. Some white employers were also reported as saying that they did not like using the term ‘servant’ when they were referring to their domestic workers arguing that it seemed derogatory. These scholars argued that the employers used polite names that they give their domestic workers as a way of masking the real exploitation that the domestic workers experience, with at least one recent argument suggesting that the term ‘helper’ is denying the domestic workers the right to be seen as workers like any other worker in a normal wage relationship. Help is something that is offered to a friend out of obligation often without expecting any monetary reward (Ally 2008). Domestic workers work with the expectation of receiving a wage, which puts them in a wage relationship, therefore on the bases of that alone they should be seen as workers.

Another scholar, Masondo (2005) in his study on BMW in South Africa, criticized the use of the term ‘associates’ when the employers were referring to the workers. His argument was that the term associates in business refers to equal partners, however the reality at BMW was that the managers are still in control. The employers were using

associates as a way of shaping the workers' attitudes towards work, and therefore force 'buy-in' into employer-dominated models of workplace participation. The same could be said for domestic workers in the townships, where the perceived unity and equality that is linked to the term 'helper' is used as a way of controlling the workers and making them work hard and at the same time obscuring the exploitation that they are experiencing.

The term 'helper' still goes to the traditional characterisation of the relationship between domestic workers and the employers as a close relationship. However, in reality, the same exploitation that the domestic workers experienced in the hands of their white employers still exists with the African employers. Therefore the equality and unity that the African employers are trying to show by using 'helper' in reality is not there. An employer and employee can never be on the same level. They do not possess the same power. For instance, domestic workers do not have the power to do as they please in the workplace they have to await the instructions of the employer and on its own serves to show that the relationship is not equal. The same class inequalities that allowed white women to displace their responsibilities for housework and childcare on to African women (Cock 1980), still apply to the case of the African employer.

Below are profiles of employers that illustrate the debate that exists among employers on what is the appropriate terminology to use when they are referring to their domestic workers. Nomthi represented employers that preferred to use the term domestic worker and therefore asserting that she is in a wage relationship with her domestic worker. Nandipha on the other hand preferred to use the term helper (even though she does not

say it) this was revealed by her assertion that "she is not here to work, she is here to assist us".

Employer's Profile: Nandipha*6

I found Nandipha through Nomthi as they attend the same classes at Wits, and she also lives in Diepkloof. She has two daughters, the first born is twelve years old, and the last born is two years old.

Nandipha pays her domestic worker R800 and allows her one weekend off every month end. She starts work at 6am and prepares a lunch box for Nandipha's daughter and breakfast for the family, and when everyone has left, she continues with her house work. Nandipha did not have set hours for her domestic worker, she said that most of the time by 10am she is done cleaning and she would sit and watch TV and look after the little child. Nandipha is the one that does the cooking in the house because her domestic worker can not cook properly. The domestic worker has her own room outside.

She describes herself as new to this 'thing', she says that she used to do things for herself, and started having a 'helper' when she moved to Johannesburg in 2006. Since she was starting school she needed someone to come help her. Her first domestic worker was from Eastern Cape but she felt guilty for hiring her because she (domestic worker) was still young, she was 28 years at that time, and still needed to be at school. Nandipha's current domestic worker is 45 years old, she finds her better than the

[6] Name changed in order to maintain anonymity.

previous 'helper', what makes their relationship better is that they are related, not by blood but they are from the same clan. She says that "in the African culture clan names are important, the connection is as important as blood relations". This makes it easy for her to regard her as part of the family; she eats with them in the house

Nandipha's 'helper' eats with them and the employer even buys her toiletries. She calls her 'helper' by her name and her older daughter calls her Sisi. Nandipha stated that we (African people) do not normally use the word domestic worker, if she is older than me, I would call her Auntie or use her clan name. We do not call her helper you don't even encourage your children to say that she is hired you say she is here to help us. The way that we address each other depends on age, the age gap between me and the current one is not that big hence she calls me by my name, the previous one called me 'Sisi' or 'Mama ka Yolanda' (Yolanda's mother).

Nandipha says that she does not treat her domestic worker like "Isiqhashi" (translated someone that is hired). When I asked her what that means by that, she said that "some people you find that they would say this is my helper and I have nothing to say to her. But with us you find that we sit and talk and laugh. She tells me about her family". I asked her if she talked about her family, she replied "not much just 'nje' on the surface not serious stuff, nothing personal. I talk to her about my school or laugh at something that my husband did you know those petty things".

Employer's profile: Nomthi*

Nomthi is a 41 year old woman that lives in Diepkloof Soweto. She is currently an MA student (Developmental Studies) at Wits university, married to a lawyer. She has two children: a six year old son and an eighteen years old daughter. Her daughter is currently a first year student at Rhodes University.

Nomthi states that she has employed a number of domestic workers in her life, her previous domestic worker was there for three years and the current domestic worker has been working for her for eight months. The women that she has hired are normally women that her mother's domestic worker knows. She does not have any prior relationship with the women that she hires. Initially the domestic workers are hired on a three months contract and if she is satisfied with their performance she then extends the employment contract. She pays her domestic workers R2500 per month and they work Monday to Sunday from 6am- 4pm. The domestic worker gets to go home (in Natal) every six weeks, for one week. Nomthi pays for her domestic worker's transport home.

Nomthi describes herself as a strict person, in that the job has to be done. She trains her workers herself. She says that "she does not have a problem with 'reprimanding' her domestic worker when she is not doing what is right". She believes that when "you do things out of pretence because you feel that this person is working for you and you force yourself to be nice, then you encounter problems". When asked about the qualities she likes in her domestic worker she said that "she is from Natal very respectful extremely,

comes from a good home and you can tell that, she respects herself and that allows her to respect others, that's very important to me".

She stated that her domestic worker calls her Sisi and she calls her by her name. When asked about how she feels about calling her domestic worker a 'maid' her response was: "No how is it? No she is a 'Maid' if you are uncomfortable with that then you can use Housekeeper. How is helper any different from domestic worker?" She also did not consider her domestic worker as her 'friend' she said that it would not work, "Imagine telling your friend to do stuff for you". Her domestic worker sleeps in the backyard room and she eats the same food as the family. However, she is not allowed to have supper with them, she eats in her own room. Nomthi believes that dinner time is family time.

These profiles were useful in revealing that the term is used as a way of masking exploitation. For instance Nandipha paid her domestic worker below minimum wage, unlike Nomthi who established a formal relationship with her worker; she paid the domestic workers R2500. This makes it hard for the employers' argument of equality and unity to hold, as the profiles show that the reality is different from what the employers are saying.

According to other employers in the study the term 'helper' is meant to show equality and unity. One of the employers Mama' Zama* tired to explain what the employers mean by the term 'helper', she said:

> "The rationale behind the concept 'helper' is that we (African employers) are trying to run away from calling them 'maid', because when you call them 'maid' people tend to think of this woman that is badly treated who has a small room outside. For me she is not a 'maid', she is not a victim I might not be related to this person but she is looking after me, looking after my kids. For me it makes the bond much closer. That's the quality behind the concept helper. There is a sense of similar identity with this person; you feel for this person, she is almost like a sister or mother to you".

Another employer Thandi* said:

> "The word 'maid' reminds me of our mothers in the suburbs; the word is derogatory and brings down people. It takes us back, to remember where we come from. 'Helper' is more dignified, it shows that you respect her and value her".

Eunice Dhladhla from the South African Domestic Service and Allied Workers Union (SADSAWU) shared the same sentiments as the scholar that was arguing against the term 'helper'. However she put responsibility on domestic workers to assert their positions as workers.

"*Workers allow themselves to be undermined. Workers do not go to the unions they stay and keep quiet and want to be exploited*".

Her opinion towards the term 'helper' was:

> "Workers need to ask what is meant by helper, because she is doing the same job as domestic worker. Even if she finishes the job at 10am it means from there she becomes security guard for employer. Even if you work 1hour a day you are a worker, as long as that person pays you and you work more than 24 hours a week. Those who agree to be called 'helpers' are undermining themselves as workers".

Having mentioned the above points, based on the responses from the employer in this study the use of the term 'helper' could be explained or understood in the following three ways. One could also argue that the reasons and explanations that were offered by these employers are not at all different from the reasons that were offered by white employers. Suggesting that the struggles that the African employers are going through are not unique to African employers, they are long term struggles of the white employers too.

Firstly, the working African mother has always sought the assistance of family members to look after her children and household. This assistance often came in the form of grannies, aunts and cousins. As these relations were members of the family, they offered relief to the mother because she knew that her family will be well looked after (Mabiletsa 1967). It has been argues that Even today the same pattern exists; some African employers sometimes seek their cousins and close family friends to come take care of their houses and children (Carroll 2004). There is still a need to hire someone that they have close familial ties with, in order to have the same sense of trust that their families will be well taken care of. The close relations that exist between them often make it hard for the 'helpers' to be viewed as workers even though they are being paid. The employers

that were interviewed all believed that it is important to hire someone that they knew personally or that someone close to them knew. This is similar to white people who hire workers based on trust, using informal networks to get domestic workers.

Secondly the term is used as a way to support the African employers argument that somehow the relationship is less exploitative that the relationship between white employers and domestic workers. Domestic work has always been described as an unequal relationship where the domestic worker has less power and autonomy and is exploited by her white employer. The African employers argue that they use the term 'helper' because it puts them on the same level, but it is just that I have means she does not have means and I am sort of helping her (Mam'Zama). Another employer Thandi* said:

"The word 'maid' reminds me of our mothers in the suburbs; the word is derogatory and brings down people. It takes us back, to remember where we come from. 'Helper' is more dignified, it shows that you respect her and value her".

According to the employers the term 'helper' is used to show mutual help, puts both parties in a position where they are both getting something out of the relationship without disrespecting or exploiting each other. The African employers use the term to contrast the relationship that they have with their domestic workers when compared to white employers. It is the way in which they assert that they do not see their domestic workers as servants that are below them. However there was one employer who expressed her

disagreement with the term employer, to her the employers who used this term were trying to find a way to justify the low pay that they give their domestic workers.

"They are justifying the pay that they give them by calling them 'helper'. She is not a helper she is a domestic worker doing her work. Or if they are looking for a nice term she is a housekeeper. How is she helping me she is earning a salary for services rendered?" (Nomthi)*

This employer stood out from the rest of the employers by openly rejecting the term 'helper' and arguing the domestic workers are workers and not 'helpers'. For her the use of the term 'helper' was closely linked to the pay that the workers were given and the employers used the term 'helper' as a way of hiding their exploitation of the domestic workers.

Finally, by viewing their domestic workers as 'helpers' the African employers are trying to show that they still have control and play an active role in their houses. Some show this by insisting on cooking supper every night when they come back from work or school. It is a way of showing that they are not completely dependent on their 'helpers' to do everything for them, they are capable of doing things for themselves. The employers find themselves in a situation where they do not have enough time to take care of their houses and families themselves and that is the reason why they require assistance of a 'helper'. To an African woman the ability to cook, clean, do laundry for her husband is still very important and valued. That could be the reason why the 'helper' never does

everything in the house; the wife still feels the need to do some tasks and control what is happening in the house.

The similarities in the reasons presented by African employers, with the reasons that were presented by white employers, add as a proving point that even though the African employers try to present their relationship as different there is not that much difference in it. However recognition is given to those employers that really do have less sinister motives behind the use of ‘helper’, driven by the fear of not wanting to treat their domestic workers the same way that their mother used to be treated in the suburbs. However their insistence in calling the domestic workers ‘helper’ reveals their ignorance in recognising the important role that the domestic workers are playing in their lives. Insisting on ‘helper’ also undermines the role of domestic worker as a worker, and there allows the employers to reproduce the same exploitation that their mothers experienced, through low wages, and long working hours.

It is more likely that the term is used as a way of creating an illusion to both the employers and the domestic workers that somehow the relationship that they have is different, more dignified and close when compared to the relationship that white people had with their domestic workers. As much as race and class were dividing between white employers and their domestic workers, class inequalities also divide the African employers and their domestic workers. The reality of the situation is that they can never be equal and using what may seem like a polite term to the employers will not make the

domestic workers and their employers equals. The employers are still in control as the domestic workers operate on the instructions that they receive from employers.

4.2. POLITICS OF SPACE

The nature of domestic service is such that conflict over space is likely to arise. Employers use live-in arrangements as a way of controlling domestic workers, leaving the domestic workers with little freedom to live their lives outside work. For some domestic workers in the township being a live-in worker not only means living in the same yard as the employer, it also means living in the same house with the employer. To the domestic workers, living inside the house often feels like their under constant surveillance, where the domestic worker is also forced and expected to present a particular emotional state. To some employers having a domestic worker living inside the house is seen as an intrusion of their private space.

Scholars such as Cock (1980) and Gaitskell et al. (1984) show how the laws of the Apartheid state forced domestic workers to accept live-in arrangements. Often this meant that they had to leave their children to be raised by their grandparents. Living-in allowed the employers to exercise greater control on the domestic workers. Living-in arrangements meant increased availability of employees to work around the clock. According to King (2007), "When living-in, the hours of work, time-off and holidays are totally controlled and taken away according to the dictates of employers. If child or elderly care is part of the assigned work tasks, this often involves being on call twenty-four hours a day" (p. 51). Living-in often left the domestic workers unable to live their

own lives outside of the family that they are working for. The domestic workers were often not allowed to have their friends come in to visit them, and would be isolated from the people that are close to them.

Domestic Worker's Profile: Nonceba*

Nonceba is a 31 year old woman from the Eastern Cape. She is single and has a son who is a year old. She attended school until Matric and could not further her education due to financial difficulties at home. She needed to find employment in order to be able to take care of her son. Her aunt told her about her friend that needed a domestic worker and that is how she ended up working for her current employer. She told me that she has been working there since the beginning of this year. Her son is living with her mother in the Eastern Cape.

Nonceba's wages is R1000 per month and she eats all her meals in the house. She could not tell me her exact working hours, because they did not discuss them with her employer. However she wakes up at six to prepare the children for school. Her tasks in the house included cooking, cleaning, washing and taking care of the employer's children. She lives inside the house in a spare bedroom. She works everyday from Monday to Sunday, and only gets off once a month. When I asked her how she feels about living-in she said that "it was not my decision to come live here. I have my own place in Orlando (Township in Soweto) and she [employer] knows about it. She told me to come live here because her children need someone to look after them". During the month when

she is at work there is no one at her place, she only goes there once a month when she gets off. She described her relationship with her employer as good; she treats her well and she appreciated her employer's kindness because she did not expect the way they treat her like family, she feels at home. She stated that even the work that she does is not hard. I later asked her if she would like to work for a white employer, before responding she laughed then said "yes, white people increase money and they offer offs". The ability to get off was important to her because she will get a chance to be in her house because now no one is there.

Domestic Worker's Profile: Patricia*

Patricia is 50 years old; she is married and is a mother to four children- three boys and one daughter. The daughter is the youngest of her children; she is thirteen years old and lives with Patricia in the house that she is working in. Patricia is from Mount Frere in the Eastern Cape. The highest standard that she passed was standard five.

She has been working for her current employer since February last year. Patricia's wages is R800 per month; she receives all her and her daughter's meals in the house. She sleeps with her daughter in a spare room inside the house. She did not express any problems with living-in; she said that her employer was a good person. "I feel at home, she and her husband treat me well". Most of the time she is left with the husband only, the wife is a flight attendant and she is often not at home, however when she is at home she treats her well. She said that because the husband is a Priest she finds it easy for her

to go to him when she has problems. She also mentioned that this is the first time that she has worked as a live-in domestic worker, previously she only did 'piece-jobs' (similar to part-time work), she used to find work in Eldorado Park and the reason she chose not to work full-time was that the "employers there make you work hard and they do not pay".

Similar to Nonceba, Patricia does not have set working hours; she said that "as long as there is something to be done in the house she works". She does not get any offs and she goes home once a year in December. I asked her if she would like to work for a white employer, she said "Yes but only because they have money and would pay me better".

The participants did not express any problems with live-in work, because their employers made them feel at home and they were granted access to everything that was in the house. Of all the live-in domestic workers that were interviewed only one had her own room outside and the rest did not have their own rooms outside; they all lived with the employers inside the house. They felt free in the house, for example most of them explained that when they wanted to sit and watch TV they can do so. As most of them were not from Johannesburg and did not have their own places of residence, being a live-in domestic worker was a better alternative. One of the respondents Matsokolo* from Lesotho said:

"*I am happy with my accommodation and I love living with her (employer) because renting is expensive".*

Some of the domestic workers that I interviewed were live-out workers. One of these domestic workers was Mam'Yokolo*,

Mam'Yokolo was born in Lesotho in 1935 and she is taking care of her three grandchildren- two boys and one girl. Mam'Yokolo was a cleaner for twenty- four years at Baragwanath hospital and now she has retired and earns a pension. She works part-time on Mondays from 7am- 3pm. She only does washing and ironing and receives R80. She has been working for this family for a year now, her employer refused to buy a washing machine because it ruins clothes. Mam'Yokolo hand washes the clothes. The second woman Mandisa* decided to look for live-out work because she has a little baby and she has no one to take care of the baby for her.

Employing a live-out domestic worker, the research shows was 'increasingly' becoming a decision that is made by the employers. Some employers chose to employ live-out domestic workers. Two of the employers that I interviewed employed live-out domestic workers. Mam'Zama decided to employ a live-out domestic worker after she 'caught' her previous domestic worker stealing her belongings. She explained what happened on the day that she 'caught' her.

> Her name was Joyce*, Joyce had a younger sister and her sister's name was Dipuo*. Joyce and her sister were from Paris. We didn't know where Dipuo worked. What they used to do during the day when we were at work, Dipuo comes home to take things that Joyce took from my house and brings the things she took from the house that she works in to stay in my house with her

> sister. When they go home they have these big bags and would say that they play 'stokvel'. It happened that I catch Dipuo one day, that day I went to work at Bara (She is a nurse there) and I was sick so I came back early in the morning at 10am. I came just at the bartering time when the other was giving and the other was taking. I can tell you "*Ihlazo*" (meaning Disgrace), I could see there was something of mine but I was scared to say "*ngicela ukubona, kunani lapho*" (can I please see what you have there). That was the day I decided to let her go.

Unlike Mam'Zama, Thandi chose to employ a live-out domestic worker because she wanted privacy. She pointed out that *"I do not like domestic workers that live-in, I like my space and they intrude on your space. They do not know boundaries. They end up knowing your weakness because they see your interactions with your husband and children."* The domestic worker that Thandi employed is 33 years old and she lives in Alexandra. She comes to work four times a week and she is paid R2500 per month.

Ally (2008) shows how the transformation to live-out domestic work started as early as 1902, and by the mid-1970s the live-out worker had become an identifiable new category in the structure of paid domestic work. The transition to live-out domestic work seemed to be motivated by two factors, first, the domestic workers' need to take care of their children. Second, it was motivated by their need to free themselves from the degrading and dehumanising conditions of residential domestic service. The domestic workers saw living-out as the only way in which they could regain control of their lives. Ally's study

also reveals how for many South African domestic workers living-out did not change any of their oppressive working conditions. However it did allow them to ‘knock-off’ and this was important to the domestic workers as they were able to live their lives as both workers and mothers. The disadvantage to living-out was that commuting to and from work created financial burdens for the workers. The time spent going to and from work served as another burden.

The use of live-in domestic workers seems to be increasing with the entry of African employers into the market. This is due to the system that they use to get their domestic workers, as some of the African employers hire people from rural areas or migrants from other countries (Lesotho or Zimbabwe). These are people that normally do not have their own houses in the urban areas and would therefore be ‘forced’ to accept live-in arrangements. In some cases the ages of the employer’s children act as another factor that leads to the employers seeking live-in domestic workers. If the children are young it is more likely that the domestic worker would be told to come live in the house. In most cases these domestic workers would sleep in the same room as the children, turning their work into a twenty-four hour job as the domestic worker is forced to attend to the child at night while the mother is sleeping in the next room. Constable (1997) argues that factory workers who lived in dormitories are in some ways better than live-in domestic workers because they had moments where they could draw a line between their places of employment and their homes.

Her argument could be taken and applied in the South African context to try and contrast the live-in domestic workers in the suburbs and the live-in domestic workers in the townships. It could be used to show how the former were or still are in a 'better' position because their rooms are outside and removed from the main house which serves as the place of employment. The act of going out of the house and in your own 'private space' could serve as drawing the line, not being in the same space as your employer can create a feeling of being away from work. Even though work rules do still apply, in the sense the domestic worker's friends can not come, the domestic workers did find a way to 'sneek in' their boyfriends or husbands without the employer knowing. In some ways the set up did still allow the domestic worker to exercise some autonomy.

However with the live-in domestic workers in the townships the living arrangements do not allow them to draw a line between work and 'home'. They are always in an environment where they are constantly aware that they are at work, even when they are sleeping they are at work. For instance some sleep with the children in the same room and if the child cries and night the domestic worker is forced to attend to the child. With the live-in domestic workers in the suburbs they have some ability to rebel and not obey the employer's rules especially if the employer is not present to monitor her.

Constable's (1997) book *Maid to order in Hong Kong: Stories of Filipina workers*, shows how in Hong Kong the domestic workers are also required to sleep in the same room as the babies so as to be able to attend to the child at night. This book was important in showing how living-in means living inside with the employer is not unique to South

African domestic workers only, although not to same the extent at which the privacy of the domestic worker is taken away. Constable also reveals how some of these live-in domestic workers in Hong Kong are in even worse conditions, where they are expected to sleep in the living room or in the kitchen floor. In such situations there is total lack of privacy (p.91).

In terms of the research some of the employers and the domestic workers did not express any negative feelings about living-in; they did not feel like their privacy was being violated in any way. This is contrary to the belief that domestic workers have negative feeling towards living-in, where they see it as a form of stripping away of their dignity. Thandi was the only employer that chose to employ a live-out domestic worker because she wanted privacy. All of the employers expressed that the domestic workers were not allowed to invite their friends over. When the domestic workers were asked how they felt about not being allowed to invite their friends, most said that they were fine with because "they are really not into friends". The domestic workers were also in most cases confined to the house. Eunice Dhladhla said that "the domestic workers in the townships work two jobs, one as a domestic worker and the other as a security guard in the house".

As much as the African employers say that they treat the domestic workers as equals, their actions reveal something else. If they were real equals the domestic workers would be allowed to have their friends come over as much as the employer's friends come to visit. It is hard to talk of equality when the domestic workers are prohibited from certain privileges that the employer gets to enjoy. This shows that the same dynamics and

struggles of the domestic workers are still being reproduced by the African employers. The same alienation that domestic workers felt working in the white suburbs still continues with the domestic workers in the Townships. The employers are denying the domestic workers the ability to interact with other people outside and to form relations with other people. The only time that the domestic workers get to reconnect with their private lives is when they go back home. To some extent this is due to the nature of domestic work, as it involves working in someone's private home and space and that creates difficulty for the employers to allow strangers into their homes. It gets even more complicated when the domestic worker lives inside the employer's house.

Interestingly the domestic workers in this study did not complain about being live-in domestic workers, even those that had their own houses in the township. This suggests that something else is happening which unfortunately the study was not aware of and therefore did not investigate further.

4.3. BETWEEN CUP AND LIP[7]: DOMESTIC WORKERS AS PART OF THE FAMILY

In South Africa and throughout the world family analogies have always been used to characterise the employee-employer relationships in domestic service. Romero (1999) argues that with women of colour employed as live-in workers, employers use the family analogy not only to incorporate the employee into the family but also to justify their patriarchal and matriarchal supervisory and disciplinary practices towards their domestic

[7] Title taken from a play which was on show at the National Arts Festival in Grahamstown. The play chronicles the relationship between a woman and her domestic worker.

workers. The literature on domestic work in South Africa has tended to focus on the inter-racial relationship between white ‘madams’ and black ‘maids’, in order to show the inequalities that exist.

Scholars such as Cock (1980) and Gaitskell (1984) challenged the view that domestic work involved close relationships between workers and employers. These scholars argued that there cannot be talks of ‘sisterhood’ while black female domestic workers are being oppressed by their white female employers. These scholars argued that

> “Even though domestic service provides one of the most significant inter-racial contacts that whites encounter, the interaction is experienced in extremely asymmetrical terms. Domestic workers are subject to practices of inferiority such as "servant's rations" and "servant's blankets" which are synonymous with cheap products of inferior quality. The inferior living quarters and the prohibition on using facilities such as same plates, toilets and bathrooms underline their subordinate place in the household” Cock (1980) cited by Motsei (1990).

The characterization of domestic workers as part of the family is more prevalent with regard to live-in domestic workers. Regarding domestic workers as part of the family has become even more important to African employers. The ‘new’ African employers agonize about not wanting to treat their domestic workers the way their mothers were treated in the suburbs. There have been reports that some African employers hire extended family members from rural areas as their domestic workers. The ties and the

need to form close relationships is motivated by more than gender, in some cases it is motivated by blood relations.

The interviews with the domestic workers and the employers revealed that being part of the family is not always understood the same way by both parties. To the employers being part of the family was always expressed with regard to the concept of Ubuntu. Ubuntu is the African sensibility that we are human only through the humanity of other human beings. To the employers it means treating their domestic workers like human beings, showing them respect and being friendly towards the workers. Constable (1997) shows how employers in Hong Kong attach respect and treating workers as human beings to the family analogy.

Most of the employers shared similar views with Mam'Zama. Employers expressed that the problem issued from workers becoming too friendly and in the process taking the employers for granted. The employers argued that the problem began with them not asserting boundaries and wanting the employees to be a worker and sister and the same time. It results in the worker not knowing when to make the transition from sister to worker and from worker to friend. One of the employers Mam'Zama explained the situation as follows:

The problem is that we become over friendly with the domestic workers and that spoils the relationship between you and her because she becomes over familiar with the situation of the house and everything, she ends up not knowing what she is supposed to

do. That not knowing happens because you are over nice. Another problem with us is that you treat your 'helper' like a sister and be afraid to confront her, when she has done something wrong and you have a right to ask her about it. For example with Joyce (her domestic worker) I was scared to say this is wrong I do not like to find people in my lounge eating me food.

Let me tell you another thing again, their expectations are not the same when they come to work for you compared when they come to work for a white person. They would be so meticulous there and they would work over the limit but to us they complain on the first day and not do the work she would do there, that is how they are. So it is very dicey, you want to treat her nice like a sister and she sees you like a fool. I think that we are very confused as people because you can not want a maid and a sister. Do you know what is interesting, there is this lady that was telling me that her aunt has had her 'helper' for twenty years, her aunt told her that in all those years they have never had a serious conversation, she tells her what to do and she doesn't laugh with her. The funny thing is that those that are treated like this last and those that are treated with love do not last.

Treating their domestic workers well seemed to be important to the employers even to those who openly declared that they did not see their domestic workers as part of their family. When I asked Nomthi if she regarded her domestic worker as part of the family she replied:

> As for family she is not my family but I treat her properly, she eats the same food that we eat. But she does not eat with us, she eats in her room and she

> has TV in her room. Look dinner is family time and she is not my family, dinner is family time and you wouldn't want another woman coming in, imposing. That is where the problem starts.

Most of the domestic workers that were interviewed expressed that they were happy with the relationship that they had with their employers and they felt free in the house. This seemed to mean more to them than being allowed to have their friends come over for a visit. The workers also expressed that they did not feel like they were being over worked because their employers allowed them to relax when they were done with their tasks. Being able to sit and discuss their personal lives with their employers contributed to the feeling of being part of a family. When asked what being part of the family means to them as workers, one of the respondents said:

"*She (employer) never complains and she helps me out with my problems and money*."

Parrenas (2001) in her book *Servants of Globalisation: Women, Migrant, and Domestic Work*, argues that the notion of 'like one of the family' is a myth. It results in a situation where both the domestic workers and the employers manipulate the attachment to get what they want. Parrenas argues that the employer manipulates the notion to extract unpaid labour. Being 'like one of the family' gave the domestic workers the ability to extract money from their employers, the trust and affection that comes with being part of the family has had some great benefits for some domestic workers. For example, the author reports how some domestic workers inherited money; some persuaded their employers to invest in their business ventures and others received loans to buy their houses. This shows the commonality of domestic workers using the close bonds that they

have with the employers as a way of getting more money. The value of the relationship is measured by the monetary and material benefits that the domestic workers get.

Fish (2006) also revealed that being part of the family means different things to the domestic worker and the employer. “For the worker this often means wanting a certain amount of agency to refuse to perform certain tasks, and for the employer that means ‘othering’ the domestic worker. There are those workers that describes the relationship as being friends with each other but that friendship is based on material things, for example if the worker gets paid well or if the employer can borrow her money. Even with the employers the friendship is a very selfish one, the employer is often looking for someone to listen to her problem, it becomes emotional labour where the worker has to listen to her employer’s problem even when she not interested, and she must constantly be in a happy and supportive mood” (Fish; 2006: 91-97).

The domestic workers also associated being part of the family with being allowed to eat the same food as the family and eating together. In the Chinese culture eating in the same pot is a symbol for shared identity (Constable 1997). The way that the domestic workers are called can also be used create a familial bond. According to Constable (1996) in Hong Kong spinster amahs (Chinese paid domestic workers) are addressed as ‘mahjeh’ literally meaning mother or older sister. Constable further argues that the names serve to both mystify the nature of the relationship between worker and employer and to create a false sense of familial bond. The sohei often have no families and thus usually depend on their

employers for their livelihood and to care for them in their old age (Constable; 1996:461).

The domestic workers take the affection and attachment as an opportunity to redress the inequality that exists. Knowing that their employers are in a better financial position than they are, the relationship becomes one way that they could acquire more money. There seems to be a realisation among the employers that being 'part of the family' does lead to the domestic workers taking advantage of the employers. In some instances it lowers the ability for the employers' to assert power that they have over the domestic workers, with some it makes it difficult to tell the domestic workers when they have done something wrong. The employers also benefit from this notion because the bond that results from being part of the family will make it difficult for the domestic worker to challenge the employer's exploitation. It takes away the domestic worker's ability to demand better working conditions, for fear of coming across as ungrateful.

4.4. FAMILY AFFAIRS: HOW MUCH DO YOU LOVE YOUR 'HELPER'?

The 'sisterhood' relationship is not without its own problems. It has been mentioned that in every society it is common for women employers to feel jealous and threatened by their domestic workers. The employers sometimes feel like the domestic workers have imposed themselves too much into the employer's life and in some cases marriages. Problems often arise when the wife accuses the domestic worker of having an affair with her husband, which may or may not be true. The sexual conflict between the employers

and employees is a very troublesome situation because there have been situations where the wives would accuse the domestic workers of having an affair with their husbands and the claim would be false. Domestic workers have been victims of sexual abuse and later on are blamed for the abuse, being made to look like they initiated the attack.

In Hong Kong the sexuality and sexual orientations of the domestic workers play an important part in influencing the decisions of the employer on whether or not to hire the worker. Constable (1996) shows how in Hong Kong chastity, sexuality and familial devotion are central issues that underlie differences between Chinese and foreign domestic helpers. Sexuality and sexual relations is also used to differentiate different categories of Chinese domestic workers. Constable's article is important in showing how the cultural beliefs of domestic workers could offer comfort and relief to the wives, and lessens the likelihood that the wife will be competing with another woman for the attention of the man. The amahs are considered the best domestic workers in Hong Kong, the most glorified of all the amahs are sohei. Their devotion as sworn spinsters is a key feature of their special status. They are idealised by Hong Kong employers because of their vow to celibacy and their resistance to marriage. The avowed celibacy of the sohei meant that they pose less of a threat to their employers than other women. Hiring a sohei woman posed a lesser risk from the point of view of a wife or mother than a woman who had not taken such an oath. The sohei were considered to be professional domestic workers and were awarded a better status than the rest of the other domestic workers. Those domestic workers that were in the worst position were the muijai, they were granted a lower status of servants, treated like slaves and often abused by the men they

worked for. The muijai posed a less threat to wives because of their lower status, sexual attacks on the muijai were not generally considered offensive. Some wives did not seem to think that a muijai had the right to fend off her masters' advances. Concubines posed a greater threat to the social and economic interest of the wife and her children. Concubines were usually those domestic workers that willingly became sexually involved with their masters and were later 'promoted' to status of a secondary wife (Constable; 1996:462-465).

The most feared of the domestic workers are the foreign domestic workers (Filipinas), most of the fear stems from the belief that the Filipina domestic workers are sexually corrupt. This is due to the way that they dress, which appears too provocative, too colourful and too stylish, when compared to the dress code of the Hong Kong domestic workers. Their appearance as women who are unattached also magnifies the mistrust of them (Constable; 1996:466).

In South Africa there is no evidence that points to sexuality of the domestic workers influencing the employer's decision to hire them. However, there is a long history and literature on the sexual conflict between the employers and the domestic workers. Swaisland (1993) talks about the fear that white women had about being sexually assaulted by black houseboys, arguing that some of this hysteria was imagined. Van Onselen (1982) shows that the 'black peril' waves coincided with the periods of stress or acute tension within the political economy of the Witwatersrand as a whole (p. 51). The entry of women in domestic service did not decrease this paranoia it changed to now

fearing that the domestic workers will take away the husbands of the women they worked for. However during apartheid era these were often forced sexual relations where domestic workers were being assaulted by the employer's husbands or their sons. It seems now that the same fear and paranoia continues and affects African employers. The blame is never put on the husband but on the domestic workers.

Motsei (1990) shows how domestic workers in the white suburbs of South Africa were victims of verbal; physical and sexual abuse, and often bore the brunt of their employer's frustrations, receiving punches and kicks. Most of these cases never had any positive results for the domestic workers because in most cases even if the domestic workers report the incidents to the police the employers would go unpunished. This was largely due to the law of that time. Some of the domestic workers were sexually harassed by the male employers and were in most cases afraid to tell the wife what was happening, because the wife would accuse the domestic worker of making sexual advances on her husband. The blame would be placed on the worker and not the husband. Domestic workers also experiences verbal abuse. This abuse took the form of ridicule, jokes about mistakes, use of derogatory terms and the emphasis on the 'stupid behaviour' of the worker (Motsei 1990).

Such encounters of verbal abuse not only happen between different races, domestic workers that are working for African employers also encounter such harassments. One of the domestic workers that I spoke to Pinki* told me of an encounter that she had with her female employer where the employer called Pinki stupid. Pinki was demanding that her

employers pay her for overtime and when they refused she threatened to go to report them to labour department. Her employer's response was that she was not going to argue with a fool and if she wanted to go report them she can go. Cock (1980) showed how 'stupidity' was a class based stereotype which in the South African society assumed a racial form. Currently the term does not only assume a racial form but a class form also, where the domestic workers' lower class status allows the African employer to see the domestic worker as 'stupid'.

The domestic workers in this study did not report any instances where they or someone that they knew was exposed to sexual violence. Some of the employers accused domestic workers of having affairs with their husbands. One of the employers Mam'Zama told me a story on how she suspected that something was happening between her previous domestic worker and her husband.

> The thing with Mphumutseng* is that she became friendly with my husband, there came a time where she was rubbing (massaging) his back and washing his feet. When I wanted money he would not give it to me, he would give Mphumutseng money to go buy groceries for my house, the things that are supposed to be done by me. I complained but he did not see anything wrong with what he was doing, he made it seem like I was being paranoid. It is very easy for their domestic workers to take our husbands, especially when the wife is working and she leaves very early in the morning and comes back late

> at night from work. The husband all that time when the wife is not there he is being served by the domestic worker.

Another employer Nomthi thought that this only happens if you allow the domestic workers too much into the family.

> If you allow her to be too much in your family then it would be easy for her to feel entitled to your husband because this is a woman who cleans his house, cooks for him, washes his clothes and looks after his kids. And if she is so part of you, this family, your man will begin to look at her differently it is normal he is a man.

The responsibility is on the wife to ensure that her role in the family is still strong. Eunice Dladla from SADSAWU also placed the blame on employers because they leave everything to the domestic workers.

> they either look for people that are very young or very old people because they say that that middle aged women look at their husbands but its not the domestic worker's fault it is the man that look at them because here is a woman that does everything for me, in our culture a man needs food that is cooked by his wife. Their (wife) problem is that they leave everything to the domestic worker and never do anything.

Women employers often direct the anger and jealousy towards the domestic workers and not the husbands. Some of the employers in this study fell into the same trap. For instance, Nomthi saw it as normal for men to lust for the domestic workers. Another employer Sibongile told a story about her previous domestic worker who refused to be left alone with her husband. Sibongile concluded that the domestic worker was behaving like this because she did not trust herself. In some cases the jealousy that employers feel can even lead to the domestic workers being physically assaulted by their female employers.

In some countries including South Africa, employers controlled the sexuality of domestic workers through uniforms, designed to make the domestic workers look less attractive. In other workplaces too, uniforms are used as a way to as a way to unmark and suppress' workers sexual identities in the workplace. Pei-Chia Lan (2001) argues that "This control practice aims to underscore a class and racial hierarchy between the employers and the domestic workers, and to 'desexualise' workers' bodies that may otherwise threaten a female employer's roles as a wife and sexual partner" (Lan; 2001:85). The uniform is a way of controlling the domestic workers bodies, by controlling how they should look.

Constable (1997) also discusses the use of "maid's uniforms" as an obvious form of bodily discipline. In Hong Kong workers are required to wear uniforms when employers expect guests. Many of the workers disliked uniforms and considered them demeaning and embarrassing. Workers knew they had no right to refuse to wear uniforms when their employers requested them to do so.

In the township most domestic workers do not wear uniforms to work, the distinction between the wife and the domestic worker is often not clear. Most of the domestic workers in the townships are allowed to wear whatever they like. That often poses as a problem to employers especially if the domestic worker is young. The employers would sometimes have a problem with some of the clothes that the domestic workers wore. Even though the domestic workers do not wear uniforms the employers still have some degree of control on what they think is appropriate for the domestic workers to wear at work.

Some employers in the townships found hiring older domestic workers a solution for this. The older woman is seen as more likely to advise the woman on life and give her tips on how to treat her husband. The generation gap between older domestic workers and a young couple can pose less risk for the wife; the sexual competition will be eliminated. The beliefs that African people have create tension between the domestic worker and the employer. There is a certain manner in which a young person is supposed to address his/her elder, and it is considered disrespectful to tell an elder to do something for you as a young person. It becomes a problem when the employer can not tell the domestic worker when she has done something that the employer does not like. Carroll (2004) wrote about how some employers find themselves with domestic workers who are slightly older than them, and they assume a motherly or sisterly role which immediately dis-empowers the employer to give instructions.

Some of the employers agreed that some domestic workers use their age as an excuse when they do not want to work. Sibongile told me how her previous employer Happiness* used to make sure that she did not forget that she was older than her.

> Happiness is the only 'helper' that I had that reminded me every time that she was older than me, and she was not that old she was five years older than me. She was just too much I couldn't tell her or show her anything because she has told herself that she is older than me. Finally I told her that "*umdala le la kukwami*" (you are old there this is my house) at the end of the day you are here to work and this is not about age, when you are at work your age does not matter. So it is not good when you tell them like that because it would seem like you are looking down at that person and you are not.

There were some employers who preferred to hire younger workers, because the younger domestic workers are faster and they are willing to learn. The ability of the employer to control and tell domestic workers what to do is important to them. One of my respondents Pinkie she said that she preferred to work for employers that are younger than her because they will respect her.

There is a constant struggle for power in the domestic work relationship, as the employer feels the need to exercise their superiority over the worker. Even though the African employers try to create a different work experience for their domestic workers, they are

unable to run away from the power struggles that are inherent in any employment relationship.

4.5. STRUGGLE FOR BETTER WAGES

Domestic work has always been characterised by low wages and long working hours. Despite government setting the minimum wages at R800 in November 2002, domestic workers are still the lowest paid workers. According to Eunice Dladla from SADSAWU the minimum wage is currently R1166.50[8]. According to the domestic workers Sectoral Determination the wages of domestic workers are supposed to increase by 8 percent each year. Although the legislation represented a major step in the right direction, non-compliance from the employers has resulted in the legislation being ineffective.

Historically, as Van Onselen (1982) has shown, a large number of domestic workers were employed in working class families. In the study I also found that the majority of African women in the township that hire domestic workers are working class women. This is not to say that there are no middle-class women in the townships that hire domestic workers. Two of the employers in this study (Nomthi and Thandi) were middle-class; their status was reflected by their ability to pay their domestic workers R2500 per month, which is above minimum wages. This was different from King's (2007) discovery in Grahamstown where the domestic workers are hired mostly by middle-class women. This study revealed that the patterns of low wages have also persisted with African employers

[8] Please note, the minimum wage differs according to zones. For example domestic workers in the rural areas have different wage rates from domestic workers in the urban areas. For more information see Sectoral Determination 7: Domestic Worker Sector.

in the townships and similar to white employer the African employers have found other means of masking the low wages, by giving their domestic workers food and clothes.

The majority of the domestic workers that were interviewed were getting paid R800 per month, two of them earned R1000 and these workers considered themselves to be in a better position as compared to their friends. Two of the employers in the study paid their domestic workers a salary that was above the minimum wage, they paid their workers R2500 per month. Even though the government has set the minimum wages, the employers in the townships have set their own informal wages which works as a standard everywhere. The domestic workers are also aware of this; the standard pay in the township is R800 which could explain why the other domestic workers that earned R1000 considered themselves to be in a better position.

Pape (1993) revealed that in Zimbabwe working class African employers increasingly hired domestic workers even though they could not afford minimum wages. Some employers have claimed that the money that they are earning as working class employers is not that much; therefore it may be difficult for them to afford the minimum wages. The African employers continued need to offer food and clothes to the domestic workers might be motivated by their knowledge that they are paying the domestic workers low wages. A similar thing was being done by white employers, where they would give their domestic workers food; lodgings, medical care and school fees for their children. Scholars such as Cock (1980) and Rollins (1985) argued that it was used as a way of keeping the wages low. Cock (1980) further argued that this was a form of benevolent maternalism, “which was demeaning to the domestic worker as it carried with it the

implication that the domestic worker is a perpetually irresponsible child" (p.102). In some ways it could be argued that the African employers are using food and clothes as a way of keeping the wages low and preventing the domestic workers from asking for a higher wage.

Even though some of the domestic workers were aware that they were being paid less than what the law stipulates they should be paid, they accepted the money out of desperation and the need to earn a living. Most of the employers that paid the workers a low wage supplemented the wages by giving workers food and clothes for their children. The food and clothes also made the workers keep quiet and not complain about low wages. One of the respondents a domestic worker Mam'Yokolo stated that even though she can see that her pay is low, she does not see the need to ask for raise because her employer buys food stamps for her during the year and in December they go to the shops and buy Christmas groceries using the food stamps.

The exploitative practices are felt most saliently within shared racial groups, as domestic workers get into the employment relationship with the assumption that the shared racial and cultural identities will influence the employer into improving their working conditions. Especially in the cases where the domestic worker can see that her employer has money and can afford to pay them a higher wage. The anger and disappointment is elevated by the domestic workers realisation that that even though the employer has 'changed' the exploitation is still the same. Some of the domestic workers in the study expressed that they would prefer to work for a white employer because white people pay

better and give wage increases. The desire to work for a white employer was based on the perception that white people generally have more money than black people, as none of the domestic workers in this study have ever worked for white employer.

The SADSAWU committee members were aware of the wage conditions in the townships.

> Township people don't pay attention to the law. They have always been underpaid when compared to most domestic workers in the suburbs; there are others in townships who earn R500. Us union people we forget the workers in the townships. That is the problem that is why some of them still earn R800.

The union expressed that it was difficult to recruit the domestic workers from the township as their members. Some of them come from very underprivileged conditions at home and did not want to seem ungrateful to their employers by going to the unions. Fear of losing their jobs might also be another reason why some domestic workers do not want to go join the union.

Fish (2006) reveals how it is not only the domestic workers that are employed in working class families that are being underpaid. The author shows how even women that are members of parliament (MPs) pay their domestic workers low wages. This showed the problem was not that the employers can not afford to pay the minimum wage, but that they were unwilling to comply with the law.

The union committee members are aware of the working conditions of the domestic workers in the townships but nothing has been done to rectify the situation. The challenge that government is sometimes faced with when it comes to domestic work is that it occurs in people's private spaces and that makes it difficult for the Department of Labour to have blitz inspections for domestic workers, as the employers could refuse to allow them in their homes, especially if the employer will be at work and present when the inspector goes to see the domestic worker. The union committee members were saying that "some domestic workers would file a complaint about their working conditions and when the inspectors come they suddenly change their story and praise their employers. The inspector would write a report based on the information being given by the domestic worker. In some cases as soon as the inspector leaves the house the domestic worker will follow the inspector and tell him that none of what she said was true, however by that time there is nothing that the inspector can do he can not change his report. The domestic workers are the ones that need to ensure that their employers follow the law by reporting them if they do not".

The vulnerable and often desperate position of the domestic workers gives employers power to impose certain conditions on them. Even with food and clothing, it is the employers that decide on the quality and quantity of the food or clothes given to domestic workers. Cock (1980) argues that the gifts given to domestic workers by their employer are a way of creating loyalty within an extremely hierarchical and unequal relationship. The employers in the townships are reproducing the similar demeaning and child like

status of the domestic workers. The employers could pay the domestic workers enough money so that they could be able to buy the things that they need for themselves, instead of the employer assuming that they know what is needed by the domestic worker. The lack of compliance of the employers in the township paints a picture that wage regulations did not benefit domestic workers as a number of them still earn below the minimum wages.

4.6. GETTING TIME OFF

Domestic Worker's Profile: Pinkie*

Pinkie is 45 years old and a live-in domestic worker. She is a single parent and has two children, both of whom are boys. Pinkie was born in Lesotho; she came to Johannesburg after the birth of her second child. Since she did not go to school domestic work was the only job that was available to her. She told me that she loved domestic work because it has given her the opportunity to take her children to school. Her first son has just finished university and her second son is in Matric. She said that she works just to educate her children.

Pinkie works in Dobsonville extension3, she has been working for her employer for fours years and she earns R1000 per month. The people that she is working for have no children, in the house it is just her and her employers. She describes her employers as good people, she eats the same food as them and she considers herself free in the house. Even though she complains that domestic work is hard and her working hours are long as

she works more than eight hours a day, she says that she loves her work. She sometimes works from 6am-9pm, she goes to sleep very late because she has to wait for her employers to come back from work, dish up for them, wait for them to finish eating then wash the dishes, after all that is done then she can go to sleep.

The only problem that she has with her employers is that they refuse to give her time off. She stated that she works from Monday to Sunday, and when her employers feel like being considerate they let her work until Saturday 12 O'clock and have the Sunday off. She said that "you see my employer is good but her problem is that I must not say I am sick or say I am tired". She stated that she does not get any "offs" or family responsibility leave; they even want her to work on holidays. Her employers would not allow her to go home in December they would tell her that she will go home in January.

The lack of offs was the reason why she ended up fighting with her employer. She told me a story where she decided to be rebellious and go home during the Easter holidays. She took off for a long weekend; she left on Friday and came back Tuesday afternoon. When she got there she found that she was locked out, when she called her employers that she is outside the gate is locked they told her that they were not home, she can go back to where she comes from and come back tomorrow. But the problem was that it was late she cannot even go to Alexandra to her friends at sleep there, there was a house where there was a tent outside she went there and slept there woke up tomorrow morning, went to work and her employers pretended like nothing happened.

The lack of ‘offs’, is the only problem that the workers expressed that they had with their employers. They felt like they were being made security guards because they were required to constantly be in the house. They were not given the opportunity to go home and be with their families. Some domestic workers said that they sometimes felt like they were security guards, because the employers would go away and expect them to be in the house all alone.

One of the reasons why African employers preferred to hire people from the rural areas or migrant workers was that the likelihood that these workers would want to go home all the time was very slim. Some employers ask the workers before they hire them if they know people in Johannesburg, those that say no are hired. Some of the employers that I spoke with said that these domestic workers lie. One employer said:

“With us we want to hire people from the rural areas, they come here and say they do not know anyone but as soon as they get here they know Jozi better than anyone” (Sibongile).

The domestic workers that live in Johannesburg are less preferred because they are more likely to want to go home more frequently, as compared to workers that come from rural areas or outside countries. Although this is not the case for all domestic workers, Nonceba has a house in Orlando (township in Soweto) but she gets to go home once every month end. The same amount of control and needing workers to be always around is still relevant with the African employers. The same way that their mother felt ‘imprisoned’ in their employers’ homes and were unable to go home and be mothers and

wives to their families, the African employers are producing exactly the same effect on their domestic workers. There are two cases in this study that show exactly this type of exploitation. The first case is the one where Nonceba's employer even though she knew that she has a house and a son in Soweto insisted on her working as a live-in domestic worker, stating that her children need to be with someone all the time. In another case Pinki (domestic worker) was complaining that her employers refuse to let her go home to Lesotho, she said that, "*They act like they are the only ones with problems and they sometimes go on holidays and leave her alone in the house*".

The African employers are producing the same domination that live-in domestic workers were being exposed to in the suburbs. The domestic workers are expected to act as mothers to their employer's children and be denied the right to be mothers to their own children. There really is not equality and unity when the needs of the domestic workers are not seen as important, where the domestic worker is denied the right to go home and be with her children during the holidays, because the employer wants to go on holiday.

Ally's (2008) study on domestic workers' shift to live- out servitude, reveals how the domestic workers placed great importance on the ability to be allowed to knock-off. To the domestic workers this meant that they can now assume their own lives in spaces where work rules do not apply. For the domestic workers by insisting on being live-out workers, they also saw that as a way of knocking-off. Going home allowed them to take care of their families. The ability to get time off has been a constant struggle for

domestic workers and even now with legislations setting the hours of work and over time, workers are still struggling with getting time to be with their families.

The law entitles domestic workers to work for 45 hours per week, and eight hours a day for five days. An employer must pay a domestic worker that who works on a Sunday double the hourly rate for each hour worked. Domestic workers are not allowed to work on Public holidays and they must get at least three weeks annual leave. The reality is most of the domestic workers that do work on Sundays and public holidays are not paid for these days; they are taken by their employers like any other normal working day.

When I spoke to the SADSAWU committee members they said that they could not understand why the African employers are treating their domestic workers like this. They said:

> The majority of the African employers are working, so they know the law they are also union members. They know that the law says workers must not work longer than eight hours and if they do they must be paid for overtime these are the same rights that they are demanding in their unions. Why can't they offer the same rights to their domestic workers at home?

The dominant script among African employers is that they do not want to treat their domestic workers the way their mothers used to be treated; most of them argue that they want to institute some level of relatedness in the work context because of their shared

experiences with the domestic workers. The African employers would argue that they want to lessen the power differentials and exploitation in the employment relationship. However, what is happening in reality is that they end up reproducing the same exploitation that their mothers were experiencing. Their domestic workers are still underpaid, they work long hours with no 'offs'. The only difference is that the exploitation is less overt and is obscured by the familial relations employers construct with their domestic workers.

Zukiswa Wanner author of the book The Madams relays a story of the difficulty that African women have with hiring a domestic worker, and the conflicts that they go through when making a decision about getting a domestic worker. In her book she tells a story of an African women Thandile, who had difficulty in making the decision to get a 'maid', because it her feel very bourgeois (she called it bourgeois guilt) and it felt like she was exploiting another human being. She did not think she could handle lashing out at a black person. Her solution was to get a white 'maid', so that there would be less guilt involved in the employment relationship.

The book captures some of the difficulties and guilt that African people feel about hiring a domestic worker. It is the guilt that leads to the employers' quest to build a more unifying and equal relationship with the domestic workers. This guilt also leads to the employers being overly nice to the domestic workers and at the end unable to assert their role as employers.

4.7. UNIONS AND RESISTANCE OF DOMESTIC WORKERS

Domestic workers are not passive recipients of the exploitation and bad working conditions that they receive. In South Africa there are reports on the long history of domestic workers organizing and improving their working conditions. Van Onselen (1982) shows how the male servants formed a gang Amalaita in order to challenge the society that sought to oppress them. The female domestic workers in the twentieth century challenged the system by resisting against live-in domestic work and choosing to work as live-out domestic workers. Living out allowed to have a sense of dignity and control over their lives. The biggest victory was when the domestic workers through their unions at the time were finally recognized as workers by the state and were given rights and protection by the law like any other worker. Even though the domestic workers are widely regarded as the most difficult to organize, the domestic workers in South Africa were able to collectively organize and challenge the systems of inequality that marginalized them as domestic workers. These cases show that domestic workers were also engaging in public forms of resistance, and where not only limited to covert forms of resistance as they were often described by some scholars.

However, domestic workers now are not employing the same forceful strategies that they were using in the past. Grossman (2004) shows how the domestic workers play on the perceptions of employers that the domestic workers are stupid and uneducated. The domestic workers act ignorant as a strategy to protect themselves and they also use arrogance as a way of making fools of employers. The domestic workers are aware of the

law and the rights that are provided to them and the steps to take when they are being treated unfairly, however they still choose indirect and subtle ways to protect their rights.

The power of the domestic workers union has diminished. This is largely due to the fact that they are not as able to get new members especially from the domestic workers in the townships. The domestic workers are aware that there is a union for them but they do not seem interested in joining the union, it does not seem like much of a priority to the domestic workers in the townships. The union committee members agreed that when it comes to domestic workers in the townships they have been unsuccessful. They said:
"*Unfortunately we forget the domestic workers in the townships we have never been there. The only members that we have that are hired by African employers are from the Suburbs."*

The committee further expressed that what added to their difficulty in getting members was that the domestic workers in the townships do not get 'offs', they have very little free time. They further complained that the domestic workers come only when they have problems and once their case is resolved they do not come to the union anymore. The power of SADSAWU as a union has been diminished by the decreasing number of members they seem to have. In all the time that I have been visiting the union not more than ten people were present, the number included committee members also. Ally (2008) argues that the demobilization was predictable given the context that all of the union's demands have been achieved, and the state has displaced the union as the protector and representative of the interest of the domestic workers.

There continues to be a gap between policy and delivery, this is largely due to the lack of compliance from the employers side and lack of enforcement of the law from government. Workers continue to be paid below minimum wage and do not have set working hours, and some work without any written employment contracts.

Workers in other parts of the world are also employing more forceful ways to fight against the oppression of their employers. Keung (2008) shows how the migrant workers in Canada have formed a union in order to protect themselves. The migrant status of the domestic worker can be used as a way of controlling the domestic workers. The federal live-in caregiver program grants permanent resident status to domestic workers after they complete their three years assignments and obtain the necessary medical and criminal record clearance. The migrant workers' work permits are often tied to one employer, in some situations the employers demand that the workers pay them a fee if they want to continue to work for them and keep their work permits. Some pay because they have no choice as they want to stay.

There are other less overt ways that the domestic workers use as a form of resistance. Sun (2006) shows how live-in domestic workers in Singapore use hand-phone (Cell-phones) as a form of resistance. The author shows how the workers used hand-phone in their pursuit of privacy and companionship. The hand-phone is the medium by which domestic workers communicate with their family and friends, because their employers restrict the use of public phones. The phones are often not known to the employers as the

workers use them at night and during the day they switch them off or put them on silent. Phone becomes a form of privacy as their boyfriends or family members could talk to them and they no longer need to write letters. The phones allowed the workers access to the outside world that is denied to them by their employers.

CONCLUSION

The themes in this chapter were discussed as a way of analyzing the findings. The aim was to provide insight into the nature of the relationship that the domestic workers had with African employers. The themes were aimed at suggesting the contours of the relationship and in some ways lead to the realization that the relationship is not that different after all.

The themes revealed that although the African employers build the relationship in ways that aspired to unity and equality through terminology that they use when referring to their domestic workers and attachments that they seek from the relationship, conflicts always arise and the same stereotypes get reproduced. The factor that was different for the African employers was that they were aware of the difficulties and exploitations that the domestic workers were and still are exposed to and therefore when hiring their domestic workers they consciously tried to ensure that they do not treat their domestic workers the same way that their mothers used to be treated. Through out this chapter, the African employers were faced with the difficulties of maintaining boundaries and authority within a relationship in which its foundation did not allow for such things to occur without conflict. This resulted in instances where the domestic workers were

sometimes seem as taking their employers for granted or not employing the same amount of commitment like they would have if they worked for a white employer. Two of the employers in the study stated that

> The domestic workers would be so meticulous when working for White or Indian employers, working over the limit. But with us it is not like that, we want to treat them properly like our sisters but they see us like fools and not work properly but expect a full salary. (Mam'Zama and Sibongile).

The African employers were seeking two things in the relationship that were conflictual in nature and difficult to have both in an employment relationship. On one hand they wanted to establish a relationship were the domestic workers felt like part of the family and felt like they were equal to their employers, while on the other hand they wanted an employment relationship were the domestic workers followed their instructions and maintained their status as workers. Emerging from the same repressive past where white people dominated over black people, makes it difficult now that things have changed for some black people to be giving orders to other black people.

Chapter Five

CONCLUSION

The aim of this report was to establish an understanding into the nature of the relationship between African employers and African domestic workers. Also looking at whether factors such as culture or familial relations play a role in the relationship that the employers have with the domestic workers. A great deal of literature has been written on domestic workers but none of it focused on the research question in the study. The focus of both current and historical literature has been on the racial inequalities that exist in domestic work sector. There have been contemporary scholars that have looked at African employers but most have tended to focus on the rich elite, the focus in this study was on the working and middle class employers in the townships of Soweto. The focus on African employers and African domestic workers provides a shift away from the focus on racial divisions that have characterised this sector to an emphasis on class as a defining characteristic. It presents an analysis which includes an examination of the interactions between 'black sisters'.

The findings in this study were not aimed to represent the whole population of African employers; they are a select sample aimed at shedding some light into what is happening between African employers and African domestic workers. This study found that the relationship that the African employers have with their domestic workers is not that different from the relationship that the white employers have with domestic workers. There African employers end up reproducing the same inequalities and domination that

the domestic workers have always been exposed to. The study revealed six main aspects of the relationship between employers and their domestic workers.

Firstly, African employers have a deep-seated fear when hiring African domestic workers, this fear stems from their need not to treat their domestic workers in the same manner that their mothers were treated in the white suburbs. They develop a need to create an equal relationship where the domestic workers do not feel like they are being exploited by their employers. Leading to the employers starting the relationships on informal bases by not establishing the relationship as an employment relationship. This makes it harder for the employers to have boundaries and in some cases assert their role as employers.

Secondly, the employers in their quest to form equality with their domestic workers, they have come up with a different way of referring to their domestic workers. Most African employers prefer to use the term ‘helper’ when referring to their domestic workers. They argued that the term ‘helper’ is more dignified and shows that they respect and value the domestic workers and do not just see them as workers. Ally (2008) has argued that even though the term could be viewed as more harmless and innocent way of referring to domestic workers, it denies the domestic workers the right to be seen as workers in a wage relationship. By insisting on using the term ‘helper’ the employers are in fact recognising that this is an unequal relationship and calling them by a different name changes nothing in the working conditions and experiences of their domestic workers.

The employers are using the term as a way of masking the exploitation that the domestic workers experience through low wages, long working hours and inability to get off time.

Thirdly, the study revealed that even though there is a general belief that the African employers hire people that they are related to, the relations are not always blood relations. Some of the employers have clan relations with the domestic workers; most of the employers would hire people from rural areas that were referred to them by their friends or family members. None of them use agents to get domestic workers; they solely rely on these informal networks.

Fourth, the study revealed that there are still employers that would insist that their domestic workers be live-in workers even though in certain cases the domestic worker has her own accommodation; producing a situation where the domestic worker is unable to be a mother to her own children and have to send them to grandparents or relatives. The inability to get 'offs' is another problem for the domestic workers because it means that they little time to live their lives away from work.

The domestic workers have come to a realisation that even though their employer has changed, the inequality and exploitation has remained the same. This realisation often leads to African employers being labeled as the 'worst employers' because the domestic workers enter into the wage relationship with the hope and expectation that the employers would treat them differently and that the shared racial and societal identities would work in their favour. The employers on the other hand complain that their domestic workers

often take them for granted, some of the employers even voiced that the domestic workers working for African employers do not work as hard or as thoroughly as they do in white homes. The African employers face the challenge that the domestic workers sometimes do to not show the same amount of commitment or respect that is showed to white employers. It should be noted that in most cases it fear and not respect that made the domestic workers especially in the past to seem like they are going the extra mile for their employers.

The study was aimed at not only expressing the views of the domestic workers but also show some of the challenges that employers have to deal with. It is the researcher's hope that the study will shed some light and spark debate or further research in an area that has been receiving little attention.

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Appendix

Interview Schedule for the domestic workers

Background Information

1. Name of respondent _____
2. Age of respondent _____
3. Marital Status _____
4. Do you have children? _____
5. If yes, how many are they?

   _____

   _____

6. Do your children live with you?

   _____

   _____

7. How many times do you see your children?

   _____

8. How old are they?

   _____

   _____

9. Educational Background

_____

10. Place of origin _____

Employment History

11. Where were you working before?

_____

_____

_____

12. Length of domestic employment _____

13. How long have been working for current

employer?_____

14. What are your duties and tasks?

_____

15. How many hours a week do you

work?_____

16. How much do you earn?

_____

17. Do you have a contract of employment?

_____

18. Do you receive any benefits (UIF, Pension fund, etc)?

_____

19. live-in or live-out worker_____

20. If live-in, what type of accommodation is being offered

_____

_____

21. how does she feel about being live-in worker

_____

_____

_____

Relationship with the employer

22. How did you find out about the job?

_____

_____

23. Did you have any prior knowledge of the employer?

_____

_____

24. Would you say there is a relationship between you and your employer?_____

_____

_____

_____

25. Does living-in affect the relationship your relationship?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

26. Do you think if you were living-out it would be different?_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

27. Who gives you orders? _____

28. What do you like best about your job?

_____

_____

29. What do you like least about your job?

_____

_____

_____

_____

30. Do you discuss your personal life with your

employer?_____

_____

_____

31. Do you feel like you are part of the family?

_____

_____

_____

_____

32. What does being part of the family mean to you?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

33. Do you eat your meals with the family?

_____

34. Do you eat the same meal as the family?

_____

35. Are you allowed to use all the equipment in the

family?_____

_____

36. What do you think the feelings of your employer are towards you?

_____

_____

37. Did you expert your employer to treat the way that they

do?_____

_____

_____

38. Have you ever worked for a white employer?_____

39. What do you think it is like to work for a white employer?

_____

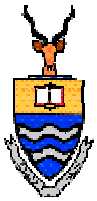
_____

40. Would you prefer to work for a white employer?

_____

_____

_____



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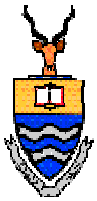
I, _____, consent to being interviewed by Xoliswa Dilata for her study on domestic workers. I understand that:

- Participation in this interview is voluntary.
- That I may refuse to answer any questions I would prefer not to.
- I may withdraw from the study at any time.
- No information that may identify me will be included in the research report, and my responses will remain confidential.

Signed _____



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I _____ consent to my interview with Xoliswa Dilata for her study on domestic workers being tape-recorded. I understand that:

- The tapes and transcripts will not be seen or heard by any person in this organisation at any time, and will only be processed by the researcher.
- All tape recordings will be stored in archives after the research is complete.
- No identifying information will be used in the transcripts or the research report.

Signed _____