



STUDY TITLE:

**THE DISCOURSE OF MIGRATION AND SCRAMBLE FOR JOBS IN THE CITY
OF JOHANNESBURG'S DOMESTIC WORK SECTOR FOR THE PERIOD 2008 TO
DATE.**

BY

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Abbreviations

ANC	African National Congress
BIG	Basic Income Grants
CCMA	Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration
COSATU	Congress of South African Trade Unions
CSG	Child Support Grant
DG	Disability Grants
DoEL	Department of Employment and Labour
DoHA	Department of Home Affairs
ILO	International Labour Organizations
IMDWs	Internal Migrant Domestic Workers
MDWs	Migrant Domestic Workers
NEET	SA Youth, not in education, not in employment and not in training
OAG	Old Age Grants
SADSAWU	South African Domestic Service and Allied Workers Union
SRD	Social Relief of Distress Grant
SASSA	South African Social Security Agency
SRT	Social Reproduction Theory
SP	Social Protection
STATS SA	Statistics South Africa
UIF	Unemployment Insurance Fund

MAIN STUDY QUESTIONS

What drives the employer's preference of a domestic worker in the City of Johannesburg?

Does migration affect employment of internal migrants in the domestic work sector?

PREFACE

Along with many other black South Africans, I endured the inevitable experience of being raised by parents who struggled each day to provide basic needs for their family in a country characterised by poverty and inequality perpetuated by the erstwhile regime of apartheid. As South Africa is also a mineral resource rich country one could argue that we lived in poverty amidst plenty. It was such an exhilarating experience to undertake this study, which served as a token of appreciation for my late mother who herself worked as a domestic worker in the suburbs of East London in Eastern Cape. Migrating to Johannesburg revealed a lot of intricacies associated with the sector and that became an impetus for me to conduct this study. The 2008 global financial crisis calamitously impacted many lives locally, regionally, and internationally. This made it even more interesting to study how the domestic work sector became a refuge for both internal and external migrant workers in the City of Johannesburg to date.

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To my study participants, thank you for trusting me with your detailed lived experiences in the sector. You allowed me into your spaces and spent numerous hours with me without any

expectations of material gain. Without you, this work could not have been possible. Lastly, to my family, I have enjoyed your unwavering support throughout this journey. To my spouse, Nonhlanhla Dube, thank you for being the strongest pillar in making sure that family is kept alive with all our children while I was intensely engaged in this study. You had to contend with my busy academic and political life. This report is inextricably linked to your sacrifices and I will forever be grateful.

ABSTRACT

The domestic work sector is one of the most vulnerable and yet marginalised employment category in South Africa despite its contribution in providing for poor families locally and in foreign countries. South Africa's economy suffered major structural changes from the early days of economic liberalism in the 1990s to the post 1994 democratic government. With the decline of labour-intensive sectors such as manufacturing, mining and agriculture, the low-skilled women labour force went to look for jobs in the domestic work sector as their last hope. The competition in the domestic work sector intensified as black women from neighbouring countries migrated to South Africa to work as domestic workers in the private homes of employers. Mass deportations of illegal immigrants has not yielded desired results, as such, South African government may have to explore other mechanism such as amnesty and formal registration of undocumented migrants who have become a scapegoat for a shrinking economic pie in the country. More research is needed to understand the extent at which social protection systems shape the attitudes of the unemployed South African workforce.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Context

In May 2008, South Africa experienced escalated tensions of xenophobic violence which broke out in the City of Johannesburg's Alexandra township. These upheavals raise enduring questions about both migration and labour employment policies. More often than not, the attacks on foreign nationals were linked to the flawed migration policies that are failing to regulate the countries' borders. While most scholars and reports maintain that migration creates employment in South Africa, paradoxically, the unfortunate incidents of xenophobia over the years and most recently, 'Operation Dudula' could point to an alternative explanation of the relationship between migration and employment in the country.

The City of Johannesburg in Gauteng is arguably the most powerful commercial center in Africa. The city attracts more migrants from inside and outside South Africa than any other province. South Africa is characterized by high levels of inequality, poverty, and unemployment. Surprisingly, the country continues to be a destination of choice for most migrants both skilled and unskilled. Domestic work is one of the most marginalized sectors where women find employment to support their families which are in most cases situated in far-flung locations.

Popular explanations in the domestic work sector and South Africa generally are that most employers prefer hiring domestic workers who are foreign migrants rather than internal migrants. This creates a pool of unemployed South African potential domestic workers. Different theories among the local population have emerged to explain this phenomenon. First, is that South African domestic work employers are exploiting the vulnerability of migrant workers. Second, that South Africans are lazy and always take unjustifiable day offs. Third, that employers are avoiding labour relations disputes which are facilitated by the Commission for Conciliation Mediation and Arbitration (CCMA). Among other theories is that foreign workers are more submissive to their employers than South African born workers. This study seeks to investigate these narratives and provide empirical data from relevant sources that will either confirm or reject these popular explanations.

1.2 How have migration patterns changed in South Africa?

Migration patterns have drastically changed in the post-apartheid South Africa. In the past, workers from rural areas were not allowed to bring their spouses and families to places of work. These were predominantly black and male workers from poor households in the rural areas previously known as homelands. “A more critical appraisal of household relations in understanding migration patterns requires also that closer attention be paid to whether and why labour migrants retain ties with their households of origin” (Posel, 2004, p. 3). One of the reasons for the changed migration patterns is attributed to the permanent settlement of migrants in their places of work (Buhlungu & Tshoaedi, 2012). The migration patterns in contemporary South Africa are gendered in the sense that more women migrate to cities than men which indirectly shifts the pressure of being a ‘bread winner’ from men to women. OECD (2010) confirms that most international migrants in Africa are women engaged in domestic work.

This is an interesting shift which has received attention in literature and academic symposiums. Buhlungu and Tshoaedi (2012) note that the increased migration of women in the past few decades from the rural areas to the cities has not necessarily translated into economic opportunities for them. Economic opportunities for women remain limited. This explains why the majority of rural women in the cities are found in domestic work services as substitutes for middle-class working woman. “Globalization and economic restructuring have produced vast inequalities in South Africa, particularly with regard to accessing work opportunities in the labour market” (Buhlungu and Tshoaedi, 2012, p. 220). The context at which women struggle to secure work in the labour market is directly linked to their historical exclusion and patriarchal dominance of global capitalism. Bozzoli (1983, p. 146) argues “Both modes of production, capital and domestic were characterized by gender oppression”. Similarly, for Buhlungu and Tshoaedi (2012, p. 222) “Part of the reason for this is that, compared to their male counterparts, migrant women are worse off in terms of education and skills levels, resulting in most of them ending up in the informal economy as domestic workers, street vendors and even as prostitutes.”

The employment of migrant women in the informal sector is not without a challenge, as Griffin (2009, p.23) observes “The Mosotho domestic worker’s illegal status makes her invisible at the street level as well as institutional level”. This observation extends to other domestic

workers from other countries who came to South Africa looking for economic opportunities. The contemporary labour migration patterns are increasingly feminized as most households are no longer headed by men. The migration status of domestic workers is further explored in later chapters of this report. It is worth noting that according to the recent change of heart in South African tribunals, illegal immigrants can be regarded as employees for the purposes of the Labour Relations Act of South Africa (Griffin, 2009).

1.3 Unpacking the “scramble”: Trends and legalities.

The meaning of ‘scramble’ in this study denotes the extent at which black African women compete for jobs in the domestic work sector. Following the global financial crisis of 2008, the scramble intensified in the city of Johannesburg as most internal and international women migrant workers abandoned their homes to look for better job opportunities in the City. Employers were at liberty to choose even along roadsides and intersections, from groups of women who desperately needed a ‘piece’ job to save the day. The women in the scramble were characterized by lack of shelter, vulnerable, and no legal documentation (for most), some came through family and friends’ connections who were also in Johannesburg to advance their life chances. According to Marais and van Wyk (2015, p.3) “Poverty is the common denominator in the lives of domestic workers”.

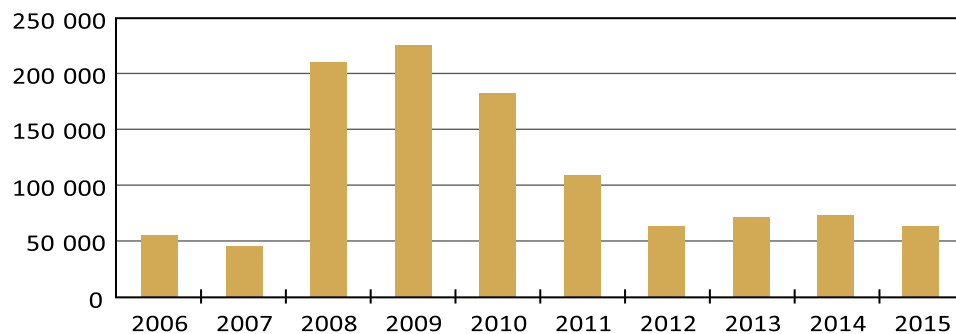
Migration to South Africa is an age-old phenomenon which has played an important role in the economic growth of the country over the years. The former homelands and neighbouring countries became a useful labour reserve of unskilled and semiskilled male workers employed in different sectors of the economy. To date, the city of Johannesburg continues to attract migrant labour from within South Africa and the region (Parshotam & Ncube, 2017). They argue that the financial crisis of 2008 contributed towards negative attitudes regarding migration. Parshotam and Ncube (2017) argue that the migration policy of South Africa was largely influenced by the perceptions that economic migrants are a threat to job-seeking South African citizens.

They recall that post-1994, the demographics of South Africa’s large cities changed because of intra-migration. They opine that “In the post-apartheid era, South Africa was held to be a ‘beacon’ of hope on the continent, a land of economic and social opportunities and welcoming of fellow Africans” (Parshotam & Ncube, 2017, p. 6). Following these developments, South Africa was unable to sustain its population as unemployment and poverty levels remained exceptionally high. This situation pushed the government to seek policy interventions to

salvage the dwindling economy. South Africa's unemployment and poverty challenges were structured along racial lines based on the country's history. Migration continues to be a national security problem in South Africa (Parshotam & Ncube, 2017).

Figure 1.

1.4 Number of registered asylum seekers in South Africa from 2006-2015



Source: Budlender D, *Migration and Employment in South Africa*. Johannesburg: Centre for Migration & Society, University of the Witwatersrand, 2014

The figures above show how the number of asylum seekers in the country grew drastically from 2008-2011. Keeping track of undocumented migrants entering South Africa is a daunting challenge. “In the post-apartheid era, the South African government has used deportation schemes to tackle irregular migration, and the country has one of highest deportation rates in the world” (Parshotam & Ncube, 2017, p. 16). Despite this high number of deportations, there is perpetual illegal border crossing which undermines stabilizing and controlling entry into the country. The deportation of illegal migrant creates its own problems and attracts hostility among Africans as Parshotam and Ncube (2017, p.18) argue “Deportations also feeds into a political rhetoric that obscures the real demand for labour in host countries and encourages hostility and xenophobia towards migrant communities”. They concur with Vanyoro (2019) as he argues that current migration policies, although seeking to deter irregular migration, fails to encourage market investor confidence in the country.

The employment policies of South Africa secure rights for most employees and employers in the workplace including domestic workers. Despite all the developed policies to protect workers in South Africa, undocumented migrant workers do not enjoy the same rights as other workers. “While domestic workers are legally protected, irregular migrants are at high risk of

labour exploitation” (Vanyoro, 2019, p. 2). For Vanyoro, although there is protection provided for domestic workers through progressive legislation, there is a gap in terms of monitoring as he argues; “The poor oversight of labour conditions in the workplace despite the existence of sound regulation protecting domestic workers in South Africa adds a particular local dimension to the precarity of migrant domestic workers” (Vanyoro, 2019, p. 2)

The progressive labour policies of South Africa are widely accepted but not without criticism. Ally (2008) notes that domestic workers in South Africa are protected from exploitation by a strong regulatory framework for domestic work. In contrast, Vanyoro (2019) contends that these provisions fail to address the needs of migrant domestic workers adequately. He further argues “South Africa has several ‘progressive’ labour protections that do not consider the realities of undocumented migrant domestic workers” (Vanyoro, 2019, p. 4).

Whereas South Africa is applauded for its progressive labour protection policies and frameworks, monitoring, and inspection on the part of the Department of Labour remains a concern. According to the International Labour Organization (2015), these challenges are not unique to South Africa but are prevalent across the world.

Domestic workers’ workplaces are not easy to access, and the labour inspectorate of the DoL is under resourced. For example, the Basic Conditions of Employment Act No.20 of 2013, which became effective in 2014, has a mandatory requirement that contracts be signed between employers and their employees on full time work. Vanyoro (2019) argues that this Act fails to accommodate domestic workers. This is because domestic workers are not always tied to one employer but sometimes work for more than one employer in live-out arrangements. This is true, as domestic workers’ employment is characterised by precarity. The legislations’ provision discriminates against domestic workers who are not in full employment.

South Africa’s immigration policy does not currently provide for low-skilled migrants to move on a more permanent basis. This becomes a challenge to sectors like the domestic work sector as they find themselves outside the protected bracket. Vanyoro (2019) has argued “The lack of equal labour protection for migrants reduces their labour power, giving employers power and autonomy to violate labour laws pertaining to working standards”. He further suggests that work permits issued to migrant workers should not be tied to certain sectors and employers for a pre-defined period as this limits duration of stay and right to change jobs. “These permits should provide a pathway towards permanency linked to the number of years of residence” (Vanyoro, 2019).

The employment rate of domestic workers increased after the global financial crisis. This was confirmed by Statistics South Africa in their Quarterly Labour Survey as they stated, “South Africa has the highest employment rate of domestic workers within the region with an estimated engagement of 924 000 workers of which only 40 000 are male” (Stats SA, 2013). Despite this high number in employment of domestic workers, they often find themselves without a social support system. The past political regimes are to blame for the plight of domestic workers according to Rautenbach (1999) who argues these regimes subjected black people to decades of neglect, isolation and deprived them of education.

Domestic workers are characterized by low literacy levels thus automatically isolating them from good paying jobs. This is captured eloquently by Marais and van Wyk (2015, p.3) as they observe “This general lack of formal schooling limits career prospects not only during people’s initial career phases but also during the later stages of their work engagement.”

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Conceptual framework

There is an ongoing debate in the literature about the relationship between migration and unemployment in South Africa. Research reports, academic journals, and government policies on migration and its effect on employment of South Africans situates migration as an important driver of employment creation for both foreign migrants and internal migrants. Although this may be the case in the formal sector and entrepreneurial field where skills are required, there are possible inconsistencies in the informal domestic sector where skills are not a prerequisite for employment. Fallon and Lucas (1998) argue that while the labour market for skilled workers in South Africa operates in accordance with theory, the same could not hold for the unskilled segment. The precarious nature of domestic work makes it easy for domestic workers' employers to overlook important laws that govern employment, as such, they willy-nilly hire and fire. Clarke (2002) contends that the insecurity within the domestic work sector gave rise to material hardships for workers. The creation of employment in South Africa has been hampered by structural changes and institutional realities of a segmented labour market (Mahadea & Simson, 2010).

There has been progress made in other unskilled labour sectors like mining and agriculture where there is over representation of men. These sectors have won far greater rights and legal protections in the law than domestic workers. Grant (1997) argues that domestic workers are marginalized because of the ideological barrier of seeing domestic workers as servants, rather than as employees with rights. For my study, I will focus on the explanations this literature provides on what makes foreign migrant workers more preferred for employment in the domestic work sector and compare with the lived experiences of employees and their employers in the City of Johannesburg.

There is an unsubstantiated belief from some sections of South African society that foreign migrants are taking jobs that would ordinarily belong to South Africans. According to Kalitanyi and Visser (2010), the presence of immigrants in South Africa's job market raises comments that are often followed by manifestations of hostility from some South Africans. Timberg (2005) argues that immigrants create employment opportunities for both them and unemployed South Africans. The discourse of immigration is not a new phenomenon but a potential beneficial component of states and regions as Kalitanyi and Visser (2010, p. 377) argue; "Throughout the world's history, people have been migrating across continents in search of food, shelter, safety and hospitable weather". Most immigrants have established themselves in

the informal and small enterprise economies which assist South Africans with providing jobs to the unemployed (Kalitanyi & Visser, 2010).

For Kalitanyi and Visser (2010), entrepreneurship has been the driving force in the creation of jobs for both South Africans and foreign nationals. Serrie (1998) maintains that entrepreneurship helps immigrants for social and economic integration more especially for those without education and skills. This point is further collaborated by Kalitanyi and Visser (2010, p. 378) as they argue “Entrepreneurship plays a major role in reforming and revitalizing economies because it establishes new businesses and helps existing ones to grow”. Wilson and Mlambo (2014) argue that South Africa’s economy has made it a center of attraction for migrants from Sub Saharan Africa. They believe that migration can serve as a panacea to the high unemployment rate faced by South Africa today. “The inflow of skilled labour should be embraced as this could reduce the skill shortages that are currently prevailing in South Africa” (Wilson & Mlambo, 2014, p. 2631).

Domestic workers perform their work under most oppressive conditions and experience economic abuse with very little protection from the law and society (Grant, 1997). “The law and society have yet been unable to see its way clear to treating domestic workers as employees, they are regarded as servants for ideological and historical reasons, thus making practical reform of working conditions difficult” (Grant, 1997, p. 161). According to Grant (1997), society has over the years attached a low value to women’s work and black labour. Most feminist scholars argue that in a patriarchal society, domestic work is undervalued because of its association traditionally as women’s unpaid work in marriage. For Fish (2006), domestic work in South Africa continues to reinforce the social construction of households as a feminised and racialized space through the paid labor of black women. “The transition into domestic work as occupation implies entering a world of work that is characterized by low wages and low status, potential exploitation, an individualised employer-employee relationship, the need to relocate from rural to urban areas, and isolation from family” (Marais & van Wyk, 2015, p. 3). They further argue that despite this reality, domestic work is still regarded as point of entry into remunerated employment.

Gauteng is home to the largest number of migrants in South Africa, and the City of Johannesburg is host to a wide range of economic activities (DEL, 2022). This is to say, South Africa plays the role of a relative place of opportunity in the region. According to South Africa’s Labour Migration Policy (2017), vast numbers of mostly low skilled and increasingly

female migrants from the Southern African Development Community (SADC) have come to South Africa. The post-apartheid South Africa is characterized by rising rates of joblessness (Posel, 2004). Reducing unemployment remains the central and critical task for the South African government. This will aid the future of South African society and its economy. Posel (2004) argues that labour market conditions in South Africa deteriorated during the 1990s causing a decline in the creation of employment while labour supply from inside and outside the country increased. “Under these circumstances, immigrants are easy targets to blame for growing unemployment” (Posel, 2004, p. 280). For Wilson and Mlambo (2014), South Africa faces an acute skills shortage. This has been identified as one of the obstacles for economic growth in the country.

2.2. The nature of domestic work

Domestic work in South Africa is performed by women in private homes of employers. These women are mostly from former homelands provinces, the SADC region and are almost exclusively black African women. This is further emphasised by the ILO as it states that the South African domestic work sector has the highest number of women who are black from low-income areas (ILO,2013). The work of a domestic worker includes washing and ironing clothes, cleaning the house, cooking, and childminding. The private nature of this work makes it difficult for the worker to interact with the outside world, thus depriving workers in this sector of some freedoms. Domestic work is often characterised by long working hours, and very low wages. Du Preez et al. (2010) contends that domestic work is not easy to be regarded as real work. This could be attributed to the invisible nature of the job.

The individual and invisible nature of domestic work makes it difficult for workers and unions to organise (Du toit, 2013; Visser, 2011). According to Clarke (2002), the domestic work sector is fraught with insecurities which subjects most workers to numerous challenges in the workplace. The experience of domestic workers is significantly different depending on the type of working arrangement a domestic worker has. Noteworthy is the live-in working arrangements which require that a worker stays in the employer’s home with the employer’s family. Ally (2009) argues that domestic workers who are live-in work endlessly. This is an important observation as employers of live-in domestic workers are always at liberty to assign tasks to their employees outside working hours. Although live-in arrangements could be found to be exploitative in favour of employers, domestic workers also benefit as they save money which would ordinarily be spent on commuting to their homes every day. The domestic work

employment is mostly found in the suburbs and big cities away from townships and informal settlements where most of these workers stay.

According to Kerr (2017) the low-income population in South Africa is faced with a reality of high transport costs and some of them walk to work. This phenomenon can be traced back from apartheid's spacial transformation of cities (Kerr, 2017). The majority of black people in South Africa were displaced away from the city where most industries are located (Thomas, 2016). Consequently, the middle class and the rich tend to buy houses in affluent suburbs that are located closer to big towns and away from homes of domestic workers. Transport plays a key role in ensuring that people are able to get closer to work opportunities which are located away from their homes. For Coxon (et al., 2019), urban transport is crucial for ensuring that access to livelihoods activities possible.

Workers in live-in working arrangements easily become fatigued because of the endless tasks such as caregiving responsibilities which affect their sleeping time (ILO, 2013; Budlender, 2013). Conditions of employment in the sector are often informed by verbal agreements and personal relationships between employers and employees making it difficult for tribunals to intervene when there are disputes. The employer-employee arrangements in the sector consequently become biased against employees as there are no binding written contracts regulating these relationships (ILO, 2013). Contractual agreements are important as they assist as tangible evidence and recourse for either disputing party. For Cock (1980), live-in domestic workers who migrated from rural areas are more exposed to exploitative practices in the workplace.

2.3. Social Reproduction Theory (SRT) in domestic work

The social reproduction theory in this study is significant to highlight and explain why domestic workers' vulnerability is perpetual despite progressive interventions in the sector. It lays bare the inherent inequalities across generations and problematises the gender bias of the market. This study would not be complete without articulating how notions of gender and race dominate the domestic work sector. In the context of South Africa, the domestic worker is black and is a woman. Although domestic workers can be found among coloured South Africans, most domestic workers in the country are black women from rural provinces and poor households. "Domestic work, by its nature in the patriarchal society, is severely undervalued because it has traditionally been treated as women's unpaid duty in marriage"

(Grant, 1997, p. 62). Labour power is replenished through reproduction, and this creates value in the economic chain indirectly (Fortunati, 1995).

Delpont (1995) argues that white woman successfully escaped the kitchen by forcing hiring black women from rural areas to render domestic work services in their homes in the cities. The outsourcing of domestic duties by white women meant that black women from the rural areas and elsewhere migrated to big cities in search of employment. Cock (1989) posit that domestic work for black woman represented ‘triple oppression’ in that they were literally oppressed in three levels, which are, for being black, for being a woman and as being workers.

Domestic work services contribute to broader economic activities in a special way but there is little recognition given to women working in the sector. In recent years, the South African government made strides in ensuring that the sector is protected but the lack of monitoring and snails pace of implementation of progressive laws has left most of the workers in the sector despondent.

The SRT theory rejects the classical political economy distinction between ‘productive’ and ‘unproductive’ labour. For classical political economists, surplus value is only produced by productive labour. In contrast, SRT proponents argue that non commodified labour is not unproductive as suggested by classical political economy but is rather indirectly productive since it produces labour power (O’Laughlin, 2021). Domestic work in households is often undervalued and deemed as non-commodified and not a contributor to capital accumulation as O’Laughlin (2021, p.1) argues “Only wage-labour directly engaged in capitalist production was considered productive because only it produced surplus-value”.

Grant (1997) argues that the continued vulnerability of woman in the domestic work sector has layers of colonial and racial oppression to blame. To study the relationship of domestic workers and their employers in the sector objectively, one must consider the historical relations as Grant (1997, p. 61) further argues; “They are regarded as servants for ideological and historical reasons, thus making practical reform of working conditions difficult”.

2.4. Migrant workers in South Africa

According to a fact sheet produced by the African Centre for Migration and Society (2017), foreign born workers are people of working age born in other countries who have migrated to South Africa to seek work in the formal or informal sectors of the economy. ACMS (2017) also observes that foreign born workers do not only seek employment but also survive through

establishing businesses in the country. ‘Migrant’ is defined as a person who moves from the area where she or he previously lived to another area. This could be the case for people, for example, who move from Eastern Cape province to Gauteng or any other province in South Africa or outside South Africa. “Migrant” includes both people who move to another country to seek asylum, and people who move to seek work and livelihoods” (ACMS, 2017, p. 1) Internal labour migrants move from one province to the other within South Africa (ACMS, 2017). Workers move back and forth between the place they work and their place of origin.

Budlender and Fauvelle-Aymar (2014) argue that access of foreign workers to South Africa’s labour market has become a politically sensitive question. They argue “This question also plays out in terms of internal migration with local communities increasingly claiming priority of access to jobs over newcomers” (Budlender & Fauvelle-Aymar, 2014). The high unemployment rate and insufficient job creation further causes more competition for jobs between internal migrants from provinces in South Africa and international migrants (Budlender & Fauvelle-Aymar, 2014).

The African Centre for Migration and Society (2017) argue that foreign born migrants are more likely to be employed in the informal sector than South Africans. This is because more foreign-born migrants are much more likely to be doing precarious jobs than South Africans. This pattern is happening because many employers exploit foreign-born migrants’ willingness to accept more precarious work (ACMS, 2017). Similarly, in their report on migration and employment in South Africa, Budlender and Fauvelle- Aymar (2014) concur that people born in other countries are more likely to be employed than those who are locally born. They further argue that foreign migrants are more likely to work in sectors with fewer or no benefits at all (Budlender & Fauvelle-Aymar, 2014).

Foreign-born migrants use precarious jobs as their point of entry and access to formal work, but this doesn’t often materialise as they normally find themselves stuck in precarious jobs (ACMS, 2017). The percentage of foreign-born migrants working in the informal sector is almost twice as high than the percentage of South Africans according to this report. The informal sector is the most accessible and the most attractive to foreign-born migrants. This is because of its lowest entry cost to the labour market and foreign-born migrants’ willingness to take jobs that locals are not willing to take (Budlender & Fauvelle-Aymar, 2014).

According to the International Labour Organization report (2021), South Africa has the highest number of domestic workers in Africa. The migration patterns in South Africa are largely

shaped by its larger economy and demand in sectors such as the domestic work sector (ILO, 2021). The ILO (2021) reports that domestic work in Africa is a significant source of employment as it accounts for 2.2% of the labour force. The impact of immigration on native employment in South Africa has small negative effects on the income of native-born workers but not on employment at national level (Facchini et al., 2013). This stands in contrast with Fauvelle-Aymar (2015) who argues that immigration is likely to have effects on employment at the national level.

The green paper on International Migration by the Department of Home Affairs in 2016 and the White Paper in 2017 argue that international migration is beneficial to the country only if managed effectively (ILO, 2021). Both these papers maintain that international migration in South Africa should be grounded in the Constitution and the National Development Plan (NDP) vision 2030. In examining the displacement effects of immigration on native-born workers, the ILO used a framework of econometrics and analysis based on two dimensions, thus level of education and experience of the workers. This assesses the labour market impact of immigration.

According to the ILO (2018) report on the impact of immigration to South Africa's economy, immigrant workers make a great contribution to the South African economy. "Immigrants are well-integrated into the labour market in terms of employment and unemployment rates, and in general do not seem to displace native-born workers" (OECD & ILO, 2018, p. 4). For the ILO (2018), immigration raises income per capita in South Africa, while migrants are instrumental in making a positive net fiscal contribution. Wilson and Mlambo (2014) argue that immigration increases the supply of labour which ultimately depresses wages and makes local people to be discouraged and opt for voluntary unemployment in the process.

The nature of the South African labour market is competitive given the surplus labour population that exists. Strategies for employment are used as Griffin (2011) observed that Basotho migrant domestic workers use their illegal migration status to win the hearts of domestic work employers in South Africa. Domestic work employers in South Africa find it easy to exploit undocumented Basotho workers as their movements become restricted because of fear of being apprehended by authorities. They are in the service of their employers day and night without any off days (Griffin, 2011).

Domestic work employers often compare the Basotho workers attitudes to that of local workers and other foreign-born workers as Griffin (2011, p. 83) argues; "Alongside other cross-border

migrants, Basotho women are therefore known amongst employers for their submissiveness vis-avis their ‘troublesome’ South African counterparts”. The illegal status of immigrants in the country has its own challenges. For Crush and Williams (2018) undocumented workers are not only breaking the law by virtue of their unauthorized presence in South Africa, but because they are often engaged in other forms of crime. Despite all the concerns about the presence of undocumented migrants in the country, the South African government is optimistic about benefiting from migrants by effectively managing by integrating them into the labour market. This commitment is expressed in the 2017 White Paper on international migration (DEL, 2022).

The 2008 global financial crisis has negatively affected the growth of the economy in South Africa. The ILO (2021) posits that; “Although the performance of the South African economy appears less volatile than that of its neighbours, economic growth has been slow since the global financial crisis and job creation has been insufficient”. The population of foreign-born migrants had increased to 4,3% by 2011 from 2,3% in 2001 with concentration in Gauteng, Mpumalanga, and the Northwest (ILO, 2021).

From the above literature, generally, migration does not affect or increase unemployment at national level. Most literature covers immigration and employment relationship at national level and not enough detail has been given about this relationship at local level. There is however a possibility that it might affect employment of South Africans in some provinces.

My study seeks to uncover the real motivations and preferences of domestic work employer choices of employment. This study examines themes such as wagelessness and surplus labour to understand the extent to which the system of capitalism subjugates populations. This study is meant to bring narratives from affected people such as domestic workers’ employers and domestic workers to ascertain whether there is truth in popular explanations about unemployment of South Africans in the domestic work sector.

The high unemployment in South Africa has attracted a lot of debates from different sectors to explain the reasons behind it. More often than not, South Africans attributed the unemployment crisis to the presence of foreign nationals in the country. Wilson and Mlambo (2014) argue that one of the reasons for the 2008 and 2013 xenophobic violence attacks was the belief that foreign nationals were taking work opportunities away from South African nationals. According to Mosala (2008), the major problem is that countries with high unemployment levels hold perceptions that foreign migrants are ‘stealing’ their scarce jobs and means of survival.

2.5. South Africa's social protection: Gains and Challenges

South Africa has a long history of offering social protection (SP) based on citizenship. These benefits were enjoyed by a select few under-apartheid South Africa until the 1994 democratic breakthrough as Moore and Seekings (2019, p. 5) argue “Poverty, which remains concentrated among African people is rooted in the history of dispossession of land and destruction of the indigenous peasantry, restricted education and economic opportunities under apartheid”. The new government ensured that many more citizens benefit from these grants and social services. “The expansion of grants and access to services has built a relatively extensive system of social welfare in South Africa in comparison to other middle-income countries in the Global South” (Scully, 2019, p. 181). According to the World Bank (2014) the social protection system implemented by South Africa has shown positive gains in as far as poverty reduction is concerned. These grants include old age, disability and child support grants for children and adolescents (Moore & Seekings, 2019).

For Moore and Seekings (2019) as for Scully (2019) the social protection system has long been established in South Africa. They argue that social protection (SP) was expanded by the new SA democratic government post 1994. Although SP grants cannot be regarded as a panacea to all unemployment problems in SA, one could argue that a significant number of the population has managed to escape poverty since its expansion. Most South Africans remain dependent on the state (Ferguson, 2015).

The expansion of SP grants yielded positive results but with fundamental gaps in its distribution. Poverty remained perpetual among working age unemployed South Africans. “Poverty persist despite the safety net because there are large holes in the net” (Moore & Seekings, 2019, p. 2). The exclusion of working age South Africans into the SP grant created a layer of not in employment, not in education and not in training cohort otherwise known as NEET in South Africa. Moore and Seekings (2019) concur with Scully (2019) saying that working aged men and women were left out. The selective allocation of grants along gender and generational lines generated tensions among populace. Some people received grants while some were deemed unqualifying for grants. The expansion of social protection grant in South Africa stands as a good example to other developing countries, but critical analysis of its implementation is necessary to circumvent its pitfalls. This is further emphasized by Moore and Seekings (2019, p. 4) as they argue; “Just as the South African case points to the likely

benefits of expanding social assistance elsewhere in Africa, it also points to the unintended consequences in terms of changing relationships within households and between kin”.

Poor South Africans found refuge in the allocation of these grants, and this became the last hope for the unemployed as they benefitted indirectly from the households. The old age pension has positively contributed to many lives of young and old South Africans. According to Scully (2019), the post-apartheid government has established access to grants and services as a defining feature of being a South African. The working age unemployed did not have a direct benefit before the Social Relief of Distress Grants were disbursed during Covid-19 lockdown.

Before the SRD grant payments, the working age cohort depended on the old age pension received by qualifying family members. Furthermore, the old age pension was utilized as a backup for job seekers who migrated from their rural provinces to the cities with the hope of securing a job. Old age pension has been shown to be positively associated with both migration and employment of working-age household members (Scully, 2019) . For Scully (2019) the scenario where working-age unemployed migrate to the cities and only depend on family remittances for survival is ‘reverse remittance’. This term captures the undeniable truth about South African households in the rural areas. Our old age pensioners share their grant with family members who are not in employment, their children and sometimes their great grandchildren.

In the absence of any form of social support, the old age grant was the only hope for survival among the working-age unemployed. “These grants reach the working age unemployed through household connections” (Scully, 2019, p.183). He further notes that women’s old age grant contributes to the upbringing and health of children in the poor households compared to their male counterparts’ pension.

The ‘reverse remittances’ could underscore an important element about internal migrant domestic workers (IMDWs) in comparison to migrant domestic workers (MDWS) from outside South Africa. Growing as a child in the rural Eastern Cape province, it was normal for my grandmother to expect remittance every month from my father who worked in the mines, and this was the known practice across all households in the village. In contemporary South Africa, the practice of sending money home to support households is reversed. This situation could be the outcome of South African economy’s inability to create sufficient jobs for working age unemployed. Citizens’ feeling of neglect and lack of participation in the economy has often led to sporadic protests characterized by burning of tires, municipal infrastructures, and

unwarranted attacks to foreign nationals. “The xenophobic violence is an explicit expression of subaltern contestation over the boundaries of inclusion” (Scully, 2019, p. 184”).

2.6. Covid-19 Social Relief of Distress grant as a social protection net

In response to the adverse effects of the Covid-19 pandemic and its inevitable lockdowns, the South African government unleashed existing social protection programs and other temporal interventions to counter the impact of lockdowns on livelihoods. The SRD grants were made accessible to South African citizens, refugees, asylum seekers and special permit holders between the ages of 18 and 60 years who do not receive any social grant or qualifying for UIF payment (SASSA, 2020). These interventions were widely welcomed by many South Africans particularly the working age unemployed from poor households. The disbursement of the Social Relief of Distress grant was administered using a two-pronged approach which was largely cash based (Gronbach et al., 2022). They argue that employment rapidly dropped under severe lockdown effectively during the second quarter of 2020. The formal sector received UIF payments while the informal sector and other vulnerable individuals received cash transfers.

It is worth noting that the disbursement of SRD grant did not exclude people who were already recipients of social assistance but instead topped-up to mitigate the impact caused by lockdown using the existing beneficiary list. “Top-up payments for existing grants were rolled out efficiently; the new SRD grant posed challenges but ultimately succeeded in reaching over six million previously uncovered beneficiaries” (Gronbach et al., 2022, p. 1). These top-ups were discontinued after six months despite calls for keeping them. They recall that South Africa unlike other developing countries, has a long history of social protection as they state, “Social protection programs replaced poor relief in South Africa in the early twentieth century, initially for ‘white’ and ‘coloured’ people only” (Gronbach et al., 2022, p. 4). The democratic government of South Africa increased payment of grant from 2,5 million beneficiaries in 1998 to over 18 million in 2020 according to South African Social Security Services Agency (SASSA, 2020).

The SRD grant is undoubtedly accommodative to working age South Africans who were left out thus closing the gap created by the unequal distribution of social security protection services before COVID-19 lockdowns. The continuous extension of SRD grant by South African government creates a better platform for establishment of the basic income grant (BIG) which could see many South African households escape the ravages of unemployment.

2.7 Wagelessness and surplus labour

The nature of historical and contemporary processes of work are inevitably linked to the idea of wagelessness. Denning (2010) exposes the extent at which wage labour economy violently disrupted primitive social order and how this phenomenon continues to shape our society today. People oblige themselves to unfavourable working conditions as they fear unemployment and wagelessness. To be unemployed is the worst thing that capitalism has ever produced. This is to say, a worker who is exploited by the capitalist in a workplace is much better than not being employed and exploited at all. This is prevalent in all corners of our society today. For example, while organised labour unions at workplaces fight against exploitation and better working conditions of the employed workers, surprisingly, there is always a pull of unemployed waiting and yearning for an opportunity to be absorbed in the very same system.

According to Denning (2010) the wageless unemployed are a reserve army of labour force or what Marxist calls the lumpenproletariat. He argues that wagelessness could be traced back to the colonial system of dispossession. This is indeed a true genesis of the discourse of wagelessness. In literature, there is sufficient evidence that in primitive society people worked not necessarily for accumulating profit but for the survival of the community at large. “Since the beginning of the wage labour economy, wageless life has been a calamity for those dispossessed of land, tools, and means of subsistence” (Denning, 2010, p. 79).

I concur with Denning (2010) in that accumulation of labour in the capitalist systems needs to be critically analysed to understand how we arrived at wagelessness. One could vehemently argue that in fact people were historically coerced to the condition of being wage labourers and thus ultimately becoming wageless as capitalism grew in leaps and bounds. For example, the land dispossession project in South Africa gave platform for capitalism’s proletarianisation. Denning (2010) also makes the point that one does not need a job to be a proletarian. For him, wageless life is the starting point in understanding the free market. He argues that labour accumulation precedes capital accumulation. Similarly, McIntyre and Nast (2011, p. 1470) argue “Dispossession has preceded capital accumulation everywhere”.

Unemployment received its legitimacy by normalisation of employment according to Denning (2010). He recalls that unions contributed to normalisation of unemployment discourse by inventing concepts like “Out of Work”. The second form of normalisation, he argues, arises when wageless people meet and march collectively as the unemployed. One concurs with

Denning, life in industrial society where capitalism dictates requires that subjugated people become aware of their own domination thus becoming a class for itself. People generally, always organise along common issues they are confronted with, it be race, class, exploitation and gender. This by no means suggests that they agree with themes like unemployment and employment, but they are finding it easy to consolidate their position around their immediate circumstances.

McIntyre and Nast (2011), like Denning (2010), argue that the greater the reserve-army of labour force in proportion to active the labour army, the greater is the mass of a consolidated surplus population. This is what they describe to be the absolute general law of accumulation. Race is central to understanding of surplus population according to McIntyre and Nast (2011). “One cannot therefore understand surplus populations without understanding how the geographical dynamics of accumulation have become increasingly racialised” (McIntyre & Nast, 2011). They argue that exploitation worked dialectically through different geographic scales and governmentalities. The cheapening of racialised bodies were made possible through different regimes of governmentalities which they refer to as biopolitical and necropolitical.

The migrant worker is the most vulnerable worker. Hyper exploitation of the undocumented workers allows employers to take up overtime work and make more income while outsourcing other house duties to workers for less money. This is true for South Africa’s informal domestic work sector. Most households in Gauteng suburbs employ immigrant workers for garden and domestic work services. These employers pay their workers’ salaries that are below the minimum wage and appropriate some of the money to their pockets thus helping them ascend to the upper class at the expense of the migrant worker.

In South Africa, capitalism can be understood in terms of the linked contradictions of reproduction and race. In ethnographic research, Wright (2013) witnesses how race and gender was used to dominate Mexican workers in Mexico. The policy of the MOTW did not allow any Mexican to hold position of authority over an American. “Understanding the national border within the corporation’s division of labour is key for individual career strategies, in a place where to ‘Americanize’ is to climb and to ‘Mexicanize’ is to descend the social ladder of power and prestige” (Wright, 2013, p. 101). The only reason for the American firm to operate in Mexico was merely to exploit the Mexican cheap labour while maximising their profit. They did this without compromising the culture and image of the company as they discriminated

female Mexican workers to remain invisible. This phenomenon obtained in the context of apartheid South Africa as white South African assumed dominance over natives.

McIntyre and Nast (2011) argue that in the bio polis, labour is periodically shed through a bipolarity in which workers are drawn into labour force during economic expansions and excreted during downturns. This point is further emphasised by Denning (2010, p. 97) as he argues “The higher the productivity of labour, the greater is the pressure of the workers on the means of employment, the more precarious therefore becomes the condition for their existence, namely, the sale of their own labour power”. Wagelessness and Surplus population continue to grow as capitalism through globalisation explores new ways of maximizing profits rendering multitudes of people out of employment. Every day in South Africa, scores of people line up in the street intersection looking for employment. These people are willing and ready to compromise their own dignity and subject themselves in adverse working conditions just to escape unemployment and wagelessness.

2.8 Black Middle-Class Employers

Post-apartheid South Africa prides itself for having won the fight against racial oppression and discrimination of the majority by the minority. It brought numerous changes in the public and private sector allowing many previously disadvantaged South Africans to thrive and compete equally in the labour market. Since 1994, there has been indelible progress made by the democratic government of the ANC, and most notable is the emergence of the black middle-class. Several pieces of legislation were introduced to give effect to what is widely known as affirmative action. Despite these progressive policies, whites are still enjoying some advantages owing to apartheid state’s policies (Scully, 2019). Bold steps were taken to redress the injustices of the past.

Through Black Economic Empowerment, Employment Equity Act and Skills Development Act, black South Africans were elevated to positions of power both in public sector, private sector, and entrepreneurship. Furthermore, the Congress of South African Trade Union (COSATU) recorded many victories in ensuring that workplace democracy is achieved. Ndletyana (2014) argues that black middle-class is a product of post-apartheid construction. The developed and successful middle-class provided with domestic service work opportunities to extended family members who came from rural areas. These women assisted their families with domestic work service such as ironing, washing clothes, cleaning the house, and cooking.

Fish (2006) points out that the emergence of 'new black madams' is critical when discussing domestic work employers in post-apartheid South Africa. The exploitation of domestic workers is perpetual as Carrol (2004) notes that black middle-class employers of domestic workers are worse exploiters than their white counterparts. "Society has historically attached a low value to 'women's' work and black labour" (Grant, 1997, p. 62). The emergence of black middle class as employers of domestic workers has not translated to any positive gain according to her. She contends that black middle-class employers of domestic workers always look for migrant domestic workers who are hard-working and obedient (Carroll, 2014). This could be true in the case of migrant domestic workers who come from outside the country with very few or no relatives to visit in the city. This then makes them to regard employers' private home as their 'home away from home'.

Internal migrants on one hand, come from rural provinces within South Africa, they often have ties with other family members who are also in the city for work opportunities which makes it easy for them to visit during weekends and establish new relationships with other community members.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

3.1. Introduction

For this study, qualitative, exploratory research methods were used for answering research questions. My study is situated within the interpretivist paradigm thus uses research techniques that helps to grasp how people in the domestic work sector understand and interpret their environment. Exploratory research is useful for collecting and analysing data in a descriptive manner to investigate the social phenomenon (Neuman, 2009). This approach allows the investigator to ask open-ended questions to understand how things are the way they are thus allowing participants to build theory. Covid-19 pandemic regulations were followed to minimize the spread of the virus and protect the study participants and myself from infection. For example, in preparation for the interviews, masks, and sanitizers were organised and social distance protocols observed while ensuring that the interview venue had suitable ventilation. Alternative online meeting arrangement was made in an event where face to face meetings were prohibited by on the Covid-19 lockdown regulations. The fundamental question that underpins this study is: What informs domestic worker employer choices of a domestic worker? Lastly, the study seeks to ascertain whether there is relationship between migration and unemployment of locals in the domestic work sector.

3.2. Sampling

The study participants were carefully selected to provide relevant data from the domestic work sector in Johannesburg. Purposive selection of domestic workers from various suburbs in the City of Johannesburg gave this study participants ranging from an age of 20 to 59 years, wherein 20-year-old was the youngest and 59-year-old being the oldest in the group. This study sampled ten (10) employers of domestic workers. The ages of these employers ranged between 28 and the age of 55 years. Two of the employers were white people from South Africa while one black middle-class employer came from Malawi. The remaining 7 employers were black-middle class from South Africa with at least a first degree. “The less skilled are always much more vulnerable to unemployment than the skilled” (Moore & Seekings, 2019, p. 5). All the employers were females who were either single with more than one child or married with children. Posel and Rogan (2009) observe that there are more women headed household in South Africa than men, as such, economic independence of women increased while there is notable decline in marriage. They worked in established companies and at least two women were working for themselves as entrepreneurs. Purposive sampling denotes selection of

participants who can answer the research question and goals (Bless et al.,2017). This allows researchers to access relevant people with the skills and expertise that are much needed for the study as Maxwell argues, “This is a strategy in which particular settings, persons, or events are deliberately selected for the important information they can provide that cannot be gotten as well from other choices” (Maxwell, 2009, p. 235). The City of Johannesburg suburbs are the ideal site for this study as most of the paid domestic work is performed in the suburbs. I will use the ward delimitation data from the City of Johannesburg Metro Municipality. Therefore, unlike in a quantitative study, non-probability sampling technique is used as Maxwell (2009) maintains that qualitative research makes use of non-probability and purposeful sampling which enables researchers to choose participants according to what the research study requires.

1 COSATU official; 1 SADSAWU official; 1 DoEL official; 10 domestic workers from different suburbs and 10 domestic workers employers from different suburbs. A total of 23 participants will be interviewed. Not all the suburbs will be sampled. This will be a targeted sampling as they are the only ones who have information on the subject being investigated.

All participants were aged between 18-59. The study made use of strategies to protect the identities of participants from their employers. For example, if a domestic worker is interviewed from a particular household, then an employer will be from another household.

Union officials, preferably at the level of office bearer from COSATU and domestic workers union (SADSAWU) were interviewed. This is because the participant must be a well versed and experienced unionist or administrator who has been in the labour movement for not less than 10 years. The reason for this is that some questions need a historical background of policies and treaties that were concluded in the field.

The choice of COSATU and SADSAWU is informed by their long-standing organising experience in labour issues in South Africa. COSATU is the biggest union federation in South Africa and is in alliance with the governing ANC which has been in power since 1994. COSATU has been instrumental in the formulation of policies on labour relations and workplace democracy issues. Furthermore, National Labour and Economic Development Institute (NALEDI) is a brainchild of COSATU which conducts research in a wide range of areas including domestic work. This helps this research study with in-depth insights on the debates and research that have taken place in the field both past and present. SADSAWU has the same characteristics as COSATU although limited to domestic workers representation.

3.3. Empirical data collection, instruments, and sites for the study

Different interview guides were developed as instruments to conduct semi-structured interviews. The interviews were organized through SADSAWU, UDWOSA, COSATU and through engagements with the communities and their leaders. For example, in a meeting with SADSAWU organisers, an opportunity to interview some of their members who are domestic workers from different suburbs in the City of Johannesburg was granted. The parks inside estates in the suburbs were utilized as most domestic workers spend more of their time monitoring children playing in the park.

Reports on migration and employment together with government policies past and present during the period being studied formed a key component for this research. Stats SA reports and International Labour Organization (ILO) data were also used to see the trends in employment and migration from 2008 to date. This provided insights on how migration and employment trends in South Africa could be studied, thus allowing for proper investigation on what influenced the narratives around unemployment of South Africans in the domestic sector.

3.4. Data analysis

Verbatim written accounts of each transcription for interviews were analysed using thematic analysis to identify common themes, and patterns of meanings that emerged repeatedly from the field. Management and analysis of data was used to reduce data to manageable size as some of the information became irrelevant for the study. “To make your job of analysing the data easier, you will need to keep track of what you have collected” (Kawulich & Holland, 2012, p. 228). Kawulich and Holland (2012) contend that qualitative research study ends up with lots of data.

Thematic analysis is a general approach to analyzing qualitative data that involves identifying themes of patterns in the data according to Kawulich and Holland (2012). Data was categorized by attaching codes to it as Maxwell (2009, p. 236) argues “the main categorising strategy in qualitative research is coding”. This helps in evaluating whether the information is relevant for the study or not, in other words, the data received in the beginning will be reduced depending on whether it is relevant for study or not.

3.5. Limitations and strengths of method

Qualitative research provides a rich contextual perspective on the issues that I may not get in standardized form questionnaire Roberts (et al., 2003). It is also able to develop or build new

theories and recognize some aspects that were ignored by other researchers. Qualitative research prioritizes the context of its study population, participants express their own world view. It considers different perspectives that exist among the people in a particular location without being judgmental towards them.

Qualitative research makes it expensive to involve large numbers of participants. Therefore, participants are always reduced to a small number. “Because of the limited number of participants, the results may not be generalizable” (Roberts et al., 2003, p. 252). There is always a possibility that the small sample size is not representative of the rest of the population. Qualitative research also depends on the skills of the researcher. According to Roberts (et al., 2003), participation in a qualitative study is time consuming which takes the researcher away from normal life. The limitations of this study do not allow generalization across the population as a much bigger sample size will be required to comfortably generalize on findings.

3.6. Ethical considerations

Ethics are an important component of a research project. “Ethics in research includes safeguards in protecting identities of participants” (Olgetree & Kawulich, 2012, p. 70). For this research study, ethical clearance was obtained from the ethics committee of the University of the Witwatersrand through application before research could commence. Upon getting permission from the ethics committee, the purpose of this research was disclosed to all study participants and emphasized the fact that participation in the study was not by coercion but rather voluntary. Furthermore, participants were advised of what was expected from them and the potential risks and benefits from the process. Consent forms for each of study participants were sourced and shared with participants. According to Babbie (2013, p. 34), “Informed consent is a norm in which subjects base their voluntary participation in research projects on a full understanding of the possible risks involved”. Note taking during one-on-one interaction did not specify names of participants and the recording happened after obtaining consent from participants. Application of the above addressed key principles of research ethics which are, do no harm, obtaining formal consent and consideration for the privacy of participants.

CHAPTER FOUR: STUDY FINDINGS / ANALYSIS

4.1. Introduction

This chapter captured the lived experiences of domestic workers and employers of domestic workers in the City of Johannesburg. Although some participants had experience dating back pre 1994 democratic transition in South Africa, for the purpose of this study, the researcher focused on the period 2008 to date as outlined in the first chapter. The chapter further engages in a discussion of findings using thematic analysis of a qualitative data approach emanating from semi-structured interviews held with domestic workers and employers of domestic workers in the City of Johannesburg.

4.2. Composition of domestic workers in the study

The composition of migrant domestic workers represented a much younger cohort than their South African counterpart. This could be attributed to a variety of reasons. First, that domestic work sector is associated with low pay, class exploitation and white domination in South Africa therefore the 1994 democratic transition inculcated a culture of resistance among young black women in the sector. Secondly, domestic work in South Africa is traditionally known for live-in type of arrangements which deprives freedom and separates the worker from the broader community, family and social life making it difficult for the young South Africans to mingle with others. Another reason could be that South African government has recorded an indelible progress in making sure that social security is provided for the non-working women over the age of 18 years who give birth through the child support grants. In May 2020, the government offered social relief of distress grants (SRD Grants) otherwise known as Covid 19 grants to persons over the age of 18 who are in the country legally (SASSA, 2020).

Regardless of the small amounts these social security initiatives given to qualifying people in South Africa, I argue that they somehow alleviate pressure of job hunting thus discouraging young South African men and women from looking for jobs. “To discourage dependence on social grants, many Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries have reduced the amounts and duration of benefits and tightened requirements that beneficiaries should seek work actively” (Van der Berg et al., 2010). Out of the 10 domestic workers that were interviewed in this study, only 3 women were from South Africa with the youngest at 40 years and the eldest at 59 years. The remaining 7 women were migrants from the neighboring countries such as Zimbabwe, Malawi, Lesotho, and Swaziland.

4.3. Emerging themes from domestic workers in the City of Johannesburg

All domestic workers that were interviewed highlighted the responsibility of sending money back to their families as the motivating factor for continued employment in the sector. Job security was of great concern especially among MDWs than IMDWs. The class positions and race of domestic worker employers also emerged as a dominant theme during interviews. Employer and employee relationships were also seen as a significant theme in addressing working conditions. Below is the analysis of the themes that emerged from interviews with participants.

4.3.1. Remittances

Domestic workers in the study showed very strong ties with their families. Most of them were married with more than two children and their husbands were either unemployed or in precarious employment. Domestic workers from South Africa were single parents who were either divorced or never got married. The role of being a provider for the entire family brought pride and sense of responsibility regardless of the unfavorable working conditions and low pay offered in the sector.

A migrant domestic worker expressed this: *“My children are small, and my parents are old. My parents used to work in the garden for us to survive but they cannot do it anymore. I must make sure that I send something to my parents for my children to survive. The ‘Mukuru’ that I send home monthly is now their garden”* (Suzette, August 2022).

The importance of sending money home became a common theme among participants regardless of their nationality. This was evidenced by a South African domestic worker who also expressed herself in this manner: *“Yes, they say ‘half a loaf is better than no bread’ but what we are getting is not even half a loaf but a quarter of a loaf, they must think about us because this money is not for us, it is for our children and families back home”* (Nancy, 18 December, 2022).

One could argue therefore that domestic workers’ commitment to their jobs is inextricably linked to meagre remittances they must send to their families.

4.3.2. Race and Class positions of employers in the sector

Participants in the study were either employed by employers who owned businesses or working middle class families. Domestic workers who were employed by employers who owned businesses were more content with their jobs while domestic workers employed by middle class families showed more discontentment towards their jobs. This finding laid bare the relationship between domestic workers' satisfaction, race, and class positions of employers in the sector. I asked one of the internal migrant domestic workers how she felt about her current job, she replied: *"I love my job, I have more than 12 years working for my boss. My boss is a white man from Portugal. He owns construction and electrical company. He is very sympathetic, and my husband also used to work for him"* (Hellen, 06 September 2022). She further emphasized how she had become part of the family throughout the years. *"If they go on holidays, I also travel with them, I am like their child you see"* (Hellen, 06 September, 2022).

I found this dimension very interesting and began to probe more into it. Hellen's employer was a white businessman from Portugal who had established himself in the City of Johannesburg's Bryanston suburbs. The 50-year-old Hellen was responsible for cleaning the house and looking after their 10-year-old son. She lived-in with the family and was paid more than the South African minimum wage for employed persons. *"I always worked for white bosses because they pay more than black, and Indian bosses. Even my previous employer was white from Cape Town."* (Hellen, 06 September 2022). I asked her whether she ever worked for other races and her response was: *"I tried but it never worked for me, it was not a good experience. You see, your own black brother and sister want to treat you as a slave and pay you very little, that's why I don't prefer them"* (Hellen, 06 September 2022). Remnants of apartheid South Africa could be experienced by domestic workers employed not only by white employers, but also those employed by black, and Indian race employers.

The interlinking between race and class positions of employers in the sector is an important finding which tells us what shapes employer attitudes towards their domestic workers. These interviews also revealed that domestic workers from South Africa preferred white foreign bosses than the white bosses from South Africa. This could be largely influenced by the historical relationship between white and black people in South Africa.

Another domestic worker in the Northern Suburb of Florida in the City of Johannesburg gave a full picture of this scenario during our interview. She has never worked for a black man and expressed herself this way. *"I like working for a white man but not South African white man"* (Idah, 14 December 2022). This is an interesting finding which came mostly from South

African born domestic workers. The historical context of South Africa continues to perpetuate antagonism between white and black South Africans in the workplace.

The nature of domestic work employment which happens in the private homes of individuals makes it even more difficult for authorities to bring perpetrators to book. It was during our interview when Idah's son interrupted with a loud voice as he was eavesdropping on our interview: *"I tell you, it will take another 50 years for apartheid to finish"* (Idah's son, 14 December 2022). Idah stayed with her 29-year-old son who used to work for her late white boss from Germany who was also a businessman.

4.3.3. Job security and relationship with employer

Job security is one of the most contentious employment issues in almost all employment categories. The global economic crisis of 2008 worsened unemployment across all sectors but this was severely felt by those in informal employment like domestic workers. The job security concerns in the study were mostly raised by the migrant workers who pointed to several challenges such as migration status, xenophobia, and exploitation among others. The intention by South African government to cancel Zimbabweans special permits brought an interesting dimension to the study as this did not only threaten jobs for Zimbabweans but all migrants who came to South Africa for work in the domestic work sector. Most domestic workers interviewed in the study were not registered with the Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF) thus making their job security even more threatened. According to SARS (2017) all employers should register their employees who work for more than 24 hours a month with the Unemployment Insurance Fund.

To some domestic workers, getting registered for UIF depended on the generosity of employers. Sipho Zulu, 43-year-old domestic worker from Zimbabwe narrated during our interview: *"UIF registration depends on whether your boss like you or not, if she likes you and you have legal documents, they can register you so that you can enjoy your retirement when you are home. I do not have UIF because my passport expired and I am only planning to apply again"* (Sipho, 08 December 2022).

When asked about how the Zimbabwe Exemption Permits saga affected her, she responded: *"ZEP doesn't affect me because I did not have any permit, but most people who had these permits like my husband are affected because their bank accounts are getting closed and other clothing accounts are closed because of this. We were hiding with those that have permits because people could not tell who has permits to work and who has no permit and now the*

hiding is over” (Sipho, 08 December 2022). This is an important finding on job security among migrant domestic workers. Most of the migrant domestic workers, although not having work permits, benefited indirectly as naïve South African employers believed that they had permits to work in the country. *“Employers are ignorant. Some discover after you have been working for a long time that you do not have a permit while some can hire you knowingly so that they can exploit your migration status” (Sipho, 08 December 2022).*

Work permits do not guarantee anyone a job according to some interview participants. *“You can have a work permit and not be so lucky to get a good job. The only challenge is that you always leave in fear of police when you don’t have a work permit or passport” (Mirriam, 12 December 2022).*

Employees registered with the UIF are entitled to benefits such as maternity leave and unemployment benefits. Most of these employees were aware of the Unemployment Insurance Fund but chose not to question their employers about it as they feared getting dismissed, thus the invisible nature of the domestic work sector perpetuates job insecurities as work is conducted in the private homes of employers.

The May 2008 xenophobic violence attacks in South Africa also threatened job security of most domestic workers as they leaved in fear of getting attacked.

The study participants had different things to say about working conditions and their wages in the domestic work sector. For these workers, generally, it depended on the type of employer. The race and class position of the employer determined the working condition and amount of wage you get for most of the participants. All participants acknowledged employer employee relationship as a determining factor for job satisfaction.

Martha from Zimbabwe who worked for a black business family in Linden, North of Johannesburg had this to say about her working conditions: *“My employers are forever not in the house because they always have business trips and I am enjoying this, it is not easy to work when someone is looking at you. I am staying with their two children who are finishing high school this year. The house is like mine; the only problem is the boy child, he is very ‘naughty’ but boys are boys” (Martha, 13 October 2022).*

Although Martha’s feedback indicated positive work experience towards her work, I observed that she was not happy of being deprived of some basic freedoms such as visiting and be visited by her family and children and interacting with the community. Domestic workers are unlikely

to mount any challenge against unfair treatment in their workplaces. Eventually, they succumb to ill treatment and unfair labour practices. This could be attributed to their inherent fear of being wageless or unemployed.

I asked about some of the house chores she was responsible for and whether she was satisfied with the salary. *“The only thing I am enjoying here is to work without bosses around and that yes, I save my money but it is ‘too little’ but there is nothing I can do. The problem with domestic work is that there is too much work that is not for a domestic worker, but we do that work. For example, there are three dogs that I must feed and wash and now they said from next month I must walk them in the morning. On top of that, I water the garden every day because the gardener only comes on weekends. You see all of this is not for female domestic worker, but I must do it but there is no extra income. I am hoping to do my papers so that I can work in a store or restaurant (Martha, 13 October 2022).*

Domestic workers are not oblivious about their own exploitation in the sector. The confrontation and engagement with their employers regarding working conditions is unrealistic as it gets overshadowed by the fear of losing their jobs. The need for earning a wage supersedes any condition domestic workers confront.

The Covid-19 lockdown had adverse effects on some domestic workers. This impact was felt by both the migrant domestic workers and internal migrant domestic workers. One domestic worker at Lombardy West expressed it like this: *“My working conditions changed completely. I was working five days a week, and everything changed to only two days a week. You see, this is about more than half of my pay and I must send some of this money back home” (Sara, 15 September 2022)*

Some respondents had this to say: *“My boss is the best; she takes care of my children’s needs especially for school and I get a good bonus during December and my birthdays. I have worked for more than five years for her, and all is going well. Maybe because she is white, I don’t know. During Covid lockdown I was not working. She sent me home because she had contracted Covid-19. She paid me full salary while I was not working. can you believe it” (Jeanette, 23 September 2022).*

The internal migrant domestic workers were most openly critical about their employers, wages and working conditions. Londeka from KwaZulu Natal in South Africa gave this feedback about her employment in the domestic work sector: *“Whites will always be Whites. I am not satisfied in this job because my needs are more than what I am getting. What I can say is that*

they are better than the Indian family I used to work for back in KZN. The house is big and there are about four children that are at school and now madam got her fifth child this year. The R4000 'incane' (Zulu word for not enough). It can be better for live-in domestic worker not me because I must travel to Tembisa everyday then almost a thousand goes to transport. I only work because it is not easy to find a job as a domestic worker especially when you are from South Africa" (Londeka, 23 February 2023)

Londeka is a 35-year-old mother of five. Her lastborn was only two years and stayed with her 62-year-old mother who depended on old age social grant. Londeka conceded that her mother remits some money to her every month as a top up to her salary. *"My children are on SASA, and she is also getting her own pension. Every month, she sends me something because I am renting here in Tembisa. Covid-19 grant is also helping a lot although it is too little"* (Londeka, 23 February 2023).

The remnants of apartheid legacy continue to shape the relationship between black and white South Africans. There are overt intentions of resistance among South African domestic workers. One could argue that this resistance is somehow linked to the government grants that the ANC government consistently gives to qualifying persons monthly. This was further affirmed by Lisa from Umtata in the Eastern Cape (SA) as she gave this account about her work: *"Sometimes you wonder if it's not better go back home and thrive on grant money only. The cost of living is too high here in Johannesburg and employers assume that we are happy with what they are giving us. The wages are very low, even Expanded Public Works Program workers get paid better for doing nothing. If I don't receive any increase this year, I am going home. My parents are still alive, and they are getting their old-age grant. They are my shoulder to cry on and that move will be better than being overworked and exploited by domestic worker employers"* (Lisa, 18 March 2023).

I asked her if she would prefer a black person as her boss and she replied: *"Those ones are worse than whites, its better white people than black employers in this work. I have worked for black people almost all my life, 'they are very stingy and oppressive' they can easily accuse you of stealing their clothes and items in the house. The lesser we talk about them the better."* (Lisa, 18 March 2023).

The question of employer preference brought competing views between migrant domestic workers and internal migrant domestic workers. This differing perspective was evident in an interview with Eunice from Malawi. She narrated: *"Both white and black people are the same*

to me. 'A boss is a boss'. They have their own challenges same as us domestic workers. They are also people. I can work for any boss if we agree on how we are going to work. I don't need a contract but just an agreement on how we are going to work. My Boss is my protector" (Eunice, 20 March 2023).

In her own observation, Eunice stated that migrant workers don't choose which boss they want to work for but they grab every opportunity to work. This explains why there is more foreign migrant domestic workers in that area than South African nationals who work there. She further explained that the difference in money exchange value could be influencing migrant domestic workers to take any job. This requires a further investigation into how the Rand exchange value could possibly influence employment of migrant workers in the sector. It became clear that on monetary terms, what was regarded as ridiculously low pay by the internal migrant domestic workers was "better than nothing" for the migrant domestic workers.

Similarly, Memory from Lesotho had this to say: *"What is important to me is the job and not the race or colour of an employer. I am here to work for my kids and conditions back home are not good. I am staying with my employer and do not have to pay any rent or transport. I do every work that they ask me to do because that's what I am hired for. Money cannot be enough, but we survive from what we are getting, the only problem is police who always wants us to pay them bribes for documents* (Memory, 28 March 2023)

The colour bar did not matter to migrant domestic workers as it did to internal migrant workers. Migrant domestic workers assume the position of being servants as opposed to being workers with rights. This could tell us something about what informs employer choices of domestic workers in the sector. The cohort of migrant domestic workers in the study were not bothered about UIF registration and worker's rights. Their 'first price' was to get a job and earn money.

Oleta from Bulawayo in Zimbabwe said this: *"I am like part of the family where I work. My boss drives me to the shops if I must go deposit money for my family. My working conditions are not that bad because I get enough. I am not buying any food and I am able to save money. I cannot complain about staying with my employer because my husband is in Zimbabwe"* (Oleta, 06 February 2023).

None of the participants among migrant domestic workers was in the country legally. Some either crossed the borders illegally or overstayed in South Africa with an invalid migration status. The internal migrants were not registered with the UIF either because of lack of knowledge about it. Equally, all the participants did not know about the National Minimum

Wage. The responsibility of government and organized labour for worker education on rights and benefits came as a challenge and weakness on the part of these institutions. The nature of domestic work sector limits access to employees in the sector as work happens in the gated private homes of employers.

During interviews, 10 employers of domestic workers were interviewed. The ages of these employers ranged between 28 and the age of 55 years. Two of the employers were white people from South Africa while one black middle-class employer came from Malawi. The remaining 7 employers were black-middle class from South Africa with at least a first degree. “The less skilled are always much more vulnerable to unemployment than the skilled” (Moore & Seekings, 2019, p. 5). All the employers were females who were either single with more than one child or married with children. Posel and Rogan (2009) observe that there are more women headed household in South Africa than men, as such, economic independence of women increased while there is notable decline in marriage. They worked in established companies and at least two women were working for themselves as entrepreneurs.

4.4. Emerging themes from employers of domestic workers in the City of Johannesburg

The employers of domestic workers commonly raised treating the domestic worker as part of the family. Black middle-class employers showed more sympathy towards migrant domestic workers from outside the country while the two white ladies were not concerned about the origin of the worker. The employers in the study did not register their employees for the UIF and they were all aware of the new minimum wage regulation and some revealed that they were paying more than the prescribed minimum wage. All the employers received their domestic workers through word of mouth and reference from friends, colleagues, and family members. The employers relied on verbal contracts as opposed to written contracts and they were all comfortable with this except for one employer who had difficulty proving at the CCMA that feeding her dogs was part of the contract.

4.4.1. Domestic worker as a family member

The sentiment of treating the domestic worker as a member of the family was common among the employers in the study although this could be interpreted as employers’ way of portraying kindness and sympathy to their employees, some of the domestic workers confirmed to be regarded as part of family by their employers during interviews.

Maria, aged 39, from Orange Grove expressed herself like this regarding this theme: *“I have always been with domestic workers my life, I do not know what I will be without them, my kids are grown-ups now and they are still under the care of a domestic worker, whom I don’t regard as a domestic worker. I always ensure that she doesn’t feel like a stranger in the house but one of our own, more especially that her family is not in South Africa”* (Maria, 03 August 2022)

Maria’s feedback emphasized her true care and appreciation for her domestic worker. One could feel the sense of empathy she has for her worker in her explanation. The fact that her domestic worker was a migrant worker made her to be more sympathetic and accommodative. It remains to be seen whether her sympathy would extend to internal migrant as well.

Innocentia aged 55 from Hazel View has been with her domestic worker for at least ten years. Her domestic worker was from Malawi. *“Pretty is my daughter and I don’t have any other things to say. Our relationship is a mother and daughter relationship. Pretty started by caring for my children and she takes care of my grandchildren now, you see, it’s a tried and tested relationship”* (Innocentia, 23 October 2022).

When I asked about Pretty’s legal status, she said: *“Last time I checked, yes, she has her papers, but I don’t think she has now, but I will ask. No, wait, she goes home every December, so I am sure she has her valid papers as a responsible adult.”* Innocentia, 23 October 2022

Innocentia came to know Pretty via reference from her previous employer who worked with her. *“I was a manager at work, and I got referred by one of my subordinates, since then, we never looked back”* (Innocentia, 23 October 2022).

From this interview, it became clear from the number of years that the domestic worker spent with the family that their relationship was stable. However, Pretty only visited her family once a year. This could suggest that the benefits of the employer were unmeasurable as she was always available as and when asked by the employer. Live-in arrangements are more beneficial to the employer than the employee. The migrant domestic worker spends off days and holidays in the private home of the employer thus allowing the employer to continuously ask for domestic services. In the literature, the idea of being part of the family is viewed differently, as domestic worker is seen as a victim of exploitation under the pretext of being part of the family. To the contrary, some domestic workers enjoy benefits that may appear lucrative in the short term but there are no guarantees to sustain them beyond working period.

The intimacy that characterises the domestic worker and her employer makes her seem like a family member not a worker. In more ways, this sense of intimacy can be false and deprive the worker some legal labour benefits (Albin & Mantouvalou, 2012). In other countries like the United Kingdom (UK), this arrangement is legislated as they argue; “If treated as family members, domestic workers are from minimum wage Act altogether” (Albin & Mantouvalou, 2012, p. 5).

Similarly, de Villiers and Taylor (2019) argue that the emotional and relational complexity of the domestic work employment relationship in some ways overrides the role played by an employment contract and fair legislation in guaranteeing the rights of domestic workers. In a study conducted to explore whether domestic workers in South Africa benefit from their relationships with their employers, Burger (et al., 2013) found that domestic workers benefit from their linking ties with employers. It is clear from the above literature that human factor is the key element in the way these relationships occur in private homes.

Another employer at Corlett Gardens expressed in this manner : “ *My domestic worker is a family member, she gets everything that we get in the house, wi-fi, ‘which she abuses but its ok’ and has access to all television -channels as she is alone during the day, think about it, she spends more time in the house than me, so, she is part of the family like that, if you get what I mean*” (Linda, 25 November 2022).

Employers in the interviews emphasized the notion of being part of the family as an overarching experience for their domestic workers. Freedom of movement is more lucrative than being housed in private homes with no interaction with the outside world. The freedom of migrant live-in domestic workers to move and associate is limited. There is a plethora of reasons why migrant domestic workers’ movements are limited, first is that most of the time migrant domestic workers often lack legal documentation thus making them fear deportation by authorities. Second is that migrant domestic workers are aware of the abundance of labour reserve in the sector therefore they go extra miles to distinguish themselves as ‘Good girl’ in the eyes of the employers.

Pauline aged 40 whose is an employer of a domestic worker expressed herself like this: “Domestic workers are also human beings and that must be respected. I empathize with my domestic workers but sometimes they take advantage and abuse you as their employer” (Pauline, 14 November 2022)

For this employer, the relationship should be that of employer and employee, thus a worker and a boss. She further added: *“I like domestic workers, but they can take you especially ones from South Africa. If you treat them as family, they tell the entire street about your personal problems, so, I decided to keep it professional”* (Pauline, 14 November 2022)

Pauline’s experience with South Africans is a pleasant one. This has made her to change how she relates with domestic workers especially internal migrants. There is a covert hostile relationship between black middle-class employers and internal migrants. Some of the South African domestic workers expressed dissatisfaction towards their black middle-class employers more especially South Africans. The notions of different class same race need proper analysis in the post-apartheid South Africa.

The domestic work sector has a history of being associated with ‘white’ madams. Furthermore, as argued in previous chapters, black middle -class historically used their family members as unpaid domestic workers in their homes. This could be the genesis of the tensions between the black middle- class employer and their internal migrant domestic workers from rural areas.

4.4.2. Choice of a domestic worker

Employers had different things to say about the type of a domestic worker they wanted. The most common theme among employers was how they get their domestic workers. They highlighted referrals by family members, colleagues and neighbours as most reliable and easy way to get a domestic worker.

“I got my domestic worker through a referral so there was no option to choose. If I had an opportunity, I would have probably chosen differently.” (Lindi, 21 November 2022). This response brings an important dimension to this study. Most employers receive domestic workers through their networks and fail to even interview them because they trust their reference. Interviews are important to gauge the level of competence and knowledge for any job. The tendency to bypass interviews in this sector is indicative of a perpetual stereotype about women’s role in the kitchen. The assumption is that women domestic workers already know what they are expected to do by virtue of their gender. Further studies may be necessary to explore this phenomenon further.

She adds:

“I don’t have a good experience with South Africa domestic workers, the last one I had took my children’s clothes and never came back. She was very argumentative and sometimes to the

point of fighting with me and I feared that. I have worked with a lot of them, and they seem to be the same to me. I can take any domestic worker as long as is not a South African” (Lindi, 21 November 2022).

One other employer expressed it like this: *“I don’t take local domestic workers for employment, and this is for obvious reasons. They always have side commitments, and they are not reliable. All the time you must plan according to her plans and not the other way round. You will just be informed and not be requested. If it’s a weekend and she is away, you must just know that Monday she is either coming late or not coming at all. This is strange and discouraging” (Zodwa, 6 December 2022)*

Lorrain, white employer, aged 34 from Northern suburbs said: *“Domestic worker is a domestic worker and for me nationality doesn’t matter. All I want is a person who does the work. I have lived with domestic workers from across the region. They all work. The only problem with internal migrant workers is that they have relationships close by and visit relatives from time to time but that should not be a problem when there is an agreement in place. (Lorraine, 30 September 2022)*

Another white employer expressed: *“to be honest, there is no difference for me” (Suzan, 18 December 2022)*

The noticeable different experiences between white and black employers speak to the historical relations of domestic work which was characterized by racial hierarchies. The white person has historically occupied a dominant position in society and domestic work, where’s the idea of different class same race madam is regarded as relatively new in the paid domestic work setting. The perpetual tensions between black middle-class employers and internal migrants in South Africa could be linked to the understanding that they know only dominance from white employers and not blacks in the context of South Africa. The reality is that black middle-class employers give employment to black- domestic workers but differ in preferences of domestic worker’s home country.

In the earlier chapters of this report, literature has suggested that black middle-class employers exploit the vulnerability of foreign migrant domestic workers as most of them illegally enters South African borders. Again, the audacity of black middle-class employers to choose foreign migrants as preferred workers demonstrates that a lacuna in the legal system to monitor working relations in the domestic work sector exists as earlier argued by Vanyoro (2019).

Another black middle-class family from Malawi narrated: *“You must hire one of the South Africans. You will come and tell me your experience. They have too many rights and they know the law. So, you see, we are not looking for lawyers, we need domestic workers. Another thing is that the government is doing everything they want, from child grants, giving them house, take them to school, give them pension when they are old and now, they are still getting Covid money. They get everything for free what do you expect? We are not surprised when they are problematic and choosey”* (Mavis, 28 December 2022).

Mavis’s interview may bring us to an understanding of what truly shape attitudes of local domestic workers and their attitudes are important to understand what informs the employer choice of a domestic worker in the country. The limitations of this study do not allow generalization across the population as a much bigger sample size will be required to comfortably generalize on findings.

The expansion of social protection in the post-apartheid era is applauded but not without criticism as Scully (2019) notes that working-age South Africans relied on what he termed ‘reverse remittance’. This is because the social protection grant did not include them. The working-age received its social grant breakthrough during lockdowns when ANC government decided to roll out SRD grants across the working-age population not in employment.

4.4.3. Knowledge of legislation regulating the sector

All employers in the study were aware of the current developments in the domestic work sector. They expressed themselves as people who go beyond what is legislated to ensure that domestic workers are happy. Strangely, despite these claims, none of the employers had gone to register their employees with the UIF and none of them had written contractual agreement with their employees.

“I know that when you get employed you must have a contract like me, but I don’t have it with her, only verbal agreement” (Lukho, 10 January 2023).

Some employers expressed that contracts create tensions in a domestic work setting.

“When you talk about legal contract employees start feeling uncertain, remember some are not documented so fear of legal processes is innate” (Lona, 23 November 2023)

The contractual obligation although important in regulating relationships, for undocumented migrants, may be viewed as taking away a right to be regarded as ‘part of the family’. This right is accrued through loyalty, hard work and being subservient to the employer.

Yolisa, aged 38 expressed herself in this fashion: *“My domestic worker is happy because I do more than what the SA government prescribes, for example. My domestic worker gets paid R5000 monthly, and this is almost twice the minimum wage of less than R4000”* (Yolisa, 21 November 2022)

The employers in this study understood the requirement to register their employees with the UIF, but none of them had registered their employees, this could be due to the illegal nature of their employee’s status.

I asked one employer about the legal status of her employees, she responded: *“Whew, that’s the work of the police, I am only concerned about my clean house, washed, and ironed clothes, the documents will be sorted by police”* (Vela, 12 December 2022)

The finding here revealed how employers deliberately overlook the needs of their employees and only prioritise domestic service. The migration laws are shelved as the undocumented migrant worker benefits the employers.

Employers of domestic workers, in their quest for a hard-working domestic worker, knowingly neglect important legal principles that govern the sector as such, ultimately becoming accomplices or legal delinquents indirectly.

4.5. Department of Labour and Employment perspective

The interview with the official from the Department of Labour and Employment confirmed the inability of the department to enter the houses of employers. The official explained like this: *“Inspectors are confronted with difficult situations when it comes to the domestic work sector. There are Pitbull, heavily securitized Estates and the employer must consent to your visit. Even domestic workers in the sector are always hostile to us as they fear deportation”* (DoEL official, 30 February 2023)

The department confirmed that new mechanisms to address the intrinsic issues within the domestic work sector were being explored.

4.6. INTERVIEW WITH COSATU AND SADSAWU

From the 26-29 of September 2022, I had an opportunity to be the guest of the outgoing General Secretary of Cosatu, Bheki Ntshalintshali

I asked him about the future of the domestic work sector, and he replied:

“Future is bright in the sector; we can start with the with the small victories that we have achieved as a sector. They look small but they are big, for example the protection of domestic workers under sectoral determination, the minimum wage victory, and the fact that even illegal migrant domestic workers are now protected and regarded as employees under the LRA. Yes, the domestic work sector has challenges and part of the bigger challenge is the nature of employment which is carried out in the private homes of employers where there is no witness to see anything irregular. What has been the challenge broadly is to organize the sector and our sister Union SADSAWU has been trying so hard to make inroads and mobilize the sector” (Ntshalintshali, 26 September 2022).

When I asked about the challenges of migration and employment in the domestic work sector, he expressed this: *“Trade liberalism did not only open industry but extended to people’s free movement in search of better opportunities. This movement needs to happen in a carefully managed manner otherwise host countries suffer the consequences of unmanaged migration patterns. This is something that we have been advocating for at a level of NEDLAC with our social partners and we are yet to see the implementation of the migration policies as agreed” (Ntshalintshali, 26 September 2022).*

Although this interview did not take long as I would have wanted, the General Secretary assumed the position of a statesman in his responses, very abstract but touching on the recent successes of organized labour. The contestation of policies happens at NEDLAC where trade union federations, government and business meet to consolidate, agree or disagree on some of the policy direction the country needs to consider.

I had an opportunity to meet Ms Eunice Dhladhla of SADSAWU.

She had worked in the domestic work sector since the late 70’s. she had experienced the sector transforming from apartheid regime to the post-apartheid South Africa.

This is what she said:

“If I can start talking about this sector you won’t go home. What I noticed is that there is no appreciation of what this sector has achieved but I don’t blame most people as they don’t have adequate history of the domestic work sector.” (Dladla, 28 September 2022).

I asked about mobilization and most people in the sector, she responded: *“It’s a disaster, we used to have foreign migrants but now there is competition by some migrant unions. Most of the domestic workers from outside don’t have documents and they fear our association with governing party may send them to jail. The victory of COSATU is a victory of SADZAWU. All successes that you see, such as UIF, sectoral determination are collective efforts of this COSATU alliance. We are very proud of our history” (Dladla, 28 September 2022).*

CHAPTER FIVE: RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

5.1. INTRODUCTION

This study investigated the popular narratives on the employment of migrant domestic workers in the City of Johannesburg. The competition for jobs in the City of Johannesburg intensified between 2008 to date. It became clear that the domestic work sector continues to be the most vulnerable and difficult for authorities to access as confirmed by domestic work literature, Unions and other participants in this study. The daunting challenge of ensuring compliance with all progressive labour and migration policies is exacerbated by nature of domestic work employment which happens in private homes of employers. Employers in the study confirmed their preferred domestic workers and advanced reasons for their choices. This at least gives the government an opportunity to make necessary policy interventions to balance employment in the sector while ensuring that competition in the job market is fair.

This balance could be achieved by implementing the following recommendations:

5.2. Tax incentives for qualifying employers in the domestic work sector.

These incentives could be paid as gratitude enhancers to encourage qualifying employers in the sector. The conditions attached to these incentives should be that employers in the domestic work sector employ legally qualifying persons on a written contractual agreement and register their employees with the Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF) and other relevant employment benefits. The employers should be given the responsibility to monitor the legal status of their employees. The payment paid to the domestic workers should not be less than the prescribed minimum wage in South Africa. In January 2019, the National Minimum Wage policy (NMW) came into effect in South Africa. Domestic workers were entitled to a minimum wage of R19,09 per hour by 2021 (NMW Act, No.9 of 2018).

5.3. Provide amnesty for undocumented persons.

The mass deportations of illegal immigrants have not truly assisted the South African government. There is a need to do things differently. “Amnesty denotes a process through which unauthorized immigrants residing in a national state are given the chance to transition to legal status there” (Bosniak, 2016, p. 26). Migration issues continue to haunt South Africa despite being an expensive exercise that cost government ridiculous amounts of money. The

SA government should give all persons who are in the country illegally opportunity to get registered. This exercise should involve SAPS, DOHA, and DoEL. Although this may prove to be cumbersome, benefits could last for a lengthy period if properly managed. All the above departments should have special offices, specially dedicated for the purpose of registering. The benefits could include crime eradication and more employment creation in the departments mentioned above.

5.4. Professionalisation of the domestic work sector.

Literacy levels of domestic workers are low, making it difficult for them to make entry in other sectors. Government could embark in massive professionalization of the sector by rolling out a specific curriculum to address literacy needs. Upon completion, SETA accredited certificate should be issued to competent participants which will align with their pay grade. For example, level 1, 2 and 3 being the highest paid domestic worker. This will encourage participation while restoring the dignity of employees in the sector.

To ensure consciousness and awareness of the evolving nature of domestic work, the SA government through the Department of Labour and Employment should take bold steps in making sure that people are inducted and trained as part of keeping-up with the changing time and racial composition of employers in the domestic sector thus eliminating the idea of ‘white’ madam. Since 1994, South Africa experienced a change in the profile of domestic workers’ employers. This was necessitated by the increasing numbers of black middle class since the end of apartheid. This change could negatively affect the internal migrant workers in the sector if left unattended.

5.5. Alleviate pressure on domestic work sector.

The sector carries the burden of both internal and international migrants who come from their home rural provinces looking for better opportunities in the City of Johannesburg. The South African Government should consider investing in the labor-intensive industries like agriculture and manufacturing, thus building factories, malls and new cities in rural provinces and create employment. “Employment growth is premised on; inter alia, robust growth of labour-intensive industrial sectors, exports, and institutional flexibility” (Mahadea & Simson, 2010, p. 399).

The formal employment in manufacturing and other labour-intensive industries has been declining over the years. In the manufacturing sector, employment declined from 1.2 million in 2000 to 871 260, and employment in agriculture also declined from 1.6 million in 1990 to

1.2 million in 2008; employment in mining sector declined from 521 379 to 474 007 over the same period (Stats SA, 2008). This structural change in the economy has clearly burdened sectors like domestic work as more people desperately needed employment to secure their livelihoods.

Lastly, the continuous payment extension of SRD grant presents an opportune moment for government to establish Basic Income Grant (BIG) for all qualifying citizens. This will afford government with an opportunity to receive more tax revenue as most employed persons will contribute to new tax brackets created by BIG payments. This will in turn enable government to service its debt while most South Africans thrive.

5.6. CONCLUSIONS

The discourse of migration and rising unemployment in the country is fraught with challenges. Despite the government's endless efforts to end the perpetual scourge of poverty since 1994, very little has been achieved in correcting the situation. This study aimed to investigate the popular narratives about the choice of employing foreign nationals over locals in the City of Johannesburg's domestic work sector. In the course of the study, a plethora of factors emerged from participants. These factors include but are not limited to illegal migration status of workers in the sector, cheap labour exploitation by employers in the sector, stringent labour laws in South Africa, culture of non-compliance on the part of employers, and reluctance of South Africans to take up domestic work employment.

The decline of the manufacturing sector and other labour-intensive industries in the economy compelled low skilled labour-force to look for jobs in the domestic work sector. The competition in the sector intensified as most women from the SADC countries migrated to South Africa searching for 'piece job' in the domestic work sector. This phenomenon was further exacerbated by the 2008 Global financial crisis where most economies experienced a decay.

The inspection and monitoring on the domestic work sector has its intricacies as work is always performed in the private homes of employers. This reduced inspection in the domestic work sector together with unsteady border management indirectly contributes to unhealthy competition which ultimately gives way to opportunistic violent actions of xenophobia. The competition for scarce jobs pits South African poor against vulnerable migrants. This make it appear as if the precarious jobs that the migrants 'get' are such great resources, rather than a structural dynamic of capitalism.

There is a need for government to allocate enough resources to address the complex nature of domestic work. Notwithstanding the different mechanisms that are employed to enforce compliance in the sector, new and viable ways such as provision of incentives to compliant employers of domestic workers could yield positive results and promote equitable access in the sector.

This study may not necessarily generalise for the entire population of the City of Johannesburg given the size of the sample, however, future research with a bigger sample in this field could enrich this work more vigorously and contribute in theory building.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A : QUESTIONS FOR DOMESTIC WORKERS

RESEARCH INSTRUMENT: ONE ON ONE INTERVIEWS

Interview Guide for Domestic workers in the City of Johannesburg.

Researcher : Mpumelelo Zengani

Research topic: The discourse of migration and the scramble for jobs in the city of Johannesburg's domestic work sector from period 2008 to date.

Interview questions

1. Please tell me about yourself and what you do for a living?
2. Where and when were you born? where did you grow up?
3. What motivated you to come to the City of Johannesburg?
4. Do you think it's easy to find a job in the City of Johannesburg?
5. What did your parents do?
6. Did you go to school? If yes, highest grade passed?
7. And how did you join this occupation? What did you do prior to this?
8. What kind of tasks do you perform as a domestic worker? (e.g. cleaning, cooking, ironing, laundry, child care, etc.)
9. Are you currently a member of any organization/union that works with domestic workers?
10. Why did you join the union or continue to be a part of it?
11. Are there any challenges you face as a domestic worker? How do you address them?
12. If member of a union/organization, do you contact the union to address any of the challenges? If yes, please tell me more about them.
13. Does your employer know that you are a part of the union? Why or why not?
14. If there is something you could change about this occupation, what would be that? Why?
15. In your view, has the prevalence of laws impacted other workers' relationship with their employers? If yes, why?
16. What type of work does your employer do?

17. What do you know about the minimum wage/UIF?
18. Does your employer know about the laws applicable to the employment relationship? Do they adhere to them? If no, why not? Eg, UIF, minimum wage
19. Do you think domestic work is like any other work in South African society? Why or why not?
20. Is there anything that you would like to share or ask me?

APPENDIX B: QUESTIONS FOR EMPLOYERS OF DOMESTIC WORKERS

RESEARCH INSTRUMENT: ONE ON ONE INTERVIEWS

Interview Guide for Employers in the domestic work sector

Research topic: The discourse of migration and scramble for jobs in the City of Johannesburg's domestic work sector from 2008 to date.

Researcher : Mpumelelo Zengani

Interview questions

1. Tell me about yourself, family, children, age, background.....
2. When did you start employing a domestic worker and why?
3. What are some of the advantages and disadvantages of having a domestic worker at home?
4. What type of work format do you prefer from domestic workers? sleep-in or parttime? and why?
5. How do you recruit domestic workers? agencies? Word of mouth?
6. Do you think this sector contributes in increasing or reducing unemployment and how?
7. If you were to be given an opportunity to change policy on migration and employment, what could be that?
8. What are the key areas/characteristics you look from a domestic worker?
9. What are the educational requirements, if any?
10. Do you currently have a domestic worker? For how long now and how would you describe her?
11. How conversant are you with the laws and regulations governing the sector? Eg, UIF and minimum wage
12. Is there any signed agreement, contract between you and your employee?
13. What type of a job/work are you doing and for how long?
14. Are there any challenges you face as a domestic worker employer? What are those challenges? How do you address them?
15. Do you think domestic work is like any other work in South African society? Why or why not?

16. If you were to be given an opportunity to change anything in the domestic work sector, what could be that?
17. Tell me about the best domestic worker you ever employed and why you think she is best?
18. Is there anything that you would like to share or ask me?

APPENDIX C: QUESTIONS FOR ORGANISATIONS/UNIONS

RESEARCH INSTRUMENT: ONE ON ONE INTERVIEWS

Interview Guide for COSATU, SADSAWU, UDWOSA, DHA AND DEL

Research topic: The discourse of migration and the scramble for jobs in the city of Johannesburg's domestic work sector from period 2008 to date.

Researcher : Mpumelelo Zengani

Interview questions

1. Tell me about yourself and what do you do in the organization
2. Tell me about your organization and what does it do?
3. What are the current policies on migration/employment and what informed them?
4. Is there a specific policy for the informal sector such as domestic workers? if yes, please elaborate.
5. What do you think about the relationship between unemployment rate and migration in the sector?
6. If you were to be given an opportunity to change policy on migration and unemployment, what could be that and why?
7. What are the current debates regarding unemployment in the sector and what is your view?
8. The Global economic crisis of 2008 had negatively affected most organizations, how were you affected by this? Recruitment/ membership decline? (**Question not for government officials**)
9. If there is something you could change about this occupation, what would be that? Why?
10. Do you think domestic work is like any other work in South African society? Why or why not?
11. Is there anything that you would like to share which I have not asked?

