

**Working on-demand in the domestic sector: A case study
on the experiences of platform domestic work in Cape
Town.**

Tengetile Wamkelwe Nhleko

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Supervisor: Bianca Tame

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COMPULSORY DECLARATION

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Abstract

There is a growing presence of platform companies of the gig economy that are providing platform domestic work in South Africa, more specifically cleaning services. In the platform domestic work model, the provision of domestic service is now undertaken on an on-demand basis and is organized and structured virtually through an online platform or 'app' provided and managed by private technology companies or platform companies. Platform companies in the sector are part of the wider shift towards the modernization of domestic work through commercialization by private, for-profit companies. Using an interpretivist case study approach, this study sought to understand domestic workers' motivations for becoming platform domestic workers, their experiences of the job and the ways in which the platform domestic work model is structured and executed. This study is based on in-depth qualitative interviews with ten platform domestic workers in Cape Town, and a document analysis of public interviews and published company materials about their platform company SweepSouth. Findings in this study were analysed using a labour process theory lens that is based on the permissive-power framework of platform work governance by Vallas and Schor (2020). This study finds that the commercialization of domestic work through the gig economy addresses unemployment in the domestic sector by allowing workers easy and reliable access to a regular supply of jobs through digital platforms. However, it does not overcome underemployment in the sector, which prompts workers to seek additional work outside the digital platform. Platform leakage, a phenomenon whereby platform workers and platform customers transact outside of the platform following their initial service interaction on the platform, was found to be a common occurrence among platform domestic workers in this case study. Platform leakage shows that domestic workers approach the platform as a networking tool to gain access to regular cleaning work with clients on and off the platform, and to also gain access to more favourable work opportunities once matched to desirable clients on the platform. This study also found that working on-demand as a platform domestic worker is a highly insecure form of work. Platform domestic workers experience intensified levels of commodification on the platform and a market despotism in the regulation of their labour effort. Managerial control over platform domestic workers' labor is exercised indirectly and from a distance, through the practice of management-by-customers and the algorithmic surveillance and monitoring of work and productivity on the platform. This affords the platform

immensely consequential “permissive power” over workers and the platform domestic work labor process. This study argues that the gig economy and gig work as an externally driven force of modernization in the domestic sector leads to the severe commodification of domestic workers. There is a need for a worker-led and or negotiated gig economy transformation of the domestic sector that empowers platform domestic workers and guarantees their access to rights and labour protections as workers.

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1. Introduction and background

Domestic work is generally defined as paid work done inside other peoples’ homes (Callister, Tortell and Williams, 2009:7), and involves work tasks such as cooking, cleaning, and caring (Callister et al., 2009:7). According to this definition, domestic workers are both carers and cleaners (Callister et al., 2009). The job of being a domestic worker is one of the oldest occupations in world history and is a product of various forms of servitude relations such as colonialism and slavery (Cosser, 1973; Aubert, 1956; ILO, 2010). In South Africa, the occupation traces its origins and contemporary form to the colonial and apartheid period, where it emerged as one of

the first forms of wage work for male Black Africans and later, Black African women (Ally, 2009). As servants, domestic workers during this time suffered extreme forms of exploitation in the form of unfair pay, unregulated working conditions, and employment relationships (Ally, 2009; Cock, 1980). The occupation was a symbol and tool for the practice of racial exploitation of the black African population and sexism of the era, hence working conditions were dehumanising and extremely exploitative (Cock, 1980; Ally, 2009).

In today's post-apartheid period, most domestic workers in South Africa are women, and domestic work is currently the fourth largest employer of women in the country, accounting for about 13% of women's employment after Elementary service, Sales and Services and Clerical work (Statistics South Africa, 2021). Black African women still dominate the sector, followed by coloured women (Hunt and Samman, 2020; Budlender, 2016). One of the most significant transformations in the domestic sector however has been the inclusion of domestic workers into South Africa's labour legislative frameworks, resulting in their transformation from servants to workers entitled to regulated and protected employment (Ally, 2009).

Such formalisation efforts in the country have also had the effect of spurring the rapid growth of commercial domestic work agencies in the sector as employers increasingly seek to outsource to private, for-profit companies the employment of domestic workers and the now mandated legal requirements and responsibilities over domestic workers (Du Toit, 2013; Tame, 2018). The South African domestic sector has thus experienced the emergence and rapid growth of commercial companies providing either direct household cleaning services to clients or recruitment and placement services to domestic workers and householders (Du Toit, 2013).

1.1 Statement of the problem

The introduction of private, for-profit companies in the domestic sector represents the commercialisation of domestic work (Neetha, 2008:27). In line with this movement towards commercialisation, technology-centred companies known colloquially as 'platform companies of the so-called "gig economy"' (or 'platform economy') have likewise made their way into the South African domestic sector.

The gig economy is a new sector of work where technology companies have created digital online platforms to provide short-term work services or 'gigs' to service requesters on their platforms (Du Ruyter and Brown, 2019). Through these digital platforms, short-term work is performed upon request by workers on an independent contracting basis, with little prospects for employment continuity (Hunt and Machingura, 2016; Du Ruyter and Brown, 2019). Some have labelled these types of work arrangements as the platform economy rather than the gig economy (see Vallas and Schor, 2020; Veen et al., 2020). However, using the term gig economy remains the prevailing norm in the literature.

The business model of the gig economy is typically structured in such a manner that the company that owns the digital platform, henceforth referred to as the platform company, organises the labour exchange between the worker and the service requester on the digital platform, and sets the conditions of engagement between them (De Stefano, 2016). Digital platforms of the gig economy are hence operating a business model based on the 'virtualisation of work organisation' whereby work is organised and structured virtually through the company-created, internet-based platform or app (Huws, 2017:31).

Platform companies of the gig economy create a new labour form in the domestic sector. Hunt and Machingura (2016) have defined this new form of domestic work of the gig economy as 'on-demand domestic work' because through digital platforms, workers provide one-time domestic services to multiple clients whenever and wherever their services are requested. Working on the platform involves providing domestic work services upon request, to multiple customers on the platform. However, a more suitable label for this kind of domestic work of the gig economy is 'platform domestic work' because it emphasises the centrality of the digital platform as the key innovation of the gig economy and locates this form of domestic work in the broader category of various kinds of piecework jobs that are being provided to customers or service requesters through the digital platforms of the gig economy.

Platform companies first emerged in the South African domestic sector around the years 2014 and 2015 (Van Rensburg, 2016; Naidoo, 2020). Initially, the sector had two such companies, namely: SweepSouth and Domestly (Hunt and Machingura, 2016). Domestly ceased operations in 2020 as an online domestic labour platform

and reasons for its failures are unclear. SweepSouth's main gig economy competitor in recent years has been the platform company GetTOD which was founded in 2016 to provide home maintenance and cleaning services upon demand to private homeowners and business in addition to its other on-demand services (GetTOD, 2021; Cape Business News, 2016).

The recent addition of platform domestic work provided by platform companies such as SweepSouth and GetTOD in South Africa needs more scholarly research and attention to understand the ways in which it is impacting working conditions in the domestic sector. While some researchers and scholars have taken up this task in recent years, much of the South African literature on domestic work has an overwhelming focus on the traditional, informal employment relationship between domestic workers and their employers within private households (Du Toit, 2013; Hunt and Machingura, 2016). Extensive research on the scope and operation of private commercial companies in the domestic sector is vastly underdeveloped (Du Toit, 2013).

With this gap in mind, this study was undertaken with the aim to expand the literature on the commercialisation of domestic work in South Africa, focusing on commercialisation by the recently emerging platform domestic work companies of the gig economy. This study is an interpretive case study on the experience of platform domestic work in South Africa, based on in-depth qualitative interviews with a sample of platform domestic workers in Cape Town, and document analysis of published company material and interviews about their platform company SweepSouth. According to Bartlett and Vavrus (2017:32), an interpretive case study research design seeks to interrogate and understand the meanings and interpretations that people make and attribute to a given phenomenon. The intention behind this case study was to draw theoretical conclusions about the experience of platform domestic work as a type of gig work in the domestic sector, as understood and defined by workers themselves.

The central research question addressed by this case study is as follows:

What do the experiences of platform domestic workers reveal about the emerging impact of gig work in the South African domestic sector?

Sub-questions:

1. What motivates workers to become platform domestic workers in South Africa?
2. How are workers experiencing and engaging with the job of being platform domestic workers?
3. How is platform domestic work structured and how is it executed by workers?

Findings from this study outline some of the emerging insights into the ways in which the platform domestic work model is affecting working conditions in the South African domestic sector, drawing on platform domestic workers' reported experiences of the job. This study examined the reasons why domestic workers chose to become platform workers and how they engage with this work arrangement. The study also examined the ways in which their work on the platform is organised and executed, by examining workers' experiences of factors such as job routines, work autonomy, and remuneration on the platform.

A labour process analysis of gig work utilising Vallas and Schor's (2020) 'permissive power' framework on the governance of platform work, along with the theory of labour commodification was used in this analysis to understand the specifics of the platform domestic work labour process, the ways in which it is structured, undertaken, and experienced by domestic workers.

1.3 Rational for the study

The phenomenon of platform domestic work is an example of the modernisation of domestic work employment through technology and commercialisation. The improvement of the working conditions of domestic work is often expressed in the literature using the logic of modernisation theory (Mendez, 1997). A significant part of the literature suggests that domestic work as an occupation remains a highly exploitative form of work because it has not been transformed away from its feudal form of the Master-Servant relationship to an entirely modern occupation based on contractual, depersonalised, and rationalised employment relations (ILO, 2010; Devetter and Rousseau, 2009). These pre-modern characteristics of domestic work persist and result in the stigmatisation and exploitation of domestic workers according to this literature (Ally, 2009). They include: a lack of extensive labour protection standards when compared to other modern occupations; poor remuneration; highly informal and personalised employment relations based on

ascribed status and requirements for 'servility' on the part of workers by employers (Devetter and Rousseau, 2009; Coser, 1973; Aubert, 1956).

Overcoming poor working conditions and the stigmatisation of domestic workers is hence thought to be possible through the transformation of the occupation into a modern, industrial occupation (Devetter and Rousseau, 2009). As such, modernising domestic work is taken to be synonymous with its formalisation, industrialisation, and commercialisation by many scholars and policy makers alike (Coser, 1973; Mendez, 1998; Pérez and Stallaert, 2016; Devetter and Rousseau, 2009).

Therefore, as agents of modernisation, technological transformations and commercialisation drives in the domestic sector ought to be scrutinised and evaluated against their perceived potential to improve the working lives of domestic workers in South Africa and beyond. The gig economy as an example of the modernisation of domestic work using the forces of technology and commercialisation must be studied to evaluate its adequacy for addressing existing gaps in the struggle for decent work for domestic workers. Such examination requires the prioritisation of domestic workers' voices and experiences of gig work.

1.4 Thesis outline

This thesis is divided into nine chapters. Chapter 1 is an introductory chapter that provides a brief overview of the phenomenon of platform domestic work and highlights the key research problem and research questions of this case study. Chapter 2 gives an overview of the literature on the major changes in the South African domestic work sector in recent years and locates platform domestic work in the trend towards rising commercialisation of domestic work by for-profit commercial agencies in the sector. This chapter also examines existing literature on the experience of platform domestic work from scholars globally and in the South African context. Chapter 3 provides a critical theoretical discussion on the commercialisation of domestic work and its further transformation through platform technology of the gig economy. This discussion is structured according to the theory of commodification and 'permissive power' in capitalist labour processes. Chapter 4 is a discussion of the interpretive case study methodological approach used for this research inquiry. This chapter also provides a profile of the platform domestic

workers interviewed as key informants and primary units of analysis and explains the ways in which their contributions were collected and analysed.

To allow for contextual understanding of key informants' narratives about their experiences and opinions about their work as platform domestic workers, chapter 5 discusses the business model of the platform domestic work company SweepSouth, which this study is based on. Chapter 6 and 7 are the main discussions of findings about platform domestic workers' experiences of platform domestic work at SweepSouth. Chapter 6 investigates workers' engagement with platform domestic work and the ways in which it is transforming their working conditions in the sector, while Chapter 7 examines the labour process of platform domestic work and workers' adjustments to this kind of domestic work. Chapter 8 and 9 provide a summary discussion about the emerging impact of the gig economy in the South African domestic sector and highlights some key gaps that future studies on the topic ought to expand on.

2. Literature Review

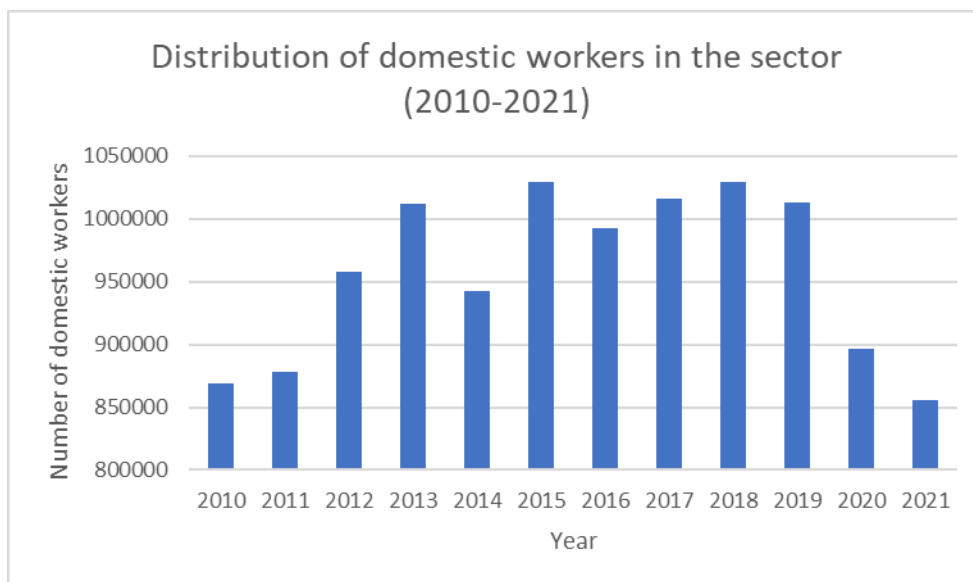
This chapter presents a literature overview of the commercialization of domestic work in South Africa to highlight the context in which the gig economy is emerging in. The discussion begins with a brief discussion of the key trends in the South African domestic sector today, which are: widespread unemployment and underemployment, shift to part time work and the changing demographic profile of employers and domestic work in the post-apartheid period. The discussion also identifies external changes and initiatives by the state and commercial companies to improve the working conditions of domestic work and 'modernise' the occupation in South Africa. Platform domestic work is part of this external modernisation drive, and the

remainder of this chapter presents emerging findings on the impact that it is having on working conditions of domestic work in South Africa and beyond.

2.1 The domestic work sector in South Africa

South Africa has a large population of domestic workers. Domestic work employment figures have remained constant over the years, ranging around slightly less than to over a million workers (Budlender, 2016:10). This is supported and demonstrated in figure 1 below which shows a graphical representation of the distribution of domestic employment over the last ten years in South Africa, compiled by the author using statistical data published by the South African government's Statistics department.

Figure 1: Number of domestic workers in South Africa over the years 2010-2021



Source: *Quarterly Labour Force Surveys (2010-2021)*, Statistics South Africa

Black African women dominate the domestic work sector in South Africa (Hunt and Machingura, 2016; Fish, 2006; Ally, 2009). Domestic workers in South Africa are also relatively young; Budlender (2016) notes a mean age of 42 years using 2013 estimates of employment in the sector. A substantial proportion of domestic work is done informally; the exact figure of this cohort of workers is unknown but is acknowledged as being significant (Hunt and Samman, 2020:108). Domestic workers are located across the provinces of South Africa and in both rural areas and urban areas (Gama and Willemse, 2015; Budlender, 2016). Gama and Willemse (2015) note a correlation between the economic status of a province and the income levels of domestic workers in South Africa. In their analysis, higher incomes for

domestic workers were associated with highly economically active provinces such as Gauteng and the Western Cape and were further associated with richer municipalities within provinces (Gama and Willemse, 2015:739).

The employer profile of domestic workers is also noted to be undergoing some changes. The domestic work employer profile today is moving away from the predominance of white household employers developed during the apartheid era, to include a growing proportion of black household employers as the country experiences an increase in the black middle class in today's post-apartheid society (Hunt and Samman, 2020; Budlender, 2016; Ally, 2009).

Another key transformation in the South African domestic sector has been the growing presence of migrant domestic workers from other parts of the African continent (Tame, 2018). The surge in transnational migrants in the domestic sector is not unique to South Africa. Transnational migration into domestic work is also observed across the globe; it is estimated that of the 67 million paid domestic workers worldwide, 11.5 million are international migrants (ILO, 2017:1). The domestic work sector globally has seen an increase and prevalence of internal and external migrant workers, creating both national and globalised care chains from the developing world to the rich global North; and from rural to urban metropolises (Ally, 2009:120; ILO, 2010).

However, the use of migrant labour in the South African domestic sector is nothing new because the sector has relied on migrant labour since its early inception in the colonial era (Ally, 2009). During the early days of settler colonialism in South Africa, domestic workers or more appropriately, servants, were mainly migrant working-class women from Europe (Ally, 2009). Gradually, the demographic profile of servants shifted to Black (African and Coloured) labour, as widespread processes of native land dispossession, capitalist penetration and oppressive segregation policies in colonial and Apartheid South Africa led to a growing supply of cheap, Black African paid domestic labour, initially male-dominated but gradually feminised in the mid-twentieth century (Ally, 2009). Therefore, migrant workers in the sector are not a novel phenomenon but have always been a key component of the occupation's labour force.

What is significant today regarding migrant labour in the sector is the significant number of foreign migrants, especially those originating from within the Southern African region who are seeking to escape harsh economic realities and sometimes political instability in their home countries (Peberdy and Dinat, 2005; Griffin, 2011). The South African domestic sector today is therefore made up of mostly black African rural migrants and cross-border migrants from mostly neighbouring countries of Southern Africa and elsewhere in the continent (Griffin, 2011; Ally, 2010). Many migrate into the country without South African IDs and work permits, making them illegal workers in the country and thus increasing their precariousness (Griffin, 2011). Cross-border migrant domestic workers are also considered to be highly exposed to exploitation in the domestic sector due to their lack of access to social networks that leads many to choose live-in domestic work and increased dependency on their employers (Griffin, 2011).

2.1.1 Working conditions in the sector: Unemployment, underemployment, and part-time work

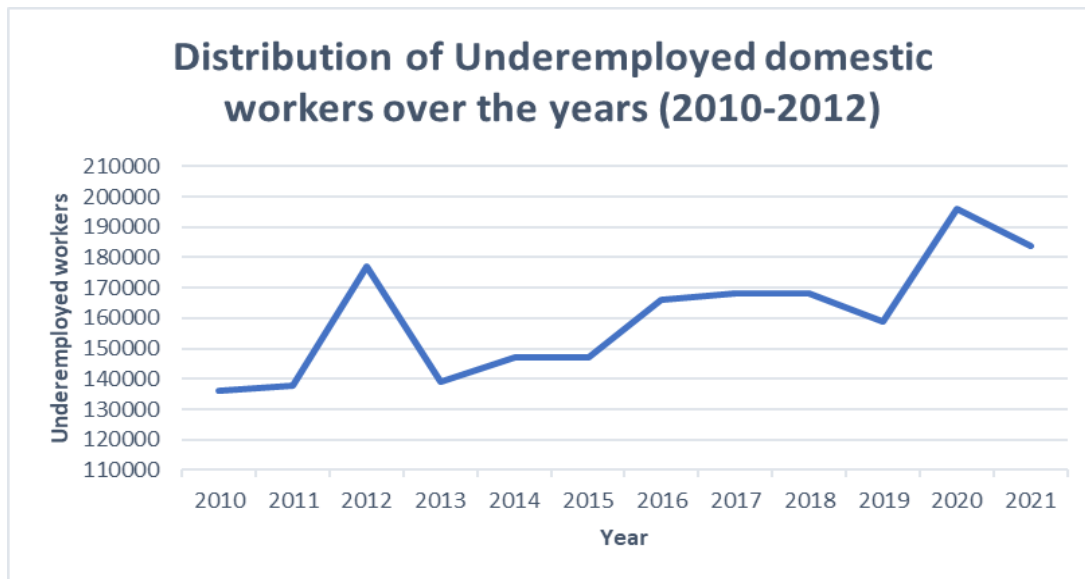
According to the governments' latest published statistics, there are an estimated 856 000 domestic workers in South Africa to date (Statistics South Africa, 2021). This is a decline from the previous high of over one million workers (1 029 000 workers) in 2018 (Statistics South Africa, 2021). By 2019 and 2020, this figure had dropped to 1 013 000 and 897 000 workers, respectively (Statistics South Africa, 2020). This signals that the sector has been experiencing serious job losses in the last three years because the number of persons employed as domestic workers had further decline from 897 000 workers in 2020 to 856 000 in 2021 (Statistics South Africa, 2021), implying that around 5 000 domestic workers lost their jobs during this two-year period.

The COVID-19 pandemic forced the South African government in March 2020 to shut down the economy and impose national lockdown policy measures to curb the spread of the virus, affecting the national labour market more broadly including the domestic sector. This may have contributed to the relatively high number of job losses during this period because lockdown regulations imposed heavy restrictions on the movement of people and strict work-from-home measures which cannot be effective for domestic work that occurs inside people's homes. The statistics show that a very low percentage (0.7%) of domestic workers reported being able to work

from home during the COVID-19 related lockdown regulations in the third quarter of 2021 (Statistics South Africa, 2021). This implies that during the periods of strict national lockdown in 2020 and early 2021, many were left without a job. Other reasons for the significant job losses in the sector during 2020 and 2021 may include reduced incomes or job losses for employers due to lockdown measures, as well as health and safety concerns among homeowners and domestic workers alike during this time.

Underemployment is also a significant problem in the domestic sector. The official government measure of underemployment in South Africa utilises the time-related definition of underemployment, which measures the number of workers who reported their weekly working hours to be below 35 hours and who expressed their willingness and availability for additional work hours at the time of the survey (Statistics South Africa, 2021:24). There are currently an estimated 188 000 underemployed domestic workers in South Africa (Statistics South Africa, 2021). There is also evidence that time-related underemployment in the domestic sector reached its highest rate in the last 10 years at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 (Statistics South Africa, 2020). The line graph in figure 2 below charts the changes in underemployment figures in the occupation of domestic work in the last ten years according to Statistics SA's Quarterly Labour Force survey data reports for the period. It shows that the number of underemployed domestic workers has exceeded 130 000 workers each year during this ten-year period. The numbers reached a peak in the year 2020 where it is estimated that 196 000 domestic workers were underemployed in South Africa (Statistics South Africa, 2020).

Figure 2: Levels of underemployment among domestic workers in the last 10 years



Source: Quarterly Labour Force Surveys (2010-2021), Statistics South Africa

Underemployment is thus a significant problem for domestic workers. According to the literature, the growing problem of underemployment in the sector can be linked to the wider structural shift to part-time work in the domestic sector. The growth of part-time domestic work is one of the most significant transformations in the occupation in South Africa (Ally, 2009:7). Ally (2009:11) traces the emergence of part-time work in the South African domestic sector to the 1970s as part of the shift to live-out domestic work during that period. Globally, scholars have also noted the decline of full-time, live-in domestic work and a growing dominance of part-time work (Neetha, 2008; Salzinger, 1997).

Working arrangements in domestic work can generally be divided into live-in work and live-out work; and whether the work is on a full-time basis or a part-time basis. Historically, the work of servants and slaves followed the live-in, full-time work model whereby servants would labour and live in the employers' household (Rio, 2005; Coser, 1973; Ally, 2009). The employer or 'madam' in this work structure exercises full control and oversight over the domestic worker in return for a wage and housing in the madam's household (Ally, 2009). Ally (2009:47) characterises the live-in domestic work arrangement as being a 'full-time servitude relation' between the domestic worker and their employer. Many scholars in the literature note that the shift to live-out was in many ways a worker-led modernisation strategy intended to weaken feudal, servitude relations in the occupation, allowing workers some autonomy and control over their working lives (Romero, 2012; Ally, 2009). Hence the

shift away from full-time live-in domestic work to live-out and part-time domestic work in South Africa is said to have coincided with the demise of apartheid and its restrictions on urban migration and settlement for the black African population (Gama and Willemse, 2015; Ally, 2009). This allowed domestic workers to be less dependent on their employers for their housing needs in urban areas, and to separate their work sphere from their personal lives as day labourers (Ally, 2009). Live-out domestic work allows for the separation of the domestic worker's personal life from the employers' sphere and paves the way for the growth of part-time work with multiple employers (Salizinger, 1997).

Internationally, part-time domestic work with multiple employers is identified as 'independent domestic work' (Rio, 2005; Romero, 2012). Independent domestic work is more akin to self-employment and entrepreneurship rather than wage-labour (Ehrenreich, 2000). The independent domestic worker, operates as a domestic service contractor, selling a specified service for a fee and operating on a customer-vendor relationship with householders (Rio, 2005:489; Romero, 2012:533). What characterises independent domestic work is that the worker performs a range of tasks in a single workday, is paid daily, and may work for more than one employer at a time (Brites, 2013). Independent domestic work is known as 'char work' in South Africa.

Independent domestic work is argued to be a further step in the attempts by workers to regain control, skill, and autonomy from their work (Romero, 2012; Ally, 2009). It signals the shift from a 'work-by-time' arrangement of full live-in or live-out employment to a 'work-by-task' arrangement which allows workers to claim their work as skilled because they are hired for a specific task as opposed to being hired to render one's overall personal service (Ally, 2009:55). Independent domestic work also illustrates further attempts by workers to modernise domestic work from a position of selling labour power to selling domestic services under a client-vendor relationship as a tradesperson (Romero, 2012:536; Rio, 2005). Writing from a Marxist-feminist lens, Rio (2005) argues that as sellers of a service rather than labour power to employers, the independent domestic worker enjoys some degree of control and autonomy over their work and can earn a higher income as a self-employed person appropriating their own surplus. This is because the work-by-task-arrangement allows workers to 'self-appropriate' any surplus value created from their

over-time work by, for example, charging extra fees, which is in contrast to conditions of full-time, work-by-time domestic work where any extra work done is unremunerated and counted along with the days' worth of work (Rio, 2005). In such an instance, the surplus value created in the form of extra domestic service use-values is appropriated by the employer (Rio, 2005). Other authors such as Harris (2007 cited in Brites, 2013:439) and Romero (2012) largely concur with this view.

The degree to which the trend towards part-time, independent domestic work has improved working conditions in the sector is debatable, however. Working part-time for multiple employers does provide workers opportunities for earning higher incomes but it is also associated with underemployment for domestic workers, especially when it is pursued by younger and inexperienced domestic workers (Ally, 2009). Time-related underemployment becomes a key problem in part-time domestic work when workers are unable to secure enough jobs each week to earn a decent livelihood (Ally, 2009:20). Fragal (2013 cited in Brites, 2013:439) cautions that independent domestic work as a form of self-employment in the sector, may provide opportunities to earn higher income levels, but it also subjects workers to employment insecurity as a cost of self-employment. Ally (2009) also finds in her study of domestic workers in South Africa that while some workers appreciate the work-by-task arrangement of part-time work in rendering them control and autonomy in their work, domestic workers were also weary of the work intensification involved in this arrangement. Furthermore, domestic workers in her study were also critical of employer-initiated part-time working arrangements because it becomes an employer strategy to dehumanise, depersonalise, and intensify their work (Ally, 2009). Indeed, part-time work has gained popularity amongst employers as a cost-effective option for middle-class households that are increasingly unable to afford full-time, live-in services (Neetha, 2008).

In conclusion, domestic work in South Africa is an important job sector for many women in the country, especially black African women, and migrants from neighbouring countries. The sector is also experiencing significant levels of underemployment due to a growing shift towards part-time work. While part-time work was in many ways a worker-led modernisation effort to undo the full-time servant model of domestic work under apartheid, it has been found to increase work

intensity and to pose a threat to job security for many young and inexperienced workers in the sector (Ally, 2009).

Nonetheless, part-time, independent domestic work in South Africa is an example of an internal drive by domestic workers themselves to modernise their occupations as they sought to regain autonomy and control over their lives and their work. Section 2.2 below examines the external forces of modernisation in the sector that have taken place in the post-Apartheid period in South Africa and evaluates their reported impact on domestic work conditions. These are mainly formalisation and commercialisation processes, which are discussed at length below.

2.2 External forces of modernisation in the South African domestic sector

The South African domestic sector has been witnessing two main externally driven structural shifts towards modernisation over the years since the democratic transition of 1994. These are formalisation and increased commercialisation processes which in the post-2014 period have developed further to include modernisation through the platform technologies of the gig economy. The following sections discuss these shifts further and analyses their reported impacts on working conditions in the South Africa domestic sector according to the literature.

2.2.1 The formalisation of domestic work in South Africa

One of the major structural changes that have taken place in the South African domestic sector has been the introduction of protective legislation for domestic workers and the drive towards formalising domestic employment relationships in the country (Fish, 2006; Ally, 2009). Domestic work is a status occupation that is deeply imbricated in global histories of servitude relations and colonialism (ILO, 2010). As such, it is an occupation that is fundamentally structured and perpetuated by social inequalities and hierarchies based on gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, or indigenous status (ILO, 2010; Ally 2009; Cock, 1980). Jacklyn Cock, in her influential study of domestic workers' experiences in the 1980s, went as far as positing that they are an 'ultra-exploitable' class of workers and that the institution of domestic work itself had become a 'microcosm' of the larger societal environment of extreme racial, class and gender exploitation in the country following decades of colonialism and apartheid rule (Cock, 1980). Therefore, to address this legacy of inequalities, the

post-apartheid government has sought to formalise the sector and extend labour rights and protections to domestic workers.

The first major legal restructuring of the sector occurred in 1993 when domestic workers were officially included in the legal framework of the Basic Conditions of Employment Act (BCEA) of 1983, which meant that domestic workers could now be identified as workers instead of servants (Ally, 2009; Budlender, 2016). Domestic workers were also further included in the coverage of the Labour Relations Act in 1995 (Budlender, 2016). Through the direction of the BCEA, Sectoral Determination 7 was further developed and adopted to prescribe and regulate working conditions that are specific to the domestic sector (Budlender, 2016). The labour rights and protections that came with these legislative changes include the extension of minimum wage requirements in the sector, the regulation of work hours, provisions for employment benefits for domestic workers such as paid leave, sick pay, unemployment insurance coverage through the national Unemployment Insurance Fund, and protections against unfair labour practices (Budlender, 2016; Ally, 2009). Domestic workers in South Africa are entitled to all these rights, which are ranked amongst the most progressive labour laws and protections for domestic workers in the world (Ally, 2009). Formalisation has made it possible for workers to be entitled to employment rights and protections and thus improved on the most exploitative aspects of domestic work under Apartheid such as instant dismissals and forms of abuse from employers (Ally, 2009).

However, scholars have noted that these labour law policies and changes have fallen short in their mission to empower domestic workers in the country, and that improving working conditions in the sector has been alarmingly slow (Fish, 2006; Ally, 2009; Griffin, 2011). High adult unemployment rates and the large portion of unskilled workers in South Africa contributes to job scarcity and competition in the general labour market, forcing many to accept insecure and exploitative working conditions in job sectors such as domestic work thereby undermining employment protection efforts by the state (Fish, 2006; Griffin, 2011). Low union membership rates in the sector are also a contributing factor to the slow effectiveness of formalisation in protecting domestic workers from unfair labour practices at work (Fish, 2006). Migrant 'illegality' in the sector is another factor that has contributed to the persistence of informal work in the sector and the shortcomings of labour law to

reach and empower domestic workers (Griffin, 2011). Labour laws regarding the domestic sector do not reach illegal migrants even though all domestic workers including illegal migrant workers are entitled to employment rights enshrined in the South African Constitution and the Labour Relations Act (Griffin, 2011). In a study on Basotho cross-border migrant domestic workers, Griffin (2011) finds that the fear of deportation and perception of exclusion from legal protections leads 'illegal' migrant domestic workers to not exercising these rights or seeking institutional legal representation to enforce and claim them. Their 'illegality' thus increases and reinforces their exploitability and makes them a desired niche of workers in the domestic sector by employers as dependent and submissive workers (Griffin, 2011).

Therefore, formalisation has achieved some basic improvements in the working conditions of domestic work but has failed to empower domestic workers across the sector due to failures by the state in addressing underlying structural conditions such as massive unemployment and existence of migrant 'illegality' in the sector which work to perpetuate and strengthen exploitative working conditions (Fish, 2006; Griffin, 2011). Formalisation has also fallen short of empowering workers in the sector because it is a modernisation drive that workers are not active agents in (Ally, 2009).

2.2.2 The commercialisation of domestic work in South Africa

While part-time, independent domestic work is a form of entrepreneurship by domestic workers themselves, another form of entrepreneurship has been proliferating in domestic work in recent years across the globe in the form of commercial companies or agencies providing household cleaning services or 'contract cleaning', and domestic service placement services (Neetha, 2008; Ehrenreich, 2000; Devetter and Rousseau, 2009).

The shift to live-out and part-time work in domestic work had the effect of also creating a market and demand for commercialisation by third-party agencies (Salzinger, 1997:285). Part-time domestic workers or 'independents' have been found to also rely on agencies to find work in addition to using informal networks of friends and families to find work (Ehrenreich, 2000:2 and Salzinger, 1997). The growing participation of third-party agencies in the domestic sector globally is a growing phenomenon due to rising demand for domestic services and care work caused by ageing populations and an increased participation of women in the labour

force, forcing many householders to outsource their housework duties to the market (ILO, 2010; Ehrenreich, 2000:90; Farris, 2020).

There is a glaring gap in the literature regarding agencies in the domestic sector both in South Africa and internationally (Farris, 2020:1451; Devetter and Rousseau, 2009:298; Du Toit, 2020:72). Research about domestic work tends to overwhelmingly focus on the traditional form of domestic work between the domestic worker and their private employer (Mendez, 1998; Meagher, 1997; Du Toit, 2013). The following discussion draws from the limited scholarly work on commercial domestic work in South Africa, and internationally.

Agencies in the domestic sector can either be commercial for-profit companies or be non-profit entities (Farris, 2020; Devetter and Rousseau, 2009). Non-profit agencies are often non-governmental organisations (NGOs) or faith-based organisations such as churches and worker cooperatives (Anderson, 2000:35; Salzinger, 1997). However, many agencies in the domestic sector have been identified to be operating on a for-profit basis in South Africa and globally (Du Toit, 2013; Mendez, 1997; Ehrenreich, 2000). One of the contributing factors behind the existence and growth of commercial, for-profit agency work in the occupation is public policy discourses inclined towards the privatisation of care and the understanding that care services provision is a household responsibility rather than a public one to be addressed by the state (Farris, 2020:1452; Ally, 2009:131). This privatisation of care ultimately leaves it open to marketisation and fulfils neoliberal ideals for competitive economies through the marketisation of all aspects of life, including social care (Brenan et al., 2012). In some countries, most notably in Europe, governments have gone as far as actively encouraging private companies to enter the domestic sector to create employment, and to modernise it by formalising, professionalising, and 'industrialising' the sector (Pérez and Stallaert, 2016; Devetter and Rousseau, 2009:297).

Commercial domestic service agencies have long existed in the South African domestic sector, but they have been rapidly growing in numbers in recent years due in part to the growing dominance of part-time work in the sector and the rising costs of hiring a domestic worker full-time (Du Toit, 2013). Commercial domestic work agencies in South Africa are operating in stiff competition with the informal market of

domestic work (Ally, 2009:131). The various factors identified in the general literature on the commercialisation of domestic work globally, such as the shift to part-time work, the rising demand for care services and public discourses that favour marketized care provision when combined can be argued to have indeed created a fertile ground for private commercial companies to emerge in the South African domestic sector. However, the rapid growth of agencies in South Africa is observed to have mostly coincided with the formalisation and increased regulatory monitoring of the sector by the government (Du Toit, 2013; Tame, 2018). Given the intensified efforts at formalisation and regulation of the domestic sector in South Africa, the direct hiring of a domestic worker has become more complex for clients, and many opt to outsource the job of managing and fulfilling mandatory employer-obligations to agencies (Tame, 2018; Du Toit, 2013).

Existing research also shows that agencies in the South African domestic sector may also be rapidly growing because of their usefulness to both clients and domestic workers. Agencies provide an opportunity to secure domestic services more efficiently and securely than informal networks and recruitment strategies (Tame, 2018). They can also allow the client to get services without having to engage in a prolonged and highly personalised relationship with workers as is typical of more traditional work arrangements in the occupation (Du Toit, 2013). The benefits for workers are several as well. Agencies in South African have been found to be useful to workers as a job-seeking strategy, they allow workers access to a regular, reliable, and mostly wealthy clientele and reduce their dependency on individual employers (Du Toit, 2013; Tame, 2018). International studies have also uncovered that a significant share of care work globally is being provided by migrant domestic workers who are brokered and supplied by agencies (Maher, 2004; Nyamnjoh, 2006). In their study of formal and informal agencies in Ghana's domestic sector, Awumbila et al. (2019) found that factors such as increased rural-urban and international migration, low entrance barriers into the occupation of domestic work and the restructuring of household gender roles within middle-class urban families create a good environment for the emergences of agencies as labour brokers in the sector. Likewise in South Africa, the growing presence of foreign migrant workers in the domestic sector in recent years has allowed agencies to fulfil migrant workers' employment-seeking needs (Tame, 2018).

Domestic service agencies vary according to several factors. They can vary depending on the domestic services they offer and the employment relationships they pursue with the clients and domestic workers. In terms of services, agencies tend to provide either one or a combination of services such as child-care, elderly care, domestic cleaning, gardening, and general housekeeping (Farris, 2020; Meagher, 1997 du Toit, 2020). In terms of employment relationships, an agency can pursue a recruitment and placement service in exchange for a fee to both domestic workers seeking employment and clients seeking domestic help (Maher, 2004). The interaction between the parties in this arrangement is often short-term; once a worker is successfully matched to a client, the business transaction is complete (Maher, 2004; Meagher, 1997:6). The agency thus assumes an 'intermediary' role between the domestic worker and their potential employer in this business model (Maher, 2004; Devetter and Rousseau, 2009). Alternatively, agencies can opt to become direct providers of domestic services for a fee (Devetter and Rousseau, 2009). In this arrangement, the agency is the legal employer of the domestic worker and is in a service contract with clients that are booking its services (Du Toit, 2013).

Both recruitment and placement agencies and direct domestic service providing agencies can be found in the South African domestic sector, catering to a largely middle-class customer base (Tame, 2018). For placement agencies in South Africa, Tame (2018) finds that employers are mostly seeking reliable and secure domestic workers for their households and that the agency also provides employers guidance on the management and growing administrative aspects of hiring a domestic worker. For workers, placement agencies are a job-seeking strategy that often guarantees access to a wealthier clientele and better working conditions than otherwise found in informal work (Tame, 2018). In direct domestic service providing agencies on the other hand, Du Toit (2013) notes that clients are seeking expert cleaning services from direct service providing agencies, and as well as the flexibility of outsourcing their domestic service provision needs to agencies which do not require them to enter long-term employment commitments with domestic workers.

Commercial agencies in the domestic work have been found to also vary according to their level of formality. Some are formally registered business entities operating in full accordance with the law while some are unregistered businesses operating on an informal basis in the informal sector (Awumbila et al. 2019:2660; Anderson,

2000:37). The boundaries between formal and informal are often blurred as formal and informal agencies in the sector often rely on each other in their business operations (Awumbila et al., 2019). Unfortunately, not much is known about informal agencies and agents in the South African domestic sector since research on commercial domestic work in the country has only focused on formal agencies so far.

Size is also another factor to consider when classifying agencies in domestic work. According to the literature, the sizes of agencies vary but most are small, some can be just one-person, often women-owned entities or a single independent contractor (Bakan and Stasiulis, 1995:304; Mendez, 1998:114; Meagher, 1997:6; Devetter and Rousseau, 2009:300). Others are bigger in size, forming national franchises (Mendez, 1998; du Toit, 2013). A review of various direct cleaning service providers in South Africa such as *Jackie's Cleaning Service*, *Daisy Nteta Cleaning Services*, and *Marvellous Maids to name a few*, by Du Toit (2013; 2020) highlights that the contract cleaning market consists of local area franchises and national franchises, larger agencies, and as well as individually owned cleaning businesses. Length of services offered by these companies range between once-off, weekly and bi-weekly according to Du Toit (2013).

The common feature of all types of agencies in the domestic sector is that they create triangular employment relationships in the sector where the employer and the agency assume overlapping employer-roles and oversight over the domestic worker (Du Toit, 2013; Tame, 2018). Agencies in South Africa are thus considered to fall under the category of Private Employment Agencies (PEAs) regardless of whether they hire workers directly as employees renting maid services to customers or are engaging as labour brokers that are matching and supplying employment-seeking domestic workers with householders in need of their services (Tame, 2018). Working arrangements in PEAs are considered triangular because workers are placed to work in the end-user's workspace, under their supervision, making obscure the extent to which the agency and the end-user are responsible over the employment conditions of placed workers (ILO, 2011). Furthermore in this triangular employment relationships, agencies as PEAs are engaged in the labour market intermediation or 'brokering' between workers seeking employment and individuals or enterprises in need of work services (ILO, 2011:3)

A. Agencies and the modernisation of domestic work

Commercial, for-profit companies or agencies in the sector represent the commercialisation of the occupation of domestic work (Neetha, 2008), and its bureaucratisation (Mendez, 1997). It also represents the transformation of domestic work from social reproductive labour whose role is the reproduction of labour power within the household and the society at large on a daily and intergenerational basis, to low-wage capitalist service labour that produces profits for capitalist enterprises (Glenn, 1992:1; Huws, 2019A:2; Ehrenreich, 2000:4).

In the literature on commercial domestic work, private companies in the sector are largely perceived as modernisation agents whose role is to professionalise domestic work by enforcing contractual, rationalised, and depersonalised employment relations in the sector, thereby transforming domestic work into a modern occupation like many others in the modern world (Mendez, 1998; Devetter and Rousseau, 2009). As noted in the previous sections of this chapter, the business model of commercial agencies in the domestic sector can be divided into two types: direct domestic service providing agencies, and recruitment and placement service agencies. Therefore, the extent to which they can professionalise domestic work will be determined by the kinds of service arrangement and employment relationships they pursue with domestic workers.

Agencies are often compelled by law to be registered and operational under state license in many countries, making them crucial actors in the formalisation of the occupation, and potentially an important instrument for establishing the norms of compliance with labour regulations in the sector (Tame, 2018). Service providing agencies assuming employer-status also offer domestic workers better access to labour and social protections that may otherwise be unavailable under informal work and tend to raise and standardise incomes to minimum wage levels in the domestic sector (Meagher, 1997; Du Toit, 2013; Devetter and Rousseau, 2009).

Having an agency as a third party in the domestic employment relationship does indeed depersonalise the relations between the domestic worker and the employer (Devetter and Rousseau, 2009; Du Toit, 2013). Depersonalisation of the employment relationship by the agency can reduce a worker's reliance on one client, thus greatly reducing the maltreatment of domestic workers (Pérez and Stallaert, 2016). Depersonalisation can also mean that the agency's management personnel become

the intermediary between the worker and the client, thus reducing the worker's need to interact with the client directly (Devetter and Rousseau, 2009; Mendez, 1998). Du Toit (2013) also finds in his study that in line with the broader literature on commercialised domestic work, contract cleaning service providing agencies in South Africa depersonalise the relationship between client and worker by delegating supervision to agency managers. However, it appears in the literature that the benefits of depersonalisation mostly occur among service providing agencies that directly employ domestic workers as employees of the company. In this arrangement, domestic workers rarely interact with the client because they often work in teams led by a team leader or a manager who assumes the responsibility for communication with the client about the job at hand (Du Toit, 2013; Ehrenreich, 2000). Still, in this work arrangement, complete depersonalisation is not achieved since studies show that personalism is rather shifted from domestic workers and clients to agency management and domestic workers as employees of the agency (Du Toit, 2013; Mendez, 1998).

Furthermore, the direct employment of domestic workers by service providing domestic service agencies also offers workers a regulated workload that is governed by an employment contract, and a service contract signed between the agency and its customers regarding the nature and scope of tasks to be done by the worker (du Toit, 2013; Devetter and Rousseau, 2009). In his study of contract cleaning agencies in Stellenbosch, South Africa, Du Toit (2013) observes that domestic workers in contract cleaning agencies cite access to a regulated workload as one of the main benefits of contract cleaning work. In direct domestic service agency work, domestic workers labour as employees rather than as servants because the worker only provides contractually specified domestic service tasks for the customer, under the supervision of the agency's managers (Du Toit, 2013). The problematic 'diffuse servant role' (Coser, 1973:32) is thereby curbed in this work arrangement because the customers' ability to extract more work than contractually agreed upon from domestic workers is reduced. Interestingly however, Farris (2020:1461) notes that even within direct employment by commercial agencies, workers may still be coerced by clients into doing additional work when agency supervision is not present during service appointments.

Direct service providing agencies also partake in efforts to professionalise the occupation, and this is a trend that has also been observed among contract cleaning agencies in South Africa (Du Toit, 2013). Service providing agencies that are in an employment relationship with workers tend to provide a considerable degree of training for their workers to ensure quality in service provision (Ehrenreich, 2000; Devetter and Rousseau, 2009; Du Toit, 2013). Some of these agencies also allow for the assigning of workers to middle-management positions within these companies as a strategy to combat turnover costs and enforce workers' loyalty to the company (Devetter and Rousseau, 2009). Du Toit (2013) notes this practice in contract cleaning work in South Africa as well. However, there is not much written about professionalisation efforts by placement agencies and intermediary agencies in the literature, and this suggests that professionalisation is the preserve of direct domestic service providing companies in the commercial domestic service industry. Placement agencies are third parties in the employment relationship between domestic workers and clients and hence their impact on depersonalising the relationship between the worker and the client after placement may be limited, and in some instances, placement agencies may even encourage personalism as a marker of good domestic service (Awumbila et al., 2019).

Lastly, it has been noted in the literature that commercial agencies in the domestic sector are making efforts to diversify worker profiles, at least by gender and age. This could potentially be a positive step towards changing societal perceptions of domestic work as women's unskilled work. In their analysis of agencies in the domestic sector of France, Devetter and Rousseau (2009) note that companies were more likely to recruit and employ male and younger domestic workers under 30 years compared to more traditional direct employment arrangements. The diversification of the gender profile of domestic workers by agencies was also noted by Meagher (1997) in her study of the Australian domestic sector, where males were found to be more common as franchisees for national cleaning service franchises. What is worth noting in that study was the finding by the author that the more rationalised and standardised the cleaning service was, the more likely it was attractive for male workers to pursue, suggesting modernisation through commercialisation diversifies the gender profile of domestic workers and make the job more attractive for men to engage in (Meagher, 1997). Given the lack of

extensive data on South African domestic service agencies, it is difficult to point out the extent to which this trend is occurring outside of the global North, and especially in the South African commercial domestic work landscape.

B. Criticisms and problems with commercial domestic work for workers

While commercial agencies in the domestic sector are an important factor in the improvement of working conditions of domestic workers, scholars still classify these modernising effects in the literature as marginal, and often mostly observable amongst direct domestic service providing agencies. The literature casts doubt on the potential for commercial companies to modernise the occupation in a manner that offers real, sustained improvement in the working conditions in the domestic sector. One of the main critiques of agencies by workers is that wages remain low for many workers; often lower and more 'fixed' than those earned in informal domestic work (Pérez and Stallaert, 2016:163; Farris, 2020:1461; Devetter and Rousseau, 2009:303; Mendez, 1998). Direct service providing agencies that hire domestic workers as employees often hire workers on a part-time basis, and as such, workers become underemployed, and with reduced incomes (Devetter and Rousseau, 2009; Mendez, 1998; Farris, 2020). Placement agencies have also been criticised for the exorbitant fees charged to domestic workers for a placement with an employer (Anderson, 2000:37). Placement agencies also do not guarantee that a worker will find employment and as a result, domestic workers must sometimes register with multiple agencies to increase the odds of getting work and increasing their incomes (Anderson, 2000).

The literature further notes that the business of agencies is the selling of workers' identities as ideal domestic work candidates and 'comfortable others' to prospective clients and employers (Maher, 2004; Awumbila et al. 2019; Tame, 2018). This is especially true for placement agencies that are in the business of matching clients with ideal domestic workers for private employment. Agencies are therefore commodifying workers' identities through their selection and recruitment processes. Various authors have studied this phenomenon. Maher's (2004) study of placement agencies in California, USA illustrates how agencies engage in this commodification of workers' identities in their marketing discourses by associating expert domestic work service with femininity and particular national identities, in this case, Latin American immigrant women. Commercial third-party companies do very little to

challenge the existing racial and gender stereotypes surrounding domestic work because they are trying to meet clients' demands and preferences of comfortable others and perceived ideal domestic workers from the agency (Tame, 2018).

In the same study of placement agencies in California, USA, Maher (2004) also observed that agencies commodify workers by treating them like commodities on sale, placing heavy emphasis on their character as ideal workers for potential clients, and their indebtedness to the agency, while not addressing much about their rights and entitlements as workers. This suggests therefore, that the business of selling workers' identities as ideal domestic service workers is more about clients getting the right worker for their housework and care needs, and domestic workers gaining access to work; it is less about providing and guaranteeing quality employment where workers are fully advised about their rights as workers and offered protected employment.

Domestic workers tend to be fully aware of their 'subjectivation' (Awumbila et al., 2019:2658) by agencies and their clients nonetheless, and they incorporate it into their own work cultures and identities (Tame, 2018; Maher, 2004). This is a strategy workers use to successfully manoeuvre a highly competitive market and a very demanding job (Tame, 2018; Maher, 2004). Additionally, Tame (2018) notes that for migrants, this practice is 'identity niching', and is an important tool for obtaining reference letters that are integral to domestic workers' access to the rigorous recruitment and screening procedures practiced by agencies.

In addition to commodifying domestic workers' identities, it has also been noted that agencies commodify the labour of domestic workers as well in various ways and depending on their chosen business model in the sector. This critique is mostly based on studies about domestic service providing agencies that are in a capital-labour relation with domestic workers. Critical discussions of this kind of agency work focus on issues of control and the structure of the labour process. Mendez (1998) argues that being an employee of an agency relieves workers from excessive demands and supervision by homeowners or clients but subjects them to the agency's management apparatus. This represents a change in strategies of control over the worker and the work process. There is a shift away from control by the homeowner to control by management, a pattern observed by other authors in their

respective research into agency work (Du Toit, 2013; Devetter and Rousseau, 2009; Meagher, 1997). For instance, in a study of household cleaning service companies that directly hire workers as employees in Stellenbosch, South Africa, Du Toit (2013) finds that the employment relationship within such companies remains largely personal in nature and is a part of a 'unitarist' management principle that aims to ensure maximum control and loyalty to the company on the part of workers. Practices such as gift-giving, emphasis on internal dispute resolution, and a particular aversion to union organising were some of the strategies found to be utilised by management to enforce control and loyalty in this study (Du Toit, 2013).

A unitarist management approach and the appeal to personalism to gain loyalty and control over workers are a common occurrence in studies on domestic service providing agencies (Devetter and Rousseau, 2009; Mendez, 1997). These strategies also serve to conceal workers' grievances over working conditions, especially problematic low wages, and unfair work practices (Mendez, 1998; Devetter and Rousseau, 2009). Union aversion by management is a common trait in agency work and scholars have reported very low to non-existent levels of unionisation among agency workers in the domestic sector (Devetter and Rousseau, 2009; Du Toit, 2013). This appeal to personalism is also often incorporated into company training and marketing discourses on 'professional' service provision, whereby workers are encouraged to undertake additional emotional work in caring for clients to ensure good service (Mendez, 1998). The contradiction here is that the agency offers a depersonalised service but is aware and unable to escape the importance of an intimate work culture in domestic service work hence workers are instructed to incorporate elements of caring for the client into their daily work routines, leading to an intensified work routine that requires both manual and emotional labour (Mendez, 1998).

In addition to being depersonalised, the work process also becomes highly standardised in direct domestic service providing agencies (Ehrenreich, 2000; Du Toit, 2013). Job tasks are rationalised and transformed into smaller, repetitive tasks that can be more efficiently performed by a team of workers (Du Toit, 2013; Ehrenreich, 2000). Workers are trained and instructed to perform these tasks in a routinised manner designed to increase cleaning speed and efficiency (Du Toit, 2013; Mendez, 1998). While such standardisation allows workers to be more

efficient, it also prevents them from exercising their own acquired knowledge and skill, which could lead to a potential de-skilling for domestic workers in the long term according to Mendez (1998).

Workers also lose their 'strategic personalism' with the client under agency work, which is a crucial aspect for domestic workers' agency and negotiations of working conditions with clients (Mendez, 1998). Strategic personalism is an important element of domestic work. It involves the pursuit of personal relations with clients in a manner that allows workers to gain concessions in matters of control and remuneration over their work (Mendez, 1998; Ally, 2009). Low earnings, combined with the rigid labour controls exercised by agencies forces many domestic workers to seek out and combine informal domestic work with agency work because the former is more flexible and allows the workers to negotiate working conditions and remuneration for themselves with the clients, using strategic personalism as part of the intimate work culture (Mendez (1998).

There is a gap in the literature with regards to the commercialisation of independent domestic work specifically. One study by Anderson and Hughes (2010) attempts to address this gap. Here, the authors identify two kinds of independent working in the Canadian domestic sector which are: informal, fully independent self-employment, and independent contracting work through an agency (Anderson and Hughes, 2010). In their sample, the authors found that all domestic cleaning workers interviewed were working independently as informal self-employed workers while a significant share child-care domestic workers interviewed were working through agencies but as independent contractors (Anderson and Hughes, 2010). This study by Anderson and Hughes (2010) is also insightful in terms of providing a comparison of working experiences of fully independent workers in the informal domestic sector and independent workers working through an agency. The authors found that domestic workers in informal independent work had more job autonomy and earned higher wages than workers who were independently contracting for an agency.

In conclusion, the literature discussion on critical studies on commercial domestic work in this section illustrates that scholars have observed some important modernising effects of commercialised domestic work in the sector, such as skills upgrading and career advancement opportunities for domestic workers, the creation

of formal, bureaucratic, and depersonalised relations between domestic workers and their clients, and some evidence of the diversification of the gender profile of domestic work (Pérez and Stallaert, 2016; Du Toit, 2013; Mendez, 1998; Devetter and Rousseau, 2009; Meagher, 1997). However, these modernising benefits are mostly observed in direct domestic service providing agencies, and there is less written about the modernising benefits of commercial domestic work provided by recruitment and placement agencies. The literature discussion in this section has also shown that the overall conditions of work in commercialised domestic work are still characterised by problematically low wages, part-time work causing underemployment, and uneven access to employment rights and protections between agency workers that are employees of agencies and those in a placement only relationship with agencies (Pérez and Stallaert, 2016; Farris, 2020; Devetter and Rousseau, 2009; Awumbila et al., 2019; Mendez, 1998; Maher, 2004). Commercial domestic work agencies are also subjecting domestic workers to increased commodification of their identities and labour, a loss of autonomy over working conditions, and potential deskilling.

Much of the literature on these merits and criticisms of commercial domestic work only apply to the more conventional agencies that are not utilising the digital technologies of the gig economy in structuring domestic work. It is hence crucial to examine the nature of the working conditions of commercial domestic work when it is being undertaken as gig work. The next section is about the newest development in commercial domestic work, the emergence of the gig economy and platform domestic work in the commercial domestic work industry and emerging research on its impact on working conditions for domestic workers in South Africa and beyond.

2.3 Commercialisation and the new gig economy in domestic work

With the rapid commercialisation of the domestic sector has emerged a new kind of agency domestic work being driven by the gig economy. In the gig economy a variety of flexible and non-standard work arrangements have been made possible in contemporary capitalism through developments in Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) as part of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (Johnston and Land-Kazlauskas, 2019; ILO, 2018; De Ruyter and Brown, 2019).

But some dispute the association of the gig economy with a distinctly new, fourth phase of Industrial development. Scholars who dispute this claim view the digital technologies of gig economy as the continuation of technological changes of the Third Industrial Revolution (Cooper, 2021; Huws, 2017). According to this perspective, the gig economy is a manifestation of the second phase of the Third Industrial revolution of the 1970s and 1980s (Huws, 2017; Cooper, 2021). The third industrial revolution ushered in telecommunications technologies that allowed transnational corporations to organise their global production systems more efficiently (Huws, 2017; McMichael, 1996). Technologies such as computers and electronic devices emerged out of this era and were further developed in the 1990s and early 2000s with the rapid growth of the internet (Huws, 2017). The digital platforms of the gig economy today are said to have built on these digital technologies and have matured in today's digital gig economy.

Through the innovation of these digital platforms, work in the gig economy is ordered and managed virtually, and then performed by workers in-person, at physical locations; or it can be performed by workers virtually through the platform being provided by the technology company (De Stefano, 2016). These kinds of gig work arrangements are defined as location-based gig work and crowd-work respectively (Naidoo, 2020; Hunt and Machingura, 2016). This virtual organisation of work can take on one of two forms; work tasks can either be organised and performed online by a geographically dispersed workforce, or the platform company can specialise on location-based work services whereby an app organises the labour process, but the actual work is done in-person at the clients' physical location (De Stefano, 2016; Naidoo, 2020). Work done on the platform by a geographically dispersed crowd is called 'crowd-work' while that provided on-demand by a service provider at the client's location is referred to as 'on-demand work' (Hunt and Machingura, 2016) or 'location-based platform work' (Naidoo, 2020).

The kind of gig work being pursued by platform companies in the domestic sector falls under the category of location-based gig work because domestic service bookings are arranged virtually on the company's platform and performed in physical, client locations by domestic workers. Platform companies in the domestic sector are providing an innovative mechanism of instant and convenient matching of domestic workers with clients in need of their services (Madden, 2015). Platform

companies are therefore introducing a third category of agency work in the domestic sector that is distinct from recruitment and placement, and distinct from employment by a direct domestic service providing agency. However, they are operating from the already existing model identified by Anderson and Hughes (2010) as 'commercialised independent domestic work'. In this domestic work arrangement, domestic workers operate as independent contractors for a private company or agency, in exchange for access to regular clients provided by the agency (Anderson and Hughes, 2010). The agency derives a profit from the exchange between the independently contracting domestic workers and its customers and oversees and manages the service relationship between them (Anderson and Hughes, 2010). Not much is written about these kinds of commercial domestic service agencies in the literature. Authors tend to focus on independent domestic work that is informally undertaken by workers on their own or sometimes collectively in worker cooperatives (Rio, 2005; Romero, 2012). Ehrenreich, (2000) likewise discusses the transition from independent domestic work to being an employee of a service providing company, but not the commercialisation of the independent domestic worker model itself. While the literature does acknowledge the presence of formal so-called one-woman owned enterprises in the commercial domestic service market, this form of independent domestic work is seldom given much attention or investigation.

Similarly to agencies providing commercialised independent domestic work, platform domestic work companies also employ domestic workers as independent contractors, supplies their labour to clients and likewise, profits and regulates this service exchange (Hunt and Machingura, 2016; Hunt and Samman, 2020). What is new about platform domestic work companies is that they are transforming commercialised independent domestic work into a form of gig work, where the independent contracting of domestic work is virtually organised through digital platform technology. Platform domestic work is hence best understood as a commercialised and 'platformised' form of independent domestic work in the domestic sector. As part of the commercialisation trend in the domestic sector, platform domestic work's impact on working conditions and the modernisation of domestic work ought to be considered. The next two sections discuss some of the emerging findings of the role that platform domestic work of the gig economy in this regard.

2.3.1 Platform domestic work in South Africa

Platform domestic work companies are a recent addition to the domestic sector of South Africa. As of 2021, there are two platform companies providing cleaning services in the country, namely SweepSouth and GetTOD. SweepSouth was once in competition with another rival platform company in the sector called Domestly, but the company is no longer active. Domestly was founded in 2015 and had a similar business model to SweepSouth's model except that it allowed domestic workers to set their own pay rates on its platform (Rensburg, 2016). The reasons for the company's demise are unclear. GetTOD, established in 2016, remains SweepSouth's main competitor in the domestic sector and the gig economy at large.

These two companies follow a largely similar business model, offering private householders and businesses with property cleaning, repair, and maintenance services, although SweepSouth emphasises much of its operations on home cleaning service. The Fairwork Report, an international research group based at Oxford University on fair working conditions in the global gig economy, rates GetTOD a nine out of ten, and SweepSouth an eight out of ten on overall fair working conditions on their platforms (Fairwork, 2021). This research group found that compared to SweepSouth, GetTOD pays a living wage and offers much fairer terms and conditions to workers on its platform (Fairwork, 2021). However, GetTOD engages with a variety of workers that offer property maintenance and repair services on its platform, in addition to domestic workers providing cleaning service work, so more studies on the working conditions of the segment of cleaners on the platform is needed to make more accurate comparisons with SweepSouth.

One of the main impetuses behind the growth of the gig economy in South Africa is the high levels of unemployment and underemployment, especially among women in the country (Hunt et al., 2019). Gig economy observers such as The Fairwork Project in posits that in South Africa gig work has the potential to address these labour market access issues in the country (Fairwork, 2021). However, in line with global trends on gig work, the current work models in this sector are highly insecure, leaving workers without adequate labour rights and protections, and in unfair working conditions (Fairwork, 2021).

Nonetheless, when it comes to fair working conditions principles such as fair pay, fair work conditions, fair management, fair contracts and fair representation, South

African platform companies are ranked much better than international platforms such as Uber, Bolt, and In-driver (Fairwork, 2021).

2.3.2 Workers' experiences of platform domestic work

Platform domestic work offers easy access to low-skilled physical work and is more attractive to low skilled workers and those from disadvantaged groups (Hunt and Samman, 2019:7). Platform domestic work also offers cheap, reliable, and convenient home services to clients, on demand (Hunt and Machingura, 2016; Ticona and Mateescu, 2018). Platform companies in the domestic sector provide a variety of domestic work tasks such as home cleaning, cooking, and care work services (Hunt and Samman, 2019). However, the literature on platform domestic work has focused on platform companies offering home-cleaning services on-demand.

For workers, platform domestic work offers opportunities that are unavailable in the traditional sector, such as the ability to easily locate and choose clients, choose working times, track hours worked, and wages earned (Hunt and Machingura, 2016). Other scholars such as Ticona and Mateescu (2018:4391) also write about some of the benefits and potential pitfalls of the platformisation or 'uberization' of care-work for domestic workers in general. In their study of online platforms providing childcare services in the United States of America, the authors find that platform companies, like other conventional agencies in the sector, may increase the formalisation of the purchase of domestic work.

However, the authors Ticona and Mateescu (2018) also argue that platforms increase the visibility of domestic workers as individuals to potential clients through platform design features like rating systems and online profiles on the platform, or social media accounts (Ticona and Mateescu, 2018:4394). Agencies in general are in the business of selling workers' identities as ideal domestic workers and comfortable others to clients as the literature discussion above showed. The increased visibility of workers' profiles in platform domestic is an intensification of this commodification. The authors in this article acknowledge that while increased visibility may be an important requirement for this type of job that relies on trustworthiness of the care-worker; it can also end up perpetuating already existing discriminations in the domestic sector according to factors such as race, gender, and immigration status (Ticona and Mateescu, 2018:4398).

One interesting observation in the literature on the experience of platform domestic work is the phenomenon of 'platform leakage'. Platform leakage refers to the practice by client-service provider pairs of transacting outside of the platform or offline following their initial service interaction on the platform (Madden, 2015; He et al., 2020). It has been noted that the threat of platform leakage is more pronounced in platform domestic work models than it is elsewhere in the gig economy such as ride-hailing services or food delivery (He et al., 2020; Maddison, 2015). Clients and platform workers can engage in platform leakage to avoid the platform company's commission fees, and in the case of clients, to ensure easy and recurring access to a trusted and quality worker (Madden, 2015; He et al., 2020). Maddison (2015) notes that platform leakage is often driven by clients keen on securing a trustworthy and quality worker. For workers, platform leakage can provide access to considerably higher wages and can allow workers to break the platform company's monopoly over the collection of valuable client-information (Madden, 2015).

However, there are some significant challenges with platform domestic work for workers. Platform domestic work has also been challenged as representing a new kind of 'technology-enabled commodification' of domestic workers (Huws, 2019). In their study of platform domestic workers in South Africa, Hunt and Machingura (2016) conclude that platform domestic work arrangements, in their current form, undermine existing efforts towards decent work in the sector. Issues that stood out in their study include low and insecure incomes, erosion of labour and social protections stemming from the independent contractor status of platform domestic workers, and biased platform design systems and company operating models that disproportionately benefit purchasers or clients more than workers (Hunt and Machingura, 2016).

These issues are not entirely unique to platform domestic work because the literature on the gig economy posits the working conditions of gig work to be extremely insecure (Flanagan, 2019). The issues of unstable work, low incomes, and the problematic misclassification of workers as independent contractors by platform companies to evade existing labour standards and protections are all emblematic experiences of workers in the gig economy (Rogers, 2015; Prassl, 2018; De Stefano, 2016; ILO, 2018). Platform companies engage in the rebranding of actual wage-labour as entrepreneurship or self-employment to avoid expensive labour costs and

other employer-related responsibilities (Prassl, 2018). Such a decision by platform companies exposes workers to the harsh realities of self-employment, devoid of many of the employment security, labour and social protections that come with being in an employer-employee relationship (Rogers, 2015; Prassl, 2018; De Stefano, 2016; ILO, 2018). It has been pointed out that among many platform companies, the actual reality of the work relationship between the worker and the company resembles that of dependent employment, not self-employment (De Stefano, 2016; Prassl, 2018).

It is worth noting that much of the scholarship on gig work tends to come from Europe and North American contexts despite there being evidence of its development in the global South (Anwar and Graham, 2019; Hunt and Machingura, 2016). Studies on platform domestic work as a particular form of work in the gig economy and the domestic sector are also an emerging phenomenon since most of the literature has chosen exclusive focus on other types of gig-work in the transportation industry and other online crowdsourcing work arrangements (Ticona and Mateescu, 2018). In this emerging literature, there is the need for the development of in-depth studies on the working arrangements and work practices of platform domestic workers on the platform.

Like many other forms of work in the gig economy, platform domestic work offers cheaper, reliable, and convenient services to clients, on demand (Hunt and Machingura, 2016; Ticona and Mateescu, 2018). According to Hunt and Machingura (2016), for workers, platform domestic work offers opportunities that are unavailable in the traditional sector, such as the ability to easily locate and choose clients, to choose working times, and track hours worked, and wages earned. It seems therefore that platform domestic work overcomes the problem of locating clients inherent to part-time independent work in the informal sector; it is yet to be studied how platform domestic work compares in terms of control, autonomy, and work intensity to traditional independent domestic work.

Conclusion

The occupation of domestic work in South Africa is facing significant challenges with unemployment and underemployment. There has also been increased formalisation of the sector by the state, and a shift to part-time work, which has in turn partly

created the conditions for commercial domestic service providers to emerge. Platform domestic work agencies of the gig economy are building on this commercialisation trend in the sector. This chapter has outlined some of the key insights about the experience of commercial domestic work in South Africa and its impact on working conditions in the sector, such as promoting some changes such as access to employment, formalised and depersonalised work relations (Du Toit, 2013; Tame, 2018).

However, agency domestic work presents domestic workers with its own challenges such as low wages, underemployment and the commodification of domestic workers identities and their labour (Mendez, 1998; Du Toit, 2013; Devetter and Rousseau, 2009). This suggests that there are limits to external modernisation through commercialisation. Many of the benefits and challenges of platform domestic work from the existing literature build on those observed in conventional agency domestic work such as access to employment and formal work relations, but ultimately exposing domestic workers to a new kind of technology-enabled commodification as Huws (2019) puts it. This theme of commodification will be further unpacked in the theoretical framework chapter that follows.

3. Theoretical Framework

Researching the experiences of work under capitalism involves probing the dynamics of the labour process; the organisation or governance of work (Burawoy, 1985; Webster et al., 2008). This chapter provides a labour process theory analysis of platform domestic work to be used as a theoretical framework for understanding the emerging impact of the gig economy in the South African domestic sector. The discussion begins with a conceptual discussion of commercialised domestic work and locates this kind of domestic work within the framework of the commodification of domestic work. The discussion then progresses to a labour process analysis of gig work and the idea by Vallas and Schor (2020) that work governance in platform work emanates from the platform company's control regime of permissive power. The permissive power framework is an analytic concept that explains the distinctive nature of work under the gig economy and is hence a useful concept to deploy when considering the impact of gig work on working conditions in the domestic sector.

3.1 Commercialisation and commodification of domestic work

Commercial, for-profit enterprises entering and operating as domestic service companies or agencies represent the commercialisation of domestic work and its commodification. When domestic work is organised and or provided by for-profit companies, this exchange serves to provide profits for the enterprise. For placement agencies, profits are derived from the selling of domestic workers' identities as ideal workers to prospective clients seeking permanent placements of workers into their homes (Maher, 2004; Tame, 2018; Awumbila et al., 2019). For domestic service providing companies that are transforming domestic work into a form of capitalist low-wage service work, profits are derived not only from selling domestic workers' identities as ideal domestic service providers, but also from the commodification of their labour as employees of the enterprise. Platform domestic work companies are, likewise, transforming informal independent domestic work (or 'char') into a commercialised work arrangement where workers identities and labour are commodified for profit.

The concept of commodification in the domestic work literature and labour studies literature tends to evoke a slightly different meanings, however. The following discussion addresses this problem and presents a theoretical conception of commodification for this case study that views the commercialisation of domestic

work as representing a commodification that moves beyond the marketisation of care thesis to a conception that understands commercial domestic work as a manifestation of capitalism's constant expansion needs and tendencies, and its requirement for cheap labour inputs to ensure continued profits in the labour process. These perspectives on the meaning of commodification in domestic work and labour studies are discussed at length below.

3.1.1 Conceptualising the commodification of domestic work

Looking at the domestic work and labour studies literature, there appears to be three broad meanings of commodification in the domestic work literature and the labour process theory tradition. These are: commodification of domestic work as the marketisation of care; commodification of domestic work as the expansion of capitalist markets and relations into the domestic sector; and commodification as labour insecurity in capitalist labour processes. The following subsections expand on these perspectives.

A. The marketisation of care thesis:

Firstly, the commodification of domestic work is understood to be the exchange of domestic services or care work for money payment; it is the expansion of money markets into intimate social life (Ungerson, 1997; Boris and Parreñas, 2010; Anderson, 2000; Zelizer, 2000; Farris and Marchetti, 2017). For this conceptualisation, the commodification of domestic work occurs when households pay for household services and care work as marketable commodities (Farris and Machetti, 2017). Households outsource their housework and care work to non-household members in the market of individual paid domestic workers and or home services companies or non-profit enterprises, thereby spurring the marketisation of care (Farris and Machetti, 2017). The implication of this view is that domestic labour can be commodified in or outside of capitalist relations. When for-profit companies or agencies enter the domestic sector, they 'corporatize' the already commodified occupation according to Farris and Marchetti (2017:110). According to this view, for-profit companies are engaging in the 'corporatization' of domestic work, by bureaucratising care and applying the logics of business rationality and profit maximisation (Farris and Marchetti, 2017:110).

B. Commodification as the expansion of capitalist markets into the domestic sector:

A second approach to the analysis of the commodification of domestic work takes a more Marxist understanding of commodification. In this perspective, commodification refers to the insatiable expansion of capitalist activity into ever more domains of human life and activity, creating new forms of commodities and new forms of workers who are subjected to its rationality and control (Huws, 2019:44). The capitalist system thus survives through the constant commodification of things, life, labour, and workers (Huws, 2019; Cole, 1998).

When applying this perspective therefore, the introduction of commercial agencies into the domestic sector is another example of capitalist expansion into the domestic sector as a new domain of profit accumulation, and converting domestic work from reproductive labour into 'productive' labour for the realisation of profit by the companies involved (Huws, 2019; Mendez, 1998; Glenn, 1992). Domestic work, whether paid or unpaid, is a type of reproductive labour that not only produces human beings but also wider society and its social relations as well (Anderson, 2000:13). When the work is taken over and organised by commercial companies, domestic work is transformed into a form of capitalist service work that is productive for the capitalist because a surplus can be realised from the domestic worker's labour (Devetter and Rousseau, 2009; Huws, 2019; Mendez, 1998). In the Marxist perspective, reproductive labour is distinguished from 'productive' labour in that it is paid and or unpaid work done outside of the capitalist mode of production that serves to 'reproduce' human beings including workers and their labour power (Huws, 2019:27; Cock, 1980:). Productive labour on the other hand refers to work done in accordance with the capitalist mode of production for the realisation of profits by capitalist employers (Huws, 2019; Cock, 1980).

Furthermore, several Marxist scholars, writing from Rosa Luxemburg's expanded Marxist theory on capitalist accumulation, also observe that capitalism not only needs to constantly expropriate social formations outside of its domain but that it actively creates and maintains these 'outside' domains whose resources can be tapped into when needed to maintain the system of surplus accumulation (Dörre, 2012; Soiland, 2019). Writing from this perspective, Dörre, (2012:130) notes that the development of capitalism occurs from both the system's 'internal markets' of surplus

value creation, and from its exchanges with 'external markets' of non-capitalist spaces and modes of production. Capitalism is therefore constantly 'manufacturing an outside' to be later expropriated because it is structurally incapable of surviving on its own internal market foundations alone (Dörre, 2012; Soiland, 2019).

This inside/outside dialectic plays out at different times and spaces as capitalism develops (Dörre, 2012:133), and by implication, drives the processes of commodification, de-commodification and re-commodification identified by Huws (2019) as being characteristic of modern society as the development of capitalism unfolds at different times and contexts. Using Rio's (2005) theorising on the independent commodity production of paid domestic work; it can be argued that platform domestic work as a phenomenon is representative of the commodification and expropriation of the independent domestic work sector into capitalism's internal market because this sector has always existed in the informal sector as a form of 'reproductive labour' (see Ally, 2009; Rio, 2005). It is an 'outside' that has been a constant presence in our capitalist societies and is now being commodified by private for-profit companies such as platform domestic work companies.

The emergence of platform domestic work reflects the latest attempt by capital to accumulate value from independent domestic work as a new site of profit accumulation. It is the latest round of 'technology-enabled commodification' (Huws, 2019:18) of the domestic sector.

C. Commodification as labour insecurity:

The third perspective on the meaning of commodification is one used by labour process analysis scholars more generally to refer to labour insecurity, or labour without protection from the disciplining power of the market (Wood et al., 2019). Michael Burawoy's terms this phenomenon 'market despotism', which is a form of labour control used to coerce workers into subordination to capital's need for intensified productive labour at the lowest cost (Burawoy, 1985). In capitalist enterprises, owners and managers seek to intensify the commodity-character of workers' labour, reducing workers to pure commodities devoid of their human quality and thus labour protections (Maddison, 2008:235; Nelson, 1995; Wood et al., 2019b). Treating workers as pure commodities is useful for the purposes of profit augmentation by the capitalist because it works to reduce the valuation of the worker as a whole person deserving of full labour rights and protections, to a valuation

based solely in relation to his or her labouring skills and capacities which can be bought and sold at the lowest price possible in the labour market (Nelson, 1995; Breman and van der Linden, 2014:926). The commodification of labour is hence synonymous with precarious work, the absence of labour protections and benefits for workers.

However, workers ultimately resist the despotic regulation of their labour, and hence more hegemonic forms of labour control emerge that work to 'manufacture consent' amongst workers and align their interests with those of capital (Webster et al., 2008:52; Burawoy, 1985). These hegemonic forms of control are rooted in the standard employment relationship and its accompanying labour-related protections and securities from the market (Webster et al., 2008). Standard employment is a term used to refer to work done under contractual agreement between an employee and their employer, on a full-time basis and for an indefinite period (ILO, 2016:7). The worker and their employer in this arrangement are in an employment relationship whereby the employee performs work under certain conditions and in the service of the employer and in return, is remunerated and assured labour protection and social security (ILO, 2005:7). Both despotic and hegemonic regimes of control in the labour process can and do coexist in various forms and to varying degrees, which symbolises the constant struggle between capitalists and workers to commodify and decommodify their labour (Webster et al., 2008).

Many authors writing about the experience of platform work in the gig economy describe the existence of market despotism in the regulation of platform labour (Wood et al., 2019; Hunt and Machingura, 2016; De Stefano, 2016; Aliosi, 2016). Platform technologies have enabled the commodification of domestic workers' labour in as far as they have made the separation of labour from the domestic worker much easier because such a technology enables companies to firmly claim an 'intermediary' status as technology companies that are not in employment relationships with workers, which allows them to evade existing protective labour legislations.

The commercialisation and commodification of domestic work by platform domestic companies in this study is taken to mean more than just the marketization of care. Platform companies are expanding into the informal domestic work sector as a new

site for growth and expansion and are also pursuing a work model characterised by labour insecurity. The next section presents a more detailed discussion on the labour process of platform work models of the gig economy.

3.2 The labour process of platform labour

Labour process theory is a Marxist-inspired analysis tradition whose foundational objective is probing and understanding the organisational structure and execution of work in capitalist industrial societies and its many varied contexts (Chai and Scully, 2019). In the platform work model of the gig economy, a worker provides a service to a customer or service requester. This service is organised through the virtual platform that has been created and managed by a third-party commercial company, which also derives revenues and profits from these transactions on its platform (Chai and Scully, 2019). The worker on the platform and the platform company are thus in a capital-labour relation and as such platform work and the gig economy at large can be studied according to the well-established labour process theory tradition (Gandini, 2019; Chai and Scully, 2019).

It is worth mentioning however, that the labour process analysis tradition has been criticised over the years for its reluctance to include in its literature work organisation contexts other than male, factory employment since its inception in the 1970s by Marxist scholars and the influential book by Harry Braverman titled *Labour and Monopoly Capital* (1974) (Smith, 2015; Chai and Scully, 2019). This is because labour process analysis takes a specific focus on the point of production in its analysis of the capitalist labour process (Veen et al., 2020:390) and was developed from observations in male, industrial factory settings by its early proponents (Smith, 2015).

Nonetheless, labour process theory has undergone much transformation over the years to be inclusive of diverse work settings and experiences of capitalist workplace life (Thompson and Smith, 2000). A labour process analysis of platform work is also slowly emerging in the works by various scholars on the subject, notably by Gandini (2019) and Chai and Scully (2019) to name a few. Thompson (1980, 1990; cited in Thompson and Smith, 2000:56) identify four key elements of the core theory of labour process analysis which shall be applied to existing research on gig work in this section. These four elements are: that the capitalist production system is

dynamic and always evolving; that labour is central to the creation of surplus value in this system; that because labour is central to surplus value creation, there is a great requirement to exert control over labour in the production process; and lastly, that these dynamics create a conflict of interests between labour and capital, with workers responses ranging between resistance, compliance, consent and accommodation (Thompson and Smith, 2000:56-57). The following paragraphs apply these elements of labour process theory to gig work.

3.2.1 The gig economy and dynamism of the capitalist labour process:

The emergence of the gig economy confirms the argument by LPT proponents that to ensure continued profit growth, the capitalist mode of production requires constant innovations and transformations of production forces by firms (Thompson and Smith, 2000:56). It is argued that the gig economy emerged because of rapid technological developments in Information and Communications Technologies and development of the Internet of things (Huws, 2017; Hunt and Machingura, 2016). Some of the major location-based labour platforms like Uber emerged in the Global North immediately after the 2008 financial crisis that necessitated the need for the further restructuring of capitalism towards more non-standard forms of work for firms to compete more effectively without the need for more investment in capital assets and full-time workers and their employment-related welfare needs (Huws, 2019:20). However, the virtualisation of work organisation was already well underway in the prior decades of the 1970s and 1980s, following the commencement of the Third industrial revolution and its propelling of the widespread use of electronics and telecommunications technology in industrial production processes (Huws, 2017) and in the management of global supply chains of transnational corporations (McMichael, 1996:89).

Technological developments alone cannot explain the rise of the gig economy because the deployment of technology by capital to the labour process is also contingent upon contextual social conditions which make the development and adoption of technology even more worthwhile for employers (Shoki, 2019). It has therefore been observed that the gig economy is also the latest manifestation of the decades old neoliberal turn towards labour market flexibilisation for national growth and competitiveness in the global arena (De Ruyter and Brown, 2019). Beginning in the 1970s, governments have pursued labour market deregulation policies which have institutionalised non-standard work (Standing, 2011; Hunt and Samman, 2019).

Non-standard work refers to working arrangements that exist outside the norms of standard employment (ILO, 2016).

The International Labour Organisation identifies four categories of non-standard work, namely: temporary employment; part-time work; various forms of triangular employment work and as well as temporary agency work; and lastly, dependent self-employment and disguised employment relationships (ILO, 2016:7). Workers in the gig economy are almost exclusively engaged as independent contractors by platform companies (Hunt and Samman, 2019; De Stefano, 2016). The literature therefore situates their work relationships within the categories of non-standard work, as forms of triangular employment arrangements (Wood et al., 2019), and as forms of dependent self-employment, and working arrangements that disguise the actual existence of an employment relationship on the platform (De Stefano, 2016; De Ruyter and Brown, 2019). This is supported by Flanagan (2019:64) who argues that unlike more conventional third-party intermediaries in the domestic sector, platform domestic work companies are far more interventionist than their intermediary status suggests because they actively shape the work relations between workers and clients through the platform design features and service agreements that are often unilaterally made by the company.

Labour market flexibilisation policies undermine standard employment norms by reducing the legal barriers to the promulgation of such work contracts that obscure or deny the existence of an employment relationship between the worker and the enterprise he or she is engaging with (ILO, 2005). Being outside of the employment relationship means that non-standard workers cannot lay claim to the rights and benefits entitled to employees in standard employment contracts (ILO, 2005).

Hence, many perceive gig work models to be 'accelerants of precarity' (Vallas and Schor, 2020:279) because the digital platforms of the gig economy are a cheaper and more convenient labour outsourcing tool for conventional firms and individual user enterprises (Wood et al., 2019b; Hunt and Samman, 2019). On these platforms, workers are hired and dismissed according to user demand and convenience (Wood et al., 2019b; Hunt and Samman, 2019). Gig work is hence an example of the severe commodification of labour because such labour is treated as a pure commodity by platform companies (Wood et al., 2019b:935) whereby workers are thrust into a

highly competitive digital labour market and with little to no access to employment benefits and protections (Wood et al., 2019b).

3.2.2 The digitally based point of production and labour control:

Profit accumulation is derived from the production process and through the generation of a surplus by workers through their labour (Thompson and Smith, 2000). Like many others in the gig work literature, Gandini (2019) notes that digital platforms in the gig economy act as more than intermediaries between companies and self-employment workers. The online platforms or apps of the gig economy are the 'points of production' where a capital-labour relationship is enacted upon workers because it is on these platforms that the gig work labour process is managed and organised in location-based gig work and additionally, executed in crowd-work arrangements. The platform hands out the work orders to be done by workers and sets the location and timing of the booking. The platform also directly and indirectly oversees the execution of the work tasks, platforms also determine directly or through indirect means the amount of remuneration workers get and are also able to monitor work performance through various platform metrics based on the collection of performance data by both the worker and the client on the platform (Gandini, 2019:1045). The platform acts as a 'digitally-based point of production' (Gandini, 2019:1040) because many of these functions are also part of managerial control and oversight over the production process in conventional, physically based points of production such work offices and factories (Gandini, 2019).

As points of production, gig economy platforms also create and shape the relations of production in the gig work labour process because the company sets the terms and conditions of work through service agreements with both workers and clients (Flanagan, 2019). The platform company also exercises an 'invisible' management role over the labour process by exerting control over work performance through platform design systems such as client feedback and review mechanisms and worker ranking and rating systems that have an influence on task allocations and earnings on the platforms (Gandini, 2019:1051; Flanagan, 2019). This constitutes management through technology rather than direct supervision of workers (Chai and Scully, 2019). Platforms are hence applying techno-normative controls over the labour process, which function using platform algorithms informed by workers' reputational scores and their work performance data that accumulates and is

captured on the platform (Gandini, 2019). Other authors such Veen et al. (2020:396) and Tassinari and Maccarrone (2020) posit a similar viewpoint about digital platform's technical design features or algorithmic management being the root mechanism of worker control in the gig economy. These authors contribute to an analytic lens that views gig work as exposing workers to a kind of work organisation that represents a 'digital cage' (Vallas and Schor, 2020:278). This metaphor of a digital cage expresses the perspective that platforms claim to be an intermediary between independently contracting service providers and users in need of their services but are, in fact, actively controlling and limiting the work autonomy of these service providers in the ways that Veen et al. (2020) and Gandini (2019) outline. More specifically, this perspective on the organisation of gig work problematises platform companies' practices of algorithmic management of the gig work labour process in the gig economy (Vallas and Schor, 2020).

3.2.3 Workers' experiences in the gig work labour process:

Workers' agency and resistance to managerial control is acknowledged in the labour process analysis literature to be a complex phenomenon. Compliance and consent with capital can co-exist with resistance tactics in the workplace (Thompson and Smith, 2000). This is because both despotic and hegemonic regimes of labour control are practiced by manager and capitalist to subordinate workers and as well as elicit their compliance and consent (Webster et al., 2008). Scholars have noted some emerging forms of resistance among platform workers in the gig economy. While platform technology represents an invisible management figure through which workers are controlled, authors also note that this very mechanism can be a catalyst for workers' various individual and collective forms of resistance. There are limits to algorithmic management (Vallas and Schor, 2020). Some have noted, for example, that the lack of transparency in the ways in which workers' data and platform algorithms are used by the company to assign work, remuneration and other management roles can lead to dissatisfaction among workers, prompting them to mobilise and engage in collective agency and action against the company (Tassinari and Maccarrone, 2020; Veen et al., 2020).

The lack of physical, and direct management and oversight over the day-to-day activities of workers makes this mobilisation easier for workers (Tassinare and Maccarrone, 2020:49). Collective agency can take on a variety of forms such as

strike action, collective restriction of work (un-logging from the app), sharing of resource, information, and assistance; while individualised agency can involve tactics like restricting work effort and setting own daily work targets, engaging in practices to influence and re-work task allocation algorithms (Tassinare and Maccarrone, 2020; Veen et al., 2020:400).

However, while resistance tactics are emergent among platform workers, there remains immense difficulty in mobilising platform workers on a wider scale because workers tend to be geographically dispersed and fragmented (Aliosi, 2016; Vallas and Schor, 2020). This suggests that for many platform workers, compliance and minor individual tactics of resistance are the norm. More in-depth studies on experiences of resistance and compliance among platform workers in the South African gig economy is critically needed.

3.2.3.1 'Permissive power' and the dynamics of control and worker resistance in gig work

While the core elements of labour process theory are very useful for the study of gig work, we also ought to consider that the organisation and control of platform labour is not entirely the same as labour control tactics in conventional capitalist firms that are in an employment relationship with workers. This is because in an employment relationship, workers submit to direct control and command by their employer (ILO, 2011). This cannot be the case for platform work however, because gig workers are not in an employment relationship with their platform companies, and hence the prospect of direct managerial control is limited. Platform companies are therefore forced to share control over the labour process with workers and clients on the platforms (Vallas and Schor, 2020).

The kind of labour process that platform companies pursue is therefore based on the delegation of some aspects of control over to workers and clients in the triangular gig work relationship (Vallas and Schor, 2020). According to Vallas and Schor (2020:282), platform companies 'govern the service triangle' of gig work by allowing or permitting workers and customers on the platform to decide on less important aspects of the work between themselves as designated participants in a vendor-customer economic exchange on the platform, but continue to maintain authority over key aspects of gig work such as the pricing of the service, task allocations on the platform, and the collection of performance data on both workers and customers

on the platform. This enables the platform company to yield significant power over workers and clients in this triangular employment relationship and maintain profitability (Vallas and Schor, 2020). Platforms are hence exercising permissive power over the gig work labour process because they allow workers and customers on their platforms to control and decide on some aspects of gig work on their platforms while they maintain authority over limited, but immensely consequential, aspects of the labour process.

The concept of permissive power in the governance of the gig work labour process is an analytic tool that is useful for distinguishing the particularities of labour control in gig work from that in other more conventional industrial employment relations (Vallas and Schor, 2020). This regime of permissive power is made possible because platform companies in the gig economy are based on a business model of digital intermediation and open employment for a spatially dispersed workforce which allows for less rigid forms of labour control and management from a distance (Vallas and Schor, 2020). This allows platform companies to cut labour costs and investments in fixed capital (Huws, 2019; Vallas and Schor, 2020). However, it also undermines the sustained profitability of the gig work model because platform companies cannot intensify their management and oversight over workers' performance without being legally challenged for misclassifying the employment relationship by gig workers (Vallas and Schor, 2020; Madden, 2015; Huet, 2015). Workers' agency and resistance to managerial control on the platforms is hence made possible by the platform's own regime of permissive power.

As Vallas and Schor (2020) articulate, platform companies' distant management approach is the only viable managerial strategy for gig work because workers are cast as independent contractors. However, because platform companies rely on the labour of gig workers to remain profitable, this managerial strategy can be unsustainable for the company's long-term growth prospects, hence platform companies deploy tactics such as algorithmic monitoring and management of the labour processes on the platform to increase the efficiency and the potency of management from a distance (Vallas and Schor, 2020).

Conclusion

Understanding the emerging impact of the gig economy on the working conditions of domestic work requires that the labour process of platform domestic work be interrogated. This section provides an analytical framework of commodification and 'permissive power' as the analytical tools in which to investigate the emerging impact of platform domestic work in the sector. The commercialisation of domestic work involves the commodification of workers' identities and their labour for a wage and for profit. Furthermore, the labour process of platform domestic work operates from a regime of permissive power that involves the distant management of workers through techno-normative controls such as algorithmic management. The findings in this study outline workers' experiences of platform domestic work using these theoretical concepts of commodification and permissive power to illustrate the ways in which platform work is impacting the conditions of work in the South African domestic sector.

4. Methodology

This study set out to examine platform domestic work as a new labour form in the South African domestic sector to find out the ways in which it is being organised and executed, based on the perspectives and experiences of domestic workers who are undertaking this kind of work in the South African landscape. A qualitative case study methodological approach was used, following an interpretivist research paradigm. The study was done in the Cape Town Metropolitan area, using domestic workers currently and formerly engaged with the national platform company SweepSouth as key informants. SweepSouth domestic workers are referred to as 'SweepStars' by the company and this case study will hence use this label as well.

The discussion in this chapter elaborates in more detail the methodological approach followed, starting with a brief discussion on the research paradigm, and a definition of the case. The chapter also discusses the data collection procedures followed and the limitations to the study.

4.1 Research design: Interpretivist case study

This research was done using a single-case study design approach. A case study design was decided to be the most suitable design approach for this research because it is a research design that allows for the study of a contemporary phenomenon or 'case' in its real-life context extensively and in-depth to describe it or generate and or test theoretical propositions (Yin, 2018; Punch, 2005; Fusch et al., 2017; Bloor and Wood, 2011:2). The 'case' in this study is platform domestic workers in Cape Town, whose work experiences provide analytic insights that can shape our understanding of this kind of labour in the sector and the ways in which it is impacting the working conditions of domestic workers in South Africa. This case study is therefore an 'instrumental case study' because one 'case' was studied in-depth to produce insights about a general issue or theory (Punch, 2005), which is the work organisation of platform domestic work in South Africa.

From an epistemological point of view, this study followed an interpretivist perspective or paradigm. Interpretivism serves as the theoretical foundation for most qualitative research approaches because of its emphasis on a constructivist ontology which views reality as subjectively interpreted by individuals; and that knowledge and meaning itself is constructed by individuals in their on-going experiences and

interactions with other individuals and the wider social systems in societies (Tuli, 2010:100). Events in the social world are subjectively interpreted so therefore, to understand a given social phenomena and generate knowledge about it, one ought to explore how it is being experienced and understood by individuals. An interpretivist case study therefore seeks to explore and understand a given issue by interrogating the ways in which participants within the case are experiencing and making sense of it (Bartlett and Vavrus, 2017:32; Yin, 2018).

Applying an interpretivist epistemological perspective in this research involved examining the ways in which platform domestic workers are making sense of their daily work experiences to understand how the platform domestic work model is organised and executed, and the implication of this for overall working conditions in the South African domestic sector.

4.2 Exploring the case

4.2.1 Sampling and recruitment of key informants

Sampling and recruitment of the ten SweepStars as key informants was done mainly through the snowball sampling technique. This was done because it was difficult to identify and locate platform domestic workers independently without assistance from their platform company SweepSouth, and because this kind of domestic work is a new phenomenon in South Africa and to the researcher. No prior contact with platform demand domestic workers or persons with information on their social networks had been established before the commencement of the study. Therefore, snowball sampling had to be utilised because the key benefit of a snowball sampling approach is that it allows one to identify hard to reach informants through initial contact with one individual from their social network (Yin, 2016; Leighton, 2021; Noy, 2008:330).

Emerging studies on platform domestic work at SweepSouth in South Africa have forgone sample recruitment through SweepSouth and instead relied on snowball sampling as well, and recruitment through the SweepSouth booking app (see Hunt and Machingura, 2016; Tandem Research and The Cloudburst Group, 2020). Snowball sampling allowed for successfully recruitment key informants independently of SweepSouth for this case study. Approaching platform domestic workers to be key research informants independent of the company's assistance

was done to ensure trust, informant anonymity and confidentiality so that workers as key informants could express themselves regarding their platform domestic work experience without fear or bias.

Using the snowball sampling approach, the researcher was able to establish initial contact with the first participant after having booked her cleaning services. More participants were recruited thereafter, through the process of referrals from already interviewed participants. The already interviewed participant would forward a written research invitation to other SweepStars whom they were familiar with, using WhatsApp and if they were interested in participating, they would either contact the researcher directly or express their interest through the respondent. The researcher would then follow up with them privately, through a telephone call and through WhatsApp voice-notes, to provide more information about the study and their involvement in it, as well as to confirm their desire to participate and to arrange an interview date.

Snowball sampling for this study relied primarily on SweepStars' friendship networks composed of other fellow platform domestic workers whom they had formed close ties with. Sampling from 'natural social networks' is indeed a key feature of snowball sampling (Noy, 2008:329). While this was beneficial in many ways to the research, it created a bias in the sample since sampling was done among friends of a similar demographic group. The study's sample is therefore largely homogenous along the characteristics of nationality and age; most participants were Zimbabwean and between the ages of 26 and 35 years old, although the common age was 32 and 33 years of age. This pattern of sampling bias is not very surprising given that in snowball sampling, the researcher is not in complete control over participant selection but is sharing the task with respondents as they give out potential participant suggestions from their own social networks (Noy, 2008:332). Referrals by fellow students in the Sociology department at the University of Cape Town were also utilised using the same technique of handing out research invitations, and then following up telephonically with potential participants who expressed interest in participating in the study. The study ended up with ten participants after referrals ran out and the data was deemed sufficiently saturated around key themes of the study.

4.2.2 Profile of SweepStars interviewed

SweepSouth’s platform domestic workers or ‘SweepStars’ were the primary units of analysis in this case study and constituted the sampling frame for this case study. A total of ten SweepStars from around the Cape Town metropolitan area were selected as key informants for this case study. Cape Town is one of the cities that has become a tech-hub in the country and has been dubbed by some observers to be the nascent ‘Silicon Valley’ of Africa, or the ‘Silicon Cape’ (Pollio, 2020). It therefore unsurprising that a platform company like SweepSouth would house its headquarters in this city.

This section gives an overview of the ten SweepStars interviewed as key informants in this study. Table 1 below gives a snapshot of their working arrangements on the platform.

Table 1: *Overview of respondents’ work history with SweepSouth*

Respondents	Was a domestic worker before SweepSouth	Currently a SweepStar	Length of time at SweepSouth
Angela	Yes	Yes	1 year
Sarah	No, worked retail jobs	Yes	5 years
Patricia	Yes	Yes	6 months
Nosipho	Yes	No	1 year
Sindi	Yes	Yes	2 years
Buhle	Yes	No	less than a year
Rose	Yes	Yes	2 years
Linda	No, worked as a receptionist	Yes	1 year
Tatenda	No, was an informal trader	Yes	1 year
Lucia	No, was a Beauty Therapist	No	less than a year

*Respondents’ names have been changed to maintain their anonymity

As indicated by Table 1 above, seven out of the ten key informants in this study were currently working for the platform company SweepSouth while three were former platform domestic workers who had since left the platform. All three former workers had spent less than a year working at SweepSouth before leaving the platform. Most of the workers interviewed had held jobs as domestic workers in private households before being hired by the platform company. On the platform, they all provided indoor house cleaning services to SweepSouth’s customers. A small but significant number of the workers interviewed had not worked as domestic workers before their employment by the platform company; they had instead worked in various low-waged service jobs such as doing cashier work in retail shops, restaurant waitressing jobs, and jobs in beauty spas and salons. One worker had been an informal trader before being employed by the platform company. Out of the ten on-

demand domestic workers interviewed, four had worked in either one or two of these occupations before being hired by the platform company.

The demographic profile of these workers is also crucial to point out and is outlined by Table 2 below.

Table 2: *Overview of demographic characteristics of workers*

Respondents	Age	Nationality	Highest level of education
Angela	26	Zimbabwean	Matric/O-Level
Sarah	32	Zimbabwean	Diploma in Tourism and Hospitality
Patrica	33	Zimbabwean	Bachelor's Degree in Teaching
Nosipho	35	South African	Grade 11
Sindi	29	South African	Grade 11
Buhle	28	South African	Not stated
Rose	33	Zimbabwean	SA equivalent to Grade 11
Linda	33	Zimbabwean	Matric/O-Level
Tatenda	32	Zimbabwean	Matric/O-Level
Lucia	26	Zimbabwean	Diploma in Beauty Therapy

As indicated in Table 2 above, the platform domestic workers interviewed in this study were relatively young; the oldest respondent was 35 years old. All ten workers interviewed were black African women and most were immigrants from Zimbabwe; only three out of the ten on-demand domestic workers interviewed were South African nationals. This demographic makeup of the sample is in line with observations from other scholars and researchers that the South African domestic sector, much like anywhere else in the world is racialised and gendered, it is work often performed by racial minority women (Ally, 2009; Cock, 2011). So far, research on on-demand domestic work in South Africa is reporting a similar, unchanged demographic trend whereby black African women are the main social group engaged in this kind of work (Hunt and Machingura, 2016:19; Tandem Research and The Cloudburst Group, 2020:4). It is worth noting that the study by the Tandem Research and The Cloudburst Group (2020) was conducted in Cape Town with the same platform company (SweepSouth) as well and encountered a similar pattern of over-representation of workers from Zimbabwe in their study sample. However, publicly available records of the platform company's workforce demographics are not available for comparison with this emerging finding in the literature.

South Africa has become a key destination for migrants from across Southern Africa and elsewhere in the continent, and they often find income earning opportunities

through informal sector jobs such as domestic work which has lower entrance barriers (Tame, 2018:95). Furthermore, internal migration to Cape Town from other poorer South African provinces was also a key characteristic among this sample of on-demand domestic workers, with workers coming into Cape Town in search of jobs from other named provinces which included: the Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal, Gauteng, and Limpopo.

Platform domestic workers selected for this study were also fairly educated, most had graduated high school, two had also gone on to attain Diplomas and one held a teaching degree qualification. This also concurs with the profile of workers interviewed by the Tandem Research and The Cloudburst Group (2020), whereby workers' educational qualifications ranged from a high school certificate to a diploma and or an undergraduate degree certification.

Lastly, all the platform domestic workers interviewed in this study had children, while only two workers were currently married and living with their spouses and children in Cape Town. Among those who were single, some were living with their children while others had migrated to Cape Town without their children. Table 3 below outlines these trends in the sample.

Table 3: Marital statuses and living arrangements

Respondents	Nationality	Marital status	Number of children
Angela	Zimbabwean	Married, lives with spouse	1, lives with child
Sarah	Zimbabwean	Married, lives with spouse	3, lives with children
Patrica	Zimbabwean	Unmarried	2, currently not living with children
Nosipho	South African	Unmarried	2, living arrangement not specified
Sindi	South African	Unmarried	1, currently not living with child
Buhle	South African	Unmarried	2, living arrangement not specified
Rose	Zimbabwean	Unmarried [Divorced]	2, currently not living with children
Linda	Zimbabwean	Unmarried	3, lives with children
Tatenda	Zimbabwean	Unmarried [Separated]	2, currently not living with children
Lucia	Zimbabwean	Unmarried	1, currently not living with child

4.2.3 Expert interview with SADSAWU

To provide more context to the reported experiences by the selected SweepStars, the study also sought expert opinion on the platform domestic work model from the local office of the South African Domestic Service and Allied Workers Union (SADSAWU). An interview with one of the union organisers in Cape Town was organised and conducted to find out how the union was interpreting working conditions in this new kind of work in the domestic sector.

4.2.4 Documentary data sources used

In addition to interviews with platform domestic workers and SADSAWU union officials, this study also analysed documentary sources of data related to the platform company SweepSouth, and the legislative framework governing platform domestic work in South Africa. Using documents as a second data source in this case study was intended for data triangulation purposes, to use in conjunction with interview data in the analysis of workers' experiences of platform domestic work. Using documents alongside other types of data is useful for data triangulation and is one of the main ways documents can be useful in qualitative research (Punch, 2005, Rapy and Reese, 2018).

The use of documentary data became vital for this study and was also imperative given that organising an interview with a SweepSouth representative regarding their company's business approach and perspective on platform domestic work was unsuccessful. Several attempts were made to arrange an interview with SweepSouth, but the company's Chief Operating Officer cited COVID-19 pandemic disruptions as having forced the company to put on hold all academic collaborations (This correspondence is discussed in section H of the Appendix). Therefore, publicly available sources of data about SweepSouth, published by the company and other observers about its business and operations had to be utilised as an alternative. Live interviews on YouTube and interview articles, all given by the Co-founder and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of SweepSouth, Dr Aisha Pandor, were one of the key sources of documentary data utilised to provide context to workers' recollection of their experiences of working on the SweepSouth platform as primary units of analysis in this case study. These sources of data were also meant to check for and ensure internal validity of findings from workers' interview inputs as part of the data triangulation process.

A total of six of these kinds of documentary sources were used: four media interviews by Dr Pandor were retrieved from YouTube, and two online interview articles by a South African online magazine called *Career Magazine*, and *Business Today*, (a web-based news outlet in Kenya). All these online sources were collected online. Additionally, SweepSouth's own published documents pertaining to the company's practices and terms of work on its platform were also analysed. These documents included content such as: the Terms and Conditions of Service

Agreement for both clients and domestic workers, SweepSouth's annual survey reports on its own domestic workers and the sector at large, as well as the company's website content.

A literature analysis of academic journal articles and emerging studies and research reports on the platform domestic work model in the country were also reviewed. While no specific time frame was applied to these studies, many of them had been conducted in the past ten years. These literature materials were also useful for the analysis of the status of platform domestic workers in the South African labour law framework and were reviewed in conjunction with the legislative documents related to paid domestic work in South Africa. This legislation included the Basic Conditions of Employment Act, 1997 and Sectoral Determination 7 for the Domestic Worker Sector; the Compensation for Occupational Injuries and Diseases Act, 1993; the National Minimum Wage Act, 2018; and the Unemployment Insurance Contributions Act, 2002.

The next section gives an overview of the steps involved in the collection of these various primary and secondary data sources used in the analysis of the experiences of platform domestic work by SweepStars in Cape Town.

4.3 Data collection techniques

Data collection strategies used in this study were individual semi-structured interviews with platform domestic workers and one union organiser; desktop research on the South African domestic sector including relevant legislations; as well as the collection of secondary sources of data about the platform company SweepSouth, which were all available online. The following sections elaborate in more detail how each of these data collection procedures took place.

4.3.1 Semi-structured interviews:

Knowledge generation in interpretivist research involves analysing the ways in which people come to understand and interpret their own lived experiences with regards to a given issue (Tuli, 2010). This research paradigm therefore relies on data collection techniques such as the interview, which allow for an in-depth exploration and a thick description of the various meanings that people attach to behaviours and events (Tuli, 2010:100). An interview is a useful tool for uncovering people's constructions of reality, the facts and meanings of people's worlds and experiences as they describe

them (Punch, 2005:168; Brinkmann and Kvale, 2019:3). It was therefore a well-suited data collection approach for this study's objective of theorising about the potential impact of gig work on the South African domestic sector, based on workers' perspectives and experiences of the job.

Field work officially began during the COVID-19 pandemic in late March 2021 with two pilot interviews and was bound by national social distancing policies as well as ethical guidelines on ethical research during a pandemic. Therefore, individual interviews had to be done remotely for this study. Only one expert interview with the SADSAWU Union official was conducted in-person at the Union's offices in Cape Town. This was the preferred mode of interviewing for the union; it was done under social distancing protocols such as mask wearing, hand sanitisation and socially distant interaction and interviewing. The interview was semi-structured, and the respondent was able to offer in-depth responses regarding the Union's mandate and activity in the South African domestic sector and its approach to the platform domestic work model. In sum, fieldwork lasted five months, between March 2021 and August 2021.

Interviews with SweepStars were conducted remotely, through direct telephone call. The interview format was semi-structured and these interview calls were recorded. Workers were made aware that the interviews would be recorded, and recording was only done with permission from participants. During these interviews, an interview guide was used to provide guidance on questions and topics to be posed and discussed with participants about the job of being a platform domestic worker in South Africa. Interview guides are an important tool for interviews because they allow the researcher to prepare beforehand the kinds of questions or points of discussion that are most likely to elicit information relevant for answering the study's main research questions (Roulston and Choi, 2018:7).

While the interview guide used in this study utilised pre-formatted questions, the interview sessions themselves were more conversational in nature, and the posing of these questions from the interview guide was largely led by participants' responses. This is a key feature of semi-structured interviews, they are meant to generate a guided conversation with interviewees about key themes or topics of interest for a given study (Roulston and Choi, 2018). Workers were given the opportunity to

express their views and opinions about their job as platform domestic workers, their experience and understandings of the work process and its organisation by the company. Workers were also asked to reflect on their experiences with clients provided by the platform company and as well as their experience with the company itself and how they understood their position and role within the company. The study began with two pilot interviews that were loosely structured to cover broad-based questions regarding the study's main themes. Later interviews became more structured as key insights started to emerge and the data became saturated among similar findings. In-depth probing into the study's main themes and emerging insights from each respondent enriched the interview guide and led to the development of further questions and probes for subsequent respondents in the study.

Telephonic interviews are not widely used in qualitative research, they are usually considered appropriate for sensitive research, or when the study requires short and structured questioning (Sturges and Hanrahan, 2004:108). Other benefits of telephonic interviewing for qualitative research also include their cost-effectiveness over in-person interviews, their convenience and time efficiency, and as is the case for this research study, that they can be useful as an alternative to in-person interviewing to ensure the safety of the researcher and as well as the relative anonymity of respondents (Sturges and Hanrahan, 2004; Trier-Bieniek, 2012; Holstein and Gubrium, 2011). Safety, the relative anonymity of participants and convenience were the main benefits of telephonic interviewing for this study.

However, the telephonic interviewing of workers did pose a few challenges to this study. Interviews were shorter than expected, usually 20-30 minutes long with each respondent. This seems to not be an unusual occurrence when it comes to telephonic interviews though, since Holstein and Gubrium (2011:8) note that telephonic interviews are less suitable to use for research topics that require complex questioning and discussion with respondents because it is difficult to maintain a lengthy discussion over the phone. Similarly in this study, having an in-depth discussion with workers on key issues was a challenge and perhaps this could partly be attributed to the lack of visual cues to aid in probing during the conversations, as well as the fact that it is difficult to establish and maintain rapport and an 'interactive naturalness' in telephonic interviews (Irvine et al., 2012:89;

Holstein and Gubrium, 2011:8). Attaining data saturation from these short interviews and from a relatively small sample size posed a significant challenge to this study.

To overcome this challenge and achieve a satisfactory saturation data from respondents, the researcher tried various tactics. Firstly, the researcher sought to ensure that the telephone interviews were as natural as possibly feasible for a telephonic interview amongst strangers. For example, for every session, the researcher would begin by initiating small talk with the respondent to establish familiarity before the recording started. The researcher also engaged in active listening and at times deployed humour to ensure that respondents felt comfortable and secure in sharing their experiences and opinions (Yeo et al., 2014). A second key strategy that was used by the researcher and that was particularly crucial for attaining data saturation was to do follow-up interviews after each initial interview or after the transcription of said interview where possible, to cover topics that had been missed or not adequately elaborated on during the initial interview session. Of the ten respondents interviewed for this study, five agreed to do subsequent follow-up interviews with the researcher through telephone calls and instant messaging through WhatsApp.. Four follow-up telephone calls and two follow-ups via WhatsApp instant messaging and 'voice notes were conducted in total. WhatsApp follow-ups tended to be brief text-message exchanges while follow-up calls were more extensive in duration ranging from as low as 10 minutes to a maximum of 23 minutes. Some respondents opted for follow-ups using live telephone calls while others, due to time constraints, preferred instant messaging. Indeed the benefit of using WhatsApp for research during a pandemic is that, as a relatively affordable, instant messaging app, the researcher and respondent do not have to be in the same place and time to engage in interview questioning (Kaufmann and Peil, 2020). It was hence possible to conduct asynchronous follow-up interview questioning with key informants in this study, who could respond at any time and at their convenience.

Interviews were conducted in English and isiXhosa. The transcription of most of the interview recordings was done by the researcher, in a two-step process to ensure that transcripts were readable and as accurate as possible. The first step involved the direct transcription of speech from the recordings while the second step involved editing the transcripts to ensure they were readable and ready for analysis.

Translation and transcription assistance were sought for of two interviews that were done in isiXhosa. These interviews were transcribed in isiXhosa and translated to English by a fellow postgraduate student. Translation captured respondents' inputs in their direct form. The researcher then proceeded to perform a close transcription of the translated interviews to ensure that they were comprehensible and accurately transcribed. Jenks's (2018) criteria for transcribing qualitative interviews according to readability, accuracy, and representation was applied to the transcription process of this study's interview recordings. Readability and granularity relate to the extent to which transcribed speech is easy for the reader to understand and follow, and the extent to which the complex nature of the interview interaction is reflected in written form on the transcripts (Jenks, 2018). Regarding these, speech was edited in the transcripts to ensure that it was readable, without stripping away participants' language expressions and meanings. Some vernacular language expressions were also kept in the transcribed speech of participants to maintain a degree of accuracy and representativeness in their transcribed interview recordings (Jenks, 2018).

4.3.2 Collecting documents as secondary sources of information:

Access to relevant documents is one of the main difficulties with using documents as data for research because such data may not be available to the researcher for research purposes (Bloor and Wood, 2011:4; Rapy and Reese, 2018). All the secondary data sources used in this study were publicly available online. The researcher was able to access SweepSouth's own published documents which were retrieved from the company's website and from the company's auto-generated email marketing alerts. Publicly available online interviews given by the company CEO Dr Aisha Pandor were also retrieved on the internet through multiple google searches, using search strings such as 'Aisha Pandor interview', 'SweepSouth model', 'The business of SweepSouth'. South African legislation on domestic work was also retrieved online from the academic online database *Sabinet Legal Platform*. A literature review was first carried out to familiarise the researcher with the general legislation that currently applies to domestic workers in South Africa, and then a database search for each of the individual legislations was conducted thereafter.

The online space is a rich source of information, and it is very accessible. However, it does pose a serious challenge when utilised for academic purposes. The main challenge with retrieving material from the internet for academic use is ensuring that

the website sources of information, as well as the documents retrieved are credible and reliable (Payne and Payne, 2011). Furthermore, choosing the right sample of documentary data relevant to the study's research question and purpose is crucial for documentary analysis (Raply and Reese, 2018). Documents intended for use as sources of data in qualitative research must be selected according to authenticity, credibility, representativeness and meaning regarding the research object (Scott, 1990, cited in Payne and Payne, 2011). The selection of documentary sources also must be relevant to a study's given research objective (Raply and Reese, 2018).

Therefore, all documentary data that was retrieved through internet searches had to be critically evaluated for their credibility, authenticity, and representativeness before analysis of its meaning with regards to the case study's research objectives. SweepSouth's own published documents on its website and the live YouTube interviews given by the SweepSouth's CEO Dr Pandor had no problems with credibility, authenticity, and representativeness because they were sources of information publicly given by the company and its CEO. The use of other web-based online articles that were only reporting on interviews done with the company was limited to websites the researcher deemed credible. Credibility in this case was sought by reviewing their publication history and activity. Another shortcoming of documentary data is that since documents are socially constructed by organisations as representations to others and themselves, they cannot be used as evidence for the actual social reality within the organisation (Atkinson and Coffey, 2004). A critical approach to all these collected documents was hence practiced in their collection and analysis, and insights derived from them was triangulated with insights derived from individual in-depth interviews with SweepSouth's platform domestic workers as key informants of this case study.

The collection of interview data and secondary documentary data produced a vast amount of qualitative data, which was to be analysed in accordance with the narrative analysis tradition and with the aid of NVivo software as a useful data storage and analysis tool. The next section gives further detail about the analysis process of the study's findings on the work organisation and experience of platform domestic work.

4.4 Analysis of Findings

Narrative analysis was employed in this study to produce a theoretical description of participants' perspectives and experiences with the on-demand domestic work model. Narrative analysis was appropriate for this study because the aim was to understand the potential impact of gig work on the working conditions in domestic sector by analysing the various perspectives of key actors, primarily platform domestic workers themselves, their platform company, the domestic workers' union SADSAWU and as well as the state's position in the form of the legal and regulatory framework of domestic work in South Africa. This study places platform domestic workers as the key informants in this dialogue. Their lived experiences and their complex interpretations of the job should be driving our evaluations of the gig economy's tech-transformation of domestic work.

Narrative analysis is an interpretive method, it involves studying narratives of lived experience according to respondents' point of view (Punch, 2005:216). What characterises narrative analysis is the portrayal of events or issues central to the research questions from the participants point of view, in the form of stories or narratives, which illustrates respondents' own self-generated meanings about the topics of investigation in the research (Esin et al., 2013:3; Punch, 2005:217; Riessman, 2005). Riessman (2005:1) explains narratives as ways of knowing and communicating, which are presented in storied form. Most data used in social research often comes in such storied form, and an emphasis on the examination of narratives in their entirety ensures that such data is analysed holistically and does not decontextualise respondents' meanings from their overall given narrative (Punch, 2005:217). Furthermore, narrative analysis allows the researcher to uncover diversity in respondents' meanings and understandings, and to also compare these self-generated narratives about their social realities with the wider social contexts in which they are being constructed (Esin et al., 2013:2).

Narrative analysis as a method can adopt a variety of step-by-step analysis techniques (Riessman, 2005; Esin et al., 2013). This study chose to utilise a thematic analysis technique. In this model of narrative analysis, emphasis is on the content of respondents' narratives whereby the researcher aims to create a typology of respondents' narratives, weaving together emerging common or shared patterns in their narratives to generate theory building and analytic generalisations

(Riessman, 2005:2). Thematic analysis is useful for uncovering and interpreting patterns in the data as they relate to the research questions and objectives (Maguire and Delahunt, 2017). In the process of uncovering these patterns, the researcher is involved in 'analytic induction' (Punch, 2005:196), generating the concepts and patterns emerging from the collection of respondents' narratives in the sample and abstracting these to a higher level of theory building. Analytic induction also involves elements of deduction whereby emerging generalisations from the data are cross-referenced with existing theory for comparisons and verification (Punch, 2005:196).

The thematic analysis framework chosen was Attride-Stirling's (2001) thematic networks model. This model was used to analyse interview data and as well as secondary data. Thematic networks are a useful way to organise and illustrate the themes that are being uncovered from the data (Attride-Stirling, 2001:387). Using this approach, the researcher begins by uncovering various 'basic themes' from their collected data, which, when collated together can produce a much broader 'organising theme' about a similar issue. From these organising themes, an even higher pattern abstraction is sought by grouping the various organising themes into one 'global theme' that represents a broad summary and interpretation of the main patterns or issues emerging from the data (Attride-Stirling, 2001). These three abstracting steps produce a web-like graphical representation of themes uncovered from the data, thereby allowing the researcher to make interpretations and generalisations from these illustrated interconnections among the themes from the data set (Attride-Stirling, 2001).

The analysis process was a non-linear process, which involved a constant reviewing of interview transcripts and the literature. It began with an initial broad reading of interview transcripts and secondary sources to uncover basic themes from workers' responses. There were several basic themes emerged in the initial stages of analysis, and it took a while to compile them into larger and more theoretically abstract organising themes such as 'motivations for joining SweepSouth' and 'benefits of platform domestic work'. The study's final global themes were compiled in the form of mind-mapping to draw the connecting thread between basic themes and organising themes as the main theoretical propositions on the experience of platform domestic work. The key global concepts that emerged from the analysis were 'platform leakage', and 'digital labour intermediation model' and 'distant

management'. A full, illustrative coding framework document is presented in the Appendix section. This framework is a graphical representation of the network of themes derived from this study's findings, from basic patterns in the data to the main theoretical propositions abstracted from these patterns.

The study also adopted software analysis assistance package NVivo to undertake the thematic analysis of the data collected. NVivo was employed in this study as an efficient data storage and organisation tool, and as an analysis aiding tool that made it possible to categorise, retrieve and verify coded data on the software. NVivo is an efficient tool for the systematic analysis and organisation of qualitative data (De Wet and Erasmus, 2005). Furthermore, Microsoft Excel spreadsheets were also utilised to produce respondents' demographic profiles and work characteristics derived from their interview responses. Microsoft Excel was also a useful tool for creating a database for the categorisation of secondary data retrieved about SweepSouth.

4.5 Research Validity

Trustworthiness and credibility are the key determinants of research validity for interpretivist research (Tuli, 2010). All the informants interviewed for this study had experience working as platform domestic workers and could thus speak authoritatively on the experience of this kind of domestic work. Informants were recruited from largely the same friend-ship network of platform domestic workers. Their credibility was also verified through cross-referencing their accounts of the platform domestic work model with those of other respondents.

The internal validity of the findings derived from this study was ensured through the triangulation of data sources and collections techniques. Using a combination of various data sources and collection methods can produce more accurate research conclusions (Yin, 2016). In this case study, extensive interview accounts by ten SweepStars as key informants of the study were collected and analysed alongside secondary reports published by the company SweepSouth, public interviews given by its CEO and as well as the literature about platform domestic work in South Africa from the literature. Given the absence of an interview session with SweepSouth, the company's own discourse about its business operations provides an authoritative account of the company's narrative on platform domestic work.

In addition to data triangulation, the study provides extensive accounts of the key informant interviewed through worker profiles and an extensive discussion of SweepSouth's business operations as a platform domestic work company in the sector. This provides more context to the study's key findings and provides an in-depth and rich account of the main issues surrounding the experience of platform domestic uncovered by this research. Qualitative research relies on such thick description to provide a holistic view of findings (Yin, 2016). Case study research is about understanding a given 'case' in as much depth as possible, its nature, complexities, and external context (Punch, 2005). Thick description allows the researcher to provide such an in-depth account of the case or phenomenon.

Therefore, despite the sample size of this research being small, the findings presented are derived from credible sources, triangulated data sets that are presented in as much detail as possible to allow for an in-depth understanding of the experiences of working as a platform domestic worker in South Africa.

4.6 Ethics and reflections on methodology

Attempts were made throughout the research process to ensure this research was conducted in accordance with ethical guidelines for academic research stipulated by the University and Humanities Faculty, and as well as those suggested in the academic literature on ethical social research and the recently implemented *Protection of Personal Information Act of 2013 (POPI Act)* in South Africa. The health and safety of both the researcher and participants was of most concern because the study was conducted amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Fieldwork had to be done remotely, and while challenges with conducting in-depth telephonic interviews with key informants in this study were experienced, remote fieldwork was ultimately the best ethical approach to take for conducting this study.

Participation in this study was voluntary. Interview respondents were given full information about the purpose of the research and how it is being funded, they were also informed about how their interview data and personal information would be treated and as well as their rights as research participants, including the right to decline participation at any point of the research process. The practice of full disclosure regarding the collection of participants' personal information and their consent therein is in accordance with South Africa's recent legislation towards the

protection of personal information for private individuals which extends to research participants as well (*Protection of Personal Information Act 2013*). Participants were also advised about the benefits of their participation and were given assurances that it would not bring them any harm as far as the researcher was concerned. A consent form outlining all these details was given to workers via WhatsApp during the recruitment phase, and before the scheduling of each interview. The researcher also went over the details of the consent form before each interview with a participant began. Consent to participate in the study was given in written format over WhatsApp chat, while consent to being interviewed and having the session recorded was given in verbal format and was done before the sessions began.

The Platform domestic workers interviewed for this study were granted and assured of their right to privacy and anonymity. Their names and any other key personal information that was deemed by the researcher to pose a threat to their anonymity are anonymised in both the transcripts and the research paper using pseudonyms. Access to interview transcripts and recordings is also restricted to the researcher and the research supervisor and is kept safe and secure on the UCT provided Google-drive server. Restricting access and utilizing cloud storage was done to ensure safe storage of research data and preserve the confidentiality of respondents' interview data, as mandated by section 19 of the *POPI Act (2013)* regarding the safeguarding subjects' data by the collecting party.

Secondary material about the company was publicly available for the researcher to use to piece together the company's narrative about its business model and vision in the sector, and as well as its relationship with the on-demand domestic workers it engages on its platform. All secondary material collected for analysis in this study was publicly available, and the researcher ensured that the sources of such information, especially data concerning the platform company, was legally accessible for public use. Efforts were made to ensure that there is transparency and truthfulness in the analysis and interpretation of all secondary material used.

There were also two key ethical dilemmas that the researcher had to contend with in this research. The first issue was about the ethics of paying participants and ensuring that it posed no threat to the quality of interviews, and the second was about whether the platform company's identity should be published in the research

paper given that they had not consented to participating in the case study. The following paragraphs explore these two issues in more detail and explain how the researcher went about addressing them.

4.6.1 The ethics of paying for participation

Platform domestic workers interviewed in this research were compensated through monetary reward for their time and effort. This is not an unusual practice because another study on platform domestic at SweepSouth by Tandem Research and The Cloudburst Group (2020) also provided compensation to domestic workers for their time and participation in the study.

However, The practice of compensating research participants is highly debated, and can be problematic for several reasons. McNall's (1971) critique of the practice of paying informants by sociologists highlights at least seven of these, which can be summarised as follows: that there is a very real possibility that payments can raise the potential for the exploitation of informants by researchers, leading them to express what they feel is required for them to say as 'paid participants'; that paying for research can also contribute towards the commodification research participation and this is detrimental for graduate students undertaking unfunded research; and lastly, that payment processes requiring respondents' personal details such as bank accounts may compromise the principle of anonymity in research, or that some respondents may even feel insulted by the purchasing of their time.

These views are not uncommon amongst other scholars. They raise the question of the impact of money on the authenticity of respondents' participation and fears about the growing commodification of research participation whereby paying informants induces a culture of sharing life stories and experiences in exchange for financial gain, which undermines the long-held belief that research participation is a social good and should be done voluntarily (Head, 2009:342; Colvin, 2015). Because of these potential implications of direct money payments to participants, it has been suggested that alternative forms of compensation such as gift vouchers or other forms of payment in kind can be used as an alternative to direct cash (Head, 2009; Colvin, 2015), or that such direct cash payments can be donated to community service agencies in the case of vulnerable populations (McNall, 1971). Alternative to these, expressions of gratitude for research participation could also involve giving

back through engaging in volunteer service in some matters relevant to the study's participants (Colvin, 2015).

With these ethical issues in mind, it was decided that a cash payment to participants for this research would nonetheless be given because any other non-monetary rewards were not feasible under a socially distanced fieldwork arrangement. Various measures were employed to limit some of the pitfalls of paid research participation. For example, when giving the reward to each participant, the researcher ensured that there was an understanding that the money was not payment for participation as such but more of an expression of gratitude for their willingness to take time off from their otherwise busy schedules to contribute to the study. Furthermore, respondents were only informed about the reward at the end of the interview to allow workers to respond to questions during the interview as they saw fit. Suggestions for making payments before the interview, as suggested by Head (2009), were deemed potentially problematic by the researcher, because of the concern that it could alter the quality of the interviews by potentially giving respondents the impression that there was an expectation about the standard of their responses as paid participants. Even so, it can be argued that participants might have been aware beforehand that their participation will be remunerated because recruitment was done with the assistance of already interviewed and rewarded respondents. However, there were no questions posed to the researcher about the reward from any of the participants either before or during the interviews, it was the researcher who initiated the topic of payment after each interview.

Overall, it is difficult to evaluate the extent to which the monetary reward encouraged participation, whether workers agreed to participate because of knowledge about the reward or just keen interest in sharing their work experiences as on-demand domestic workers. The literature on the effectiveness of incentivising research participation is likewise not well established with empirical evidence (Head, 2009). A conclusion on this issue is that the reward may have played a role, but it was not the sole reason for the decision to participate among workers in this study. This is based on the observation that potential participant referrals by already interviewed and rewarded respondents did not always guarantee successful recruitment. Time constraints and in some cases, suspicions of the researcher led to instances of non-response to interview invitations.

4.6.2 Organisational anonymity in case study research

The choice over the degree of anonymity for the 'case' in this study was another key concern that invoked ethical and pragmatic questions and considerations for how the study's findings were to be presented. This study is about the platform domestic work model and workers' experiences of it. This presented the researcher with the dilemma of whether it was significant to disclose the identity of the platform company that workers were engaged with and reporting their working experiences in relation to. This dilemma was compounded by the fact that the platform company, SweepSouth, did not agree to participate in the study and hence, it was felt that it would be unethical to publish a one-sided account about the company's practices by workers.

Deciding on the degree of anonymity for the case is always a key decision to make in case study research according to Yin (2018). Anonymity in a case study can either be partial, whereby only the individual informants within the case are anonymised but the research site itself is disclosed; or it can be a complete anonymisation of the entire case where both the research informants and the research site are anonymised and given pseudonyms (Yin, 2018:324). The anonymisation of platform domestic workers interviewed for this study was uncontroversial for the researcher and was clearly stipulated as a condition of participation for workers to allow them to be able to express themselves freely without fear of being identified for their opinions. The challenge was whether this anonymity could be extended to the platform company itself, rendering the case study completely anonymous.

According to Yin (2018:324), anonymising a case study completely is advantageous and sometimes necessary if the research is on a controversial topic, or if the researcher fears subsequent actions by those implicated in the research report. It is also more applicable if the purpose of the research inquiry was less about the specific case studied but more about presenting an 'ideal-type' phenomenon for analysis and theoretical discussion (Yin, 2018:324). Organisational anonymity for social science research is useful for negotiating access to research sites and affords researchers the freedom and independence to produce highly critical accounts of organisational practices (Taylor and Land, 2014). Giving organisations and other kinds of research sites anonymity in qualitative research can also be a default ethical principle and requirement in qualitative research, ethics boards and publication

journals that all research participants be anonymous (Taylor and Land, 2019; Kelly, 2009).

There are significant disadvantages and limitations to anonymising an entire research project. By not disclosing the identity of research sites and the demographic studied, one removes important contextual information necessary to fully analyse and comprehend the study's key findings and conclusions (Kelly, 2009). There is also the concern that anonymity can be easily unravelled upon publication and that is the promise of anonymity that cannot be guaranteed or maintained which is unethical (Kelly, 2009:433). In their critique of organisational anonymity in research Taylor and Land (2014) opine that not disclosing the identity of organisations in social science research on work on contemporary organisations inhibits the ability of researchers and scholars to contribute more efficiently and meaningfully to public debates and policies about work and organisational behaviour using concrete studied examples. These debates are instead, restricted to academic circles as theoretical abstractions (Taylor and Land, 2014). Lastly, out of pragmatic reasons for doing case study research, Yin (2018:325) advises against complete anonymisation of the case because of the real challenge of composing and reporting on an anonymous case study, and the difficult tasks involved in converting its rich, contextual information into fictitious accounts.

Considering these arguments for and against complete case anonymisation, I decided that the best approach to take was to disclose the identity of SweepSouth as the platform company workers were reflecting on in describing their experience in my final research thesis. Providing a full narrative of workers' experiences and the potential impact of gig work in the domestic sector would be nearly impossible to do without disclosing information about the identity of the companies involved its origin and real-life examples of their operations in the domestic sector. SweepSouth is currently one out of only two platform domestic work companies in South Africa and is the most popular; hence its anonymity cannot be maintained in the case study's research findings report. More importantly, the platform company itself is very public about the virtues of its work model and its desire to improve working conditions for the better in the domestic sector through its technological innovation. This study's findings are therefore intended to contribute to a constructive debate on the company's potential to achieve this using its current work practices in the sector.

4.6.3 Research positionality

As a qualitative researcher, it is important to acknowledge that social research is not a neutral academic undertaking but is a human activity that is influenced and constructed by the researcher's own subjective understandings and contextual circumstances and constraints (Punch, 2005). I set out to conduct this study out of the need to understand domestic work in the gig economy from workers themselves, as part of a broader research project on technology in the domestic sector. Although the research idea was suggested to me by my supervisor, I soon developed a keen interest in the topic because there seemed to be a great divide between critics of platform labour in the gig economy and platform companies like SweepSouth who were expressing in their public discourses the benefits of gig work as a technological innovation in an environment of high unemployment and rigid employment regimes.

Furthermore, there is a current debate in the domestic work literature about modernising the occupation which scholars are equally quite pessimistic about. I drew my theoretical positioning from this strand of work and was especially inspired by Ally's (2009) critique of the modernisation discourse in the domestic work literature that tends to overlook workers' capacities to modernise their work for maximum benefit for themselves, rather than modernisation as state paternalism or modernisation on employers' terms. The research methodology and findings of this study were hence designed to allow for the generation of workers' voices on platform domestic work, and to investigate their creative engagements with this new labour form as they navigate poor working conditions in the sector.

I approached this research topic as an outsider looking into the world of platform domestic work. I have no experience of the job myself, nor was I personally acquainted with any domestic workers before this study. Acknowledgement and constant awareness of my relatively privileged position as a postgraduate student was a crucial component of my fieldwork and my analysis of respondents' narratives regarding why they chose platform domestic work and how they were engaging with it in their on-going pursuits for more favourable working conditions in the sector. As a result, my own views on platform domestic work were continually evolving from a position of highly critical to a critical but nuanced understanding of the value placed on this kind of work by domestic workers. My position as an outsider amongst my key informants did not hamper the success of my fieldwork in any significant way,

and respondents were quite keen on sharing their knowledge, opinions, and experience of the job openly with me.

4.7 Methodological challenges

Conducting research during a pandemic was a challenging task. The pandemic brought about logistical challenges to conducting fieldwork, which made it difficult to collect enough quality data to ensure reliability in findings (Buckle, 2021). Fieldwork strategies had to be quickly revised to adhere to policies of social distancing (Dodds and Hess, 2020). At the start of this research project, fieldwork was intended to be conducted face-to-face but as the pandemic unfolded, this approach had to be revised to cater to a socially distanced approach to fieldwork.

As a result, establishing rapport with participants was a key challenge because all interactions and interview sessions with the study's key informants had to be done through telephone call or instant messaging using WhatsApp. Because the researcher and participants did not meet in person at any point during the study, issues of mistrust and suspicion of the researcher were experienced in some instances, and this had a significant impact on the recruitment of key informants for this study. The size of the sample was significantly hampered by instances of non-response from referred potential participants, which suggested to the researcher that they were not convinced of the researcher's intentions and had changed their minds about participating in the study.

Time constraints on the part of participants was another key challenge encountered during recruitment and interview-date preparations. This was because platform domestic workers work irregular and sporadic hours, which meant that they had little time to spare for interviews with the researcher. As a result, most of the successful interviews were done in the evenings and during weekends or whenever workers had free time to spare. The researcher had to regularly follow-up with participants about their preferred interview times, or their scheduling concerns.

To overcome these challenges with recruitment, it was also decided from the early stages of the research that compensation for domestic workers' time and effort should be offered to encourage participation, as well as compensate them for the hour they could have otherwise spent trying to secure clients or attend to work appointments. It is commonplace in research to compensate participants' time and

input (Colvin, 2015:) although, in many social research publications, it is rarely acknowledged (Head, 2009:335). Aside from being a token of appreciation and incentivising participation, giving out monetary payments to research participants can also work to equalise the imbalance of power between the researcher and the research participant by ensuring that both parties receive a direct and immediate benefit from the research (Head, 2009; Biruk, 2017).

With these principles in mind, a monetary reward equivalent to an average booking on the app was given to on-demand domestic workers after each interview session. Follow-up interviews were also rewarded but with a reduced amount and workers were made aware of this before each follow-up interview session. A thorough reflexive discussion about the ethical implications of this act of rewarding participation in this research is discussed in the 'ethics and reflections on methodology' section of this chapter.

4.7.1 Limitations of study

The main shortcoming of an interpretivist epistemology and a case study design approach is that both have limits on the generalisability of findings (Williams, 2000, Yin, 2018). Generalisation in both case studies and interpretivism-oriented studies are not based on statistically representative samples and therefore cannot be inferred to whole populations (Williams, 2000; Yin, 2018). As such, generalising findings is limited to either lower-level forms of generalisations referred to as 'moderatum generalisations' by Williams (2000) when discussing generalisations in interpretivist social research; or can be restricted to theory building and replication (Yin, 2018; Schreier, 2018).

This study's findings are to be treated as theoretical generalisations. Yin (2018:79) argues that generalisations in case study research are derived from the case study rather than from the cases themselves, and these generalisations are analytic insights that are used to make propositions or argumentative claims about issues emerging from the case study. Findings presented in this case study are hence useful to the extent that they add on to our theoretical understandings of the platform domestic work process and domestic workers' experiences and engagement with this kind of domestic work. Although the findings are derived from a small group of mostly young domestic workers, most of whom were Zimbabwean migrant domestic workers in Cape Town, the findings are still crucial for our understanding of how

platform domestic work is being structured and utilised by workers in the sector. The over-representation of young, mostly Zimbabwean nationals may also be indicative of the changing demographic composition of workers in the sector in post-Apartheid South Africa.

Conclusion

This section has discussed at length the case study approach followed in capturing workers' experiences of platform domestic work and has offered concrete justifications for the validity of the findings and theoretical propositions made in this thesis report. This study provides an analysis of the ways in which domestic workers in South Africa are engaging with and experiencing platform domestic work. The study achieved this using in-depth, qualitative interviews with a select sample of platform domestic workers working for the platform company SweepSouth in Cape Town. A profile of the platform company SweepSouth and how work on the platform is structured and organised is discussed in chapter 5 and is based on findings derived from collected documentary data about SweepSouth.

5. The business of platform domestic work

This chapter provides an overview of the labour process of platform domestic work at the SweepSouth as a context to workers' narratives on their experiences of working on the platform. The aim of this chapter is to answer the following question: How is platform domestic work structured on the SweepSouth platform? The following sections address this question through an analysis of the founding mission of the company and its platform business model.

5.1 The business of SweepSouth

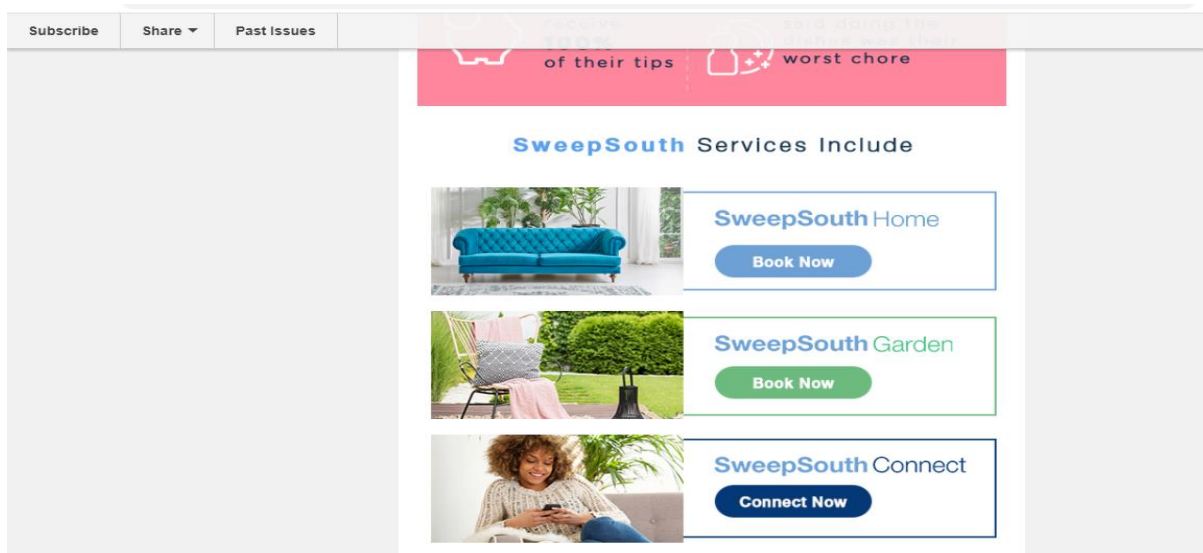
5.1.1 What is SweepSouth?

SweepSouth is a South African for-profit platform company that was founded in 2013 by co-founders Aisha Pandor and Alen Ribic. According to co-founder and Chief Operating Officer (CEO) Dr Aisha Pandor, SweepSouth is a 'social utility and an online platform' that is facilitating an efficient and convenient domestic services exchange between domestic workers and householders through digital platform technology (Pandor, 2017). SweepSouth views its business as providing a much-needed service to society, a cleaning service to clients and work opportunities for domestic workers. This is captured in the following quote from a public presentation on the business of SweepSouth by CEO Pandor:

SweepSouth is a social utility and an online platform that allows homeowners who are looking for home cleaning services and looking for someone to clean their home to connect to domestic workers who are experienced, inventive, and looking for work to connect the two sides together. (Pandor, 2017)

SweepSouth currently operates in cities across three provinces in South Africa, namely Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal, and Western Cape (SweepSouth, 2021). Much like conventional domestic service agencies in the domestic sector, SweepSouth operates in urban, middle-class areas. Image 1 below was retrieved from the company's email newsletter. As a marketing trope, it depicts the company's services as being intended for a middle-class household, and this is exemplified by the choice of imagery used in the advertisement.

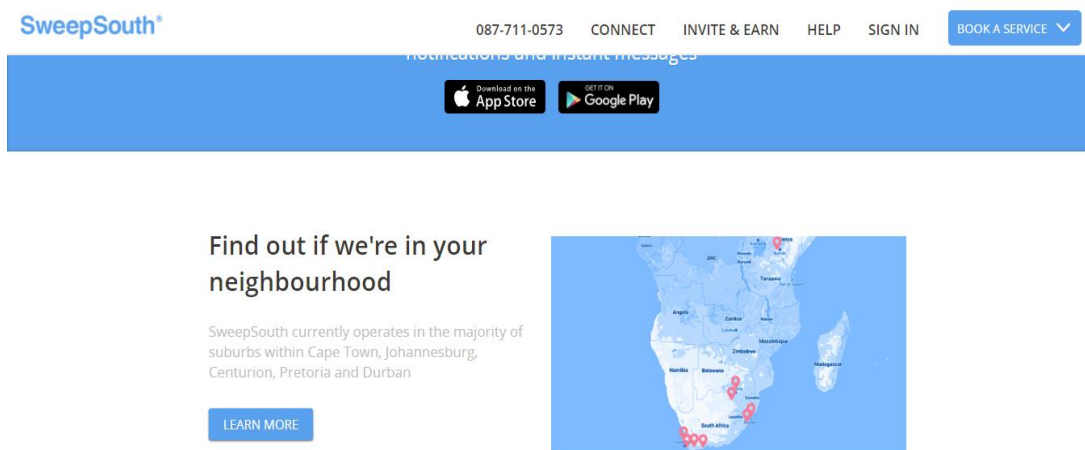
Image 1: *SweepSouth's marketing content is intended for middle-class householders*



Source: SweepSouth email newsletter

SweepSouth has also opened a branch in Nairobi, Kenya and has plans for future expansion into West Africa and other available global markets (SweepSouth, 2021; Njeri, 2021; Pandor, 2019). The map below highlights the company's various operations by areas in South Africa and in Kenya as of 2021.

Image 2: Current SweepSouth branches in South Africa and Kenya



Source: <https://sweepsouth.com/>

As of October 2020, the company reported that it had serviced one million cleaning bookings on its platforms since its inception in 2014 and had 20 000 domestic workers working on its platform (SweepSouth, 2020). Furthermore, the company has also expanded into two additional divisions, namely: the SweepSouth Shop, and the SweepSouth Connect platform (Pandor, 2017). The additional services by

SweepSouth are separate from the main cleaning platform and are only offered in South Africa. The SweepSouth Shop sells home cleaning products (Pandor, 2017), whereas the SweepSouth Connect platform division is an app-based platform for customers who need quick access to professionals such as electricians, plumbers, handymen, social media marketers, accountants, and tax specialists (SweepSouth, 2021).

While many researchers have identified SweepSouth as a gig economy company offering short-term work or 'gigs' through its digital platform, SweepSouth rejects this label. SweepSouth does not identify itself as part of the gig economy as suggested by some researchers and research groups looking into the company's work structure (see Hunt and Machingura, 2016; Hunt and Samman, 2020; Tandem Research and The Cloudburst Group, 2020). The company argues that the 'gig work' or 'on-demand work' label only applies to platforms like Uber and not necessarily to platform domestic work companies like SweepSouth in the domestic sector. The quotes below illustrate CEO Pandor's reasoning in this regard in two separate public interviews:

...we are not really a gig economy business. Most of the bookings that happen on our platform are recurring, ongoing bookings as opposed to something like an Uber where you may only ever see your driver once. We are trying to build something where you can create ongoing relationships with the customer and the service provider, and you cannot do that if you treat people badly. (Pandor, 2020, cited in Mkele, 2020)

...actually, if you think about domestic work in the way it works in South Africa and in many other similar markets, there's a relationship. I don't have a relationship with my Uber driver apart from the five to twenty minutes that I'm in the car and then I don't mind who the next Uber driver is who comes and picks me up. This is very different. (Pandor, 2019, cited in Whitfield, 2019).

According to the company, associating SweepSouth with the gig economy is misguided because unlike conventional platform companies of the gig economy, SweepSouth is operating in a unique sector, where providing a regular and recurring domestic cleaning service to customers in intimate household workspaces is a key aspect of the business model. There is the understanding by CEO Pandor that conventional gig work does not occur in intimate workspaces and hence the requirement of establishing longer-term relationships with customers is not practiced and nor is it crucial to the gig work business model. This suggests therefore that the

kind of domestic work provided by SweepSouth is not gig work and thus is not a part of the gig economy. The company also reiterated this position when responding to a research invitation for this case study, stating that companies like themselves are serving a different purpose than 'uber-like' platforms in Africa's development context (see appendix H). However, the realities of the working conditions on SweepSouth's platforms follow the work model associated with the gig economy, as pointed out by scholars in the literature on SweepSouth. This is discussed in section 5.2 of this chapter.

5.1.2 SweepSouth's founding mission and objective in the domestic sector

A. Modernisation through technology

According to the company's website, SweepSouth's founding objective is to modernise home services in South Africa through technology (SweepSouth, 2021). SweepSouth is positioning itself as an agent of domestic work's modernisation that is harnessing platform technology to bring about structural improvements in the conditions of work in the South African domestic sector. In an interview with *Careers Magazine*, the company's CEO, Dr Aisha Pandor, posits that their platform is seeking to address informality in the sector and the maltreatment of domestic workers by creating formal work relations based on service agreements between domestic workers and their customers using its digital platform or app. Pandor remarks:

We also realised that the industry was very, very old school. It had not progressed probably since democracy. I mean some people didn't even have contracts and people were still being treated very badly. In short, we saw a big problem and thought to try and solve it through technology and by building an app and a platform that would help people get access to decent work at good rates. (Pandor, 2020, cited in Mkele, 2020).

Looking at this quote, it is evident that the kind of modernising that SweepSouth seeks to undertake in the South African domestic sector is about formalizing domestic work relations in the sector through promotion of service contracts and providing workers with a digital platform that makes it easier to search for work that pays well.

The elimination of search costs for clients and providing them easy access to trusted and competent workers is also an objective for SweepSouth. This is reflected in the

following quote by Pandor as she speaks about the efficiency of the SweepSouth platform in providing clients instant access to a credible domestic worker:

Through technology, we've been able to take the process of getting a domestic worker to come and help you with cleaning your home from taking hours or days or even weeks down to for few minutes; and then also we provide a whole lot of guarantees that you would not necessarily get if you were getting these services through other means. (Pandor, 2017)

Publicly, Pandor, has expressed the impetus for creating an online cleaning platform company to be her personal experience with the time-consuming task of finding and hiring a trusted domestic worker for her own household (SweepSouth, 2021; Njeri, 2021; Mkele, 2020). SweepSouth was hence also created out of the necessity for convenience and quality assurance to those seeking domestic cleaning services. SweepSouth is providing householders an opportunity to outsource the recruitment, and management of domestic workers to its platform. This is reflected in the quote below by Pandor:

...Through technology we're making the process of connecting to a cleaner, booking, managing, and paying for cleaning services extremely convenient, and we provide a couple of guarantees. So, there are things like trusted cleaners, we do all the vetting for you, and we provide convenience. (Pandor, 2017)

Customers of the platform get easy access to domestic workers whose cleaning skills and trustworthiness has already been vetted by SweepSouth, and whose day-to-day management is undertaken by the platform, not the customer. The emphasis on trust and vetting of cleaners on the platform highlight the crucial point that SweepSouth's business model hinges upon the commodified identity of its workers as 'trusted and vetted cleaners'. As is the convention among agencies in the domestic sector, SweepSouth is also partaking in the selling of domestic workers on its platform as 'comfortable others' to clients (Tame, 2018).

However, SweepSouth is positioning itself as an improvement on the existing recruitment and placement agencies and channels in the South African domestic sector. According to the company, agencies, classified ads, and online social media platforms in the sector are inefficient as placement and recruitment methods for domestic workers and clients. Reflecting on their own experience with these traditional channels in their journey towards creating SweepSouth, Pandor gives her take on their inefficiencies, which can be summarised as: the lack of credibility on the

part of recruiters; the difficulties of finding the right worker through social media advertisements; and the exploitation of domestic workers by agencies. These issues are expressed in Pandor's remarks regarding these recruitment and placement channels in the quotes below:

...when people referred domestic workers on Facebook, we would contact the domestic worker and the lady will say, "yeah I work in Stellenbosch and you live in Rondebosch, I'm not gonna come all that way to work for you" or we'd speak to someone over the phone and we will find that our friend had referred them but the person wasn't necessarily someone who was going to work for us...

...Also, classifieds aren't better and so we'd phone someone, and a man answers the phone and there will be a picture of a lady on the classifieds and the guy would sound really dodgy and that didn't feel really safe.

...So eventually, we went to these agencies that have existed in South Africa for decades and decades...

...We sat down and chatted to these ladies who were working with the agencies, and they talked about things like being badly paid and facing abuse, exploitation from both the clients and from the agencies themselves and just not really being in an industry that motivated them or that they wanted to work in. (Pandor, 2017)

Based on these quotes above, SweepSouth is positing that their company provides an improvement on these issues through its digital platform that is more accessible, credible, and safe for both domestic workers and clients. From the second quote above, Pandor alludes to the issue of maltreatment of domestic workers by agencies and their clients, suggesting that SweepSouth seeks to improve workers conditions by eliminating these exploitative practices in the agency market of the domestic sector. This is an interesting argument given that platform domestic work at SweepSouth is likewise a form of triangular employment since it is labour market intermediary or 'broker' provided work. Chapter 7 will interrogate this issue of the potential improvement of working conditions in platform domestic work further when discussing SweepStars' experiences of working conditions on the SweepSouth platform.

B. 'Democratising access'

SweepSouth insists that domestic workers or 'SweepStars' working under their platform are not company employees but are engaged on the platform as independent contractors. The company hence engages with domestic workers on

their platform as customers of the company, together with homeowners. When describing this business approach, Pandor likens SweepSouth to a 'market-place' that is comprised of domestic workers and homeowners as market actors in exchange with each other, but not with SweepSouth. The quote below encapsulates Pandor's reasoning:

So, SweepSouth is a marketplace. We deal with domestic workers on the one hand, and clients on the other hand and we are really passionate about offering value to both sides of the marketplace.

So, SweepStars on the one hand, are our customers and one hand of the marketplace. These people are 1.2 million registered SweepStars or domestic workers in South Africa alone and are at very high levels of unemployment and underemployment. (Pandor, 2017)

Therefore according to SweepSouth, the company's business is providing a 'marketplace'. This idea of the platform as a marketplace speaks to the commodified nature of cleaning jobs on the platform. Domestic workers on the platform are selling a commodified service that is highly interchangeable; this labour is a pure commodity ready for exchange on the market. In this 'marketplace', domestic workers and householders are clients of SweepSouth, and SweepSouth's role is to manage and administrate the marketplace, as explained by Pandor below:

...what platforms are, is that the relationship is often bi-directional, and this is the case in SweepSouth and the end role of platforms like SweepSouth is to be the enabler of those bi-directional interactions and to help with everything from forming the connections between the two sides, trying to aid in transactions between the two sides or trying to set up rules and regulations for how those two sides interact and then things can get even more interesting (Pandor, 2019).

Therefore, according to Pandor, domestic workers and householders are exchanging services to each other on the platform independently of SweepSouth as sellers and buyers of cleaning services. This means that domestic workers on the SweepSouth platform are not entitled to labour protections.

Despite this limitation for SweepStars however, SweepSouth argues that the marketplace created by the SweepSouth platform benefits domestic workers because it helps address unemployment and underemployment in the domestic sector (Pandor, 2017). For householders, it allows quick and affordable home-cleaning services (Pandor, 2017). Therefore, providing a digital platform as a

marketplace for the exchange of products and services allows for the 'democratisation of access' according to Pandor. This is expressed in her own words in the quote below:

I think the idea of platforms is not going to go away. It's a way of democratizing access to services and products. It's a way of being able to scale them at a very cheap rate. In many cases, it's a way of giving access to someone who is working in Cape Town and is providing a product or service to the rest of the world... (Pandor, 2019).

Despite the lack of labour protections for domestic workers on the platform, SweepSouth is positioning its actions in the domestic sector as democratising access to employment, and as well as cheap and convenient domestic cleaning services through its digital platform technology.

5.2 The structure of platform domestic work at SweepSouth

This section provides a summary of the ways in which platform domestic work is structured on the SweepSouth platform. This includes issues such as the application process for domestic workers, conditions of work on the platform and the allocation of work. A detailed discussion on workers experiences of working through the company's platform is provided in chapter 6 and 7.

5.2.1 Becoming a 'SweepStar'

To become a SweepStar, domestic workers are required to have at least two years of work experience as a cleaner, must not have a criminal record, and should provide positive references from their previous domestic work employers (SweepSouth, 2021). Upon completion of this screening process, potential SweepStars undergo a written test to evaluate their cleaning knowledge and professional skills before being allowed to work on the platform (SweepSouth, 2021).

5.2.2 Conditions of work on the platform

SweepSouth is one of the many South African platforms that have been rated highly for offering fair working conditions by the Fairwork Project, a research team focused on observing working conditions and workers' rights in the gig economy of South Africa. SweepSouth is rated eight out ten by the Fairwork Project for fair pay, fair contracts, fair representation, fair management, and fair work conditions (Fairwork, 2021). SweepSouth's overall fair work score is based on the finding by the research team that most SweepStars earn minimum wage after costs, operate under fair

contracts that are clear and accessible for workers, that the company is committed to promoting equality, diversity and inclusion, that it was able to provide protective measures for SweepStars during COVID and national lockdown, and that the company has committed to recognising SweepStars' right to engage in collective bargaining and has established worker communication channels to enhance the process (Fairwork, 2021).

As a precondition for work on the platform, SweepStars sign service agreements, not employment contracts, upon completion of their application and screening process. SweepSouth states explicitly in its Terms and Conditions that the company is 'not in a partnership, employment, or agency relationship with users and service providers on its platform' (SweepSouth, 2020). Therefore, according to SweepSouth, the company is not liable for any employment tax such as unemployment insurance and social security contributions for domestic workers using its platform (SweepSouth, 2020). The company also extends the responsibility of ensuring safe and secure working environments to the 'users' of its platform, who are householders and SweepStars (SweepSouth, 2020). Although SweepSouth does not identify itself as a gig economy company, this kind of working structure for domestic workers on its platform resembles the main features of gig economy work identified in the literature such as working on-demand as a freelancer or contractor through a digital platform (Du Ruyter and Brown, 2019; Hunt and Machingura, 2016).

Platform domestic work at SweepSouth is on a work-by-time basis, and this is clearly stated on the company's website using the quote below:

...We charge for the SweepStar's time, i.e., the number of hours they work. We do not charge per task as everyone's home is different, but our estimates are correct 99% of the time! (SweepSouth, 2021).

As indicated in this quote above, SweepStars are paid according to the number of hours they clean at the client's house. When it comes to the payment of SweepStars, the company states in its website that SweepStars earn between 80% and 90% of the total booking fee, although this is largely determined by the worker's length of work with the platform (SweepSouth, 2021). SweepStars earn 65% of the booking fee in the first two to three months of work on the platform (SweepSouth, 2021). A worker's payment rate on the platform increases with time on the SweepSouth platform; new workers earn less than those that have been on the platform for longer

than three months. It is crucial to point out that according to SweepSouth, their calculation of the booking fees can vary given that they are determined by a variety of factors according to the company, which includes the length of the booking, frequency of the booking, the day of the week in which the booking is being made, the level of demand per geographic area and lastly, SweepSouth's base rate for bookings which is not publicly disclosed (SweepSouth, 2021). It appears, however, that SweepSouth's revenue is derived through charges to customers and SweepStars, especially new workers on the platform.

It is stated on the company's website that SweepStars' average booking time is 7 hours per day with an average pay R210, which is equated to an average monthly income of up to R4000 (SweepSouth, 2021). However, according to the company's own domestic worker survey reports on pay and working conditions in the sector, the average earnings of SweepStars between 2019 and 2020 were R3600 and R3359 respectively (SweepSouth, 2019; SweepSouth, 2020). These figures were above the 2018 national minimum wage of R15 per hour for Domestic Work in South Africa (*National Minimum Wage Act, 2018*); prior to its adjustment to R19.09 per hour from the 1st of March 2021 (*Government Notice No.43026, 2020*). There are no SweepStar earnings figures for 2021; the company's 2021 report (SweepSouth, 2021b) does not indicate SweepStar earnings statistics for the year, following the minimum wage increase for domestic workers.

5.2.3 Benefits of becoming a SweepStar

Aside from the promise of above-minimum wage earnings, prospective workers are also promised a chance to get regular access to a wide pool of clients and a flexible working arrangement from the company. This is best captured on the company's website as outlined by the image below:

Image 3: *Benefits of becoming a SweepStar*



Source: <https://campaign.sweepsouth.com/become-a-sweepstar/>

The caption in this image above reads:

“Apply to become a SweepStar on SweepSouth today. The SweepSouth platform connects you to thousands of clients near you. You get to choose when you want to work and where you want to work.”

As the above caption in image 3 shows, domestic workers get access to a guaranteed supply of clients from the platform and given that SweepSouth mainly operates in urban, middle-class areas, this provides the potential for higher pay rates for domestic workers including extra tips from this wealthy clientele. SweepStars are also allowed to choose their own workdays and work locations, meaning workers can target specific areas they deem attractive to work in for better pay and working conditions. In addition to receiving booking requests from clients, workers are also allowed to bid for any available extra cleaning jobs on the worker app, in a section of the app called ‘earn more’ (SweepSouth, 2021).

SweepSouth also maintains in its website that workers on their platform can get access to basic skills training and vocational courses, financial literacy, and savings training, plus a zero-rated worker app that will ensure that SweepStars are not using their own data to manage bookings on the app (SweepSouth, 2021). During COVID-19 National lockdown protocols, the company also raised funds to provide SweepStars with income relief due to loss of bookings (SweepSouth, 2021).

5.2.4 The labour process of platform domestic work

As stated by SweepSouth, its objective is to create a marketplace composed of domestic workers and clients exchanging household services. Therefore, as independent contractors on the platform, SweepStars work on a part-time basis and must secure their own jobs on the platform. The company only oversees and organises this 'matching' of domestic workers and customers through on the platform.

Clients can book a home cleaning service through the company's website or through the SweepSouth app. The following image below is a website view of SweepSouth's home cleaning booking page where the customer specifies their booking details and instructions for SweepStars.

Image 4: website booking platform

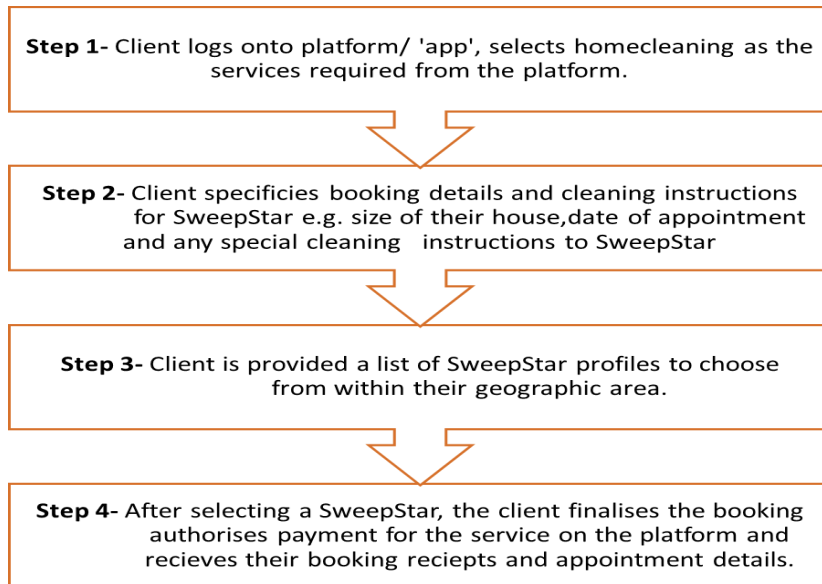
The screenshot displays the SweepSouth booking interface. At the top left is the SweepSouth logo, and at the top right is a 'SIGN IN' link. The main content area is divided into two columns. The left column contains three sections: 'Extras' with six task icons (Laundry & Ironing, Inside Fridge, Inside Oven, Inside Cabinets, Interior Windows, Interior Walls), 'How Often' with 'ONE TIME' and 'REGULAR' buttons and a 'Select Day' dropdown set to 'Fri, 10 Sep', and 'Booking Insurance' with a 'What is this?' link. The right column shows booking details: '3 Hours' service, 'When: Fri, 10 Sep @ 08:30', 'Where: Milnerton, Cape Town 7435', 'Rooms: 1 Bedroom, 1 Bathroom', 'Service Fee: R 35.00', 'Insurance: R 19.00', a 'VOUCHER CODE' input field with an 'APPLY' button, and a 'Total' of 'R 214.00'. A pink 'Find SweepStar >' button is at the bottom right.

Source: <https://sweepsouth.com/book/step1?indoor=true>

Domestic workers have their own separate SweepSouth worker app in which their work is organised. A householder in need of a cleaning service will log onto SweepSouth's digital platform and select home cleaning as their desired home service from the platform. The client then specifies the booking details such as the number of rooms to be cleaned, extra cleaning tasks to be done or any special instructions to the cleaner, and as well their house geographic location. After specifying these details, the client is presented with a list of potential cleaners or 'SweepStars' to choose from in their geographic area for their cleaning service needs. Once this selection is done, the client finalises the booking, pays the booking

fee on the platform and receives a booking confirmation email which summarises the booking details and the day of the cleaning service appointment. Image 5 below gives a summary of this booking process.

Image 5: Summary of the booking process

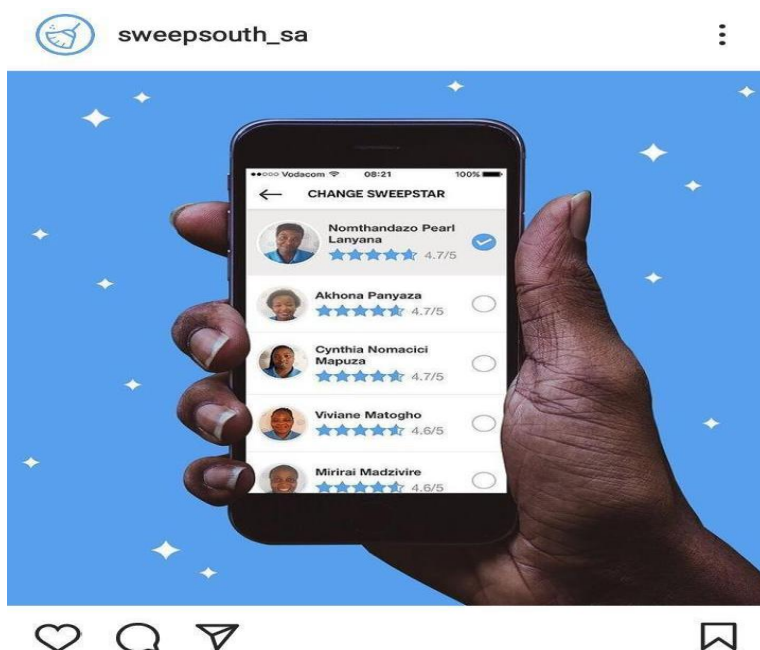


Source: Author's own summary

SweepSouth gives clients access to general house cleaning services and an option to book extra cleaning tasks (SweepSouth, 2021). The platform also gives clients an option to make a one-time booking or opt for regular bookings on the platform, with the same SweepStar should they choose (SweepSouth, 2021). There is an incentive for clients to make these regular bookings on the platform because only one-time bookings incur a service fee from SweepSouth (SweepSouth, 2021). As of 2021, SweepSouth's service fee was a flat rate of R35. This is deducted from the total booking fee paid by the client to SweepSouth during the booking phase, and the remainder of the fee is allocated to the SweepStar (SweepSouth, 2021). According to SweepSouth, this booking fee is influenced and determined by booking demand per geographic area and the company's base rate (SweepSouth, 2021).

Clients are also allowed to opt-in for an additional insurance fee that covers damage and loss of client's property, provided through SweepSouth by a third-party (SweepSouth, 2021). This insurance is optional, and a client may choose not to subscribe to it. When a client makes a booking, they are presented with a list of possible domestic workers or 'SweepStars' to choose from, in accordance with their

geographic location and worker availability (SweepSouth, 2021). Before they can choose a SweepStar, clients are also presented with a 'SweepScore', which is a measure of a given SweepStar's performance and is based on previous clients' ratings and the number of jobs done on the platform (SweepSouth, 2021). This 'SweepScore' is reflected as stars on SweepStars' profiles on the platform. A perfect SweepScore is a five star-rating. Image 6 below shows a typical example of a clients' view of workers' profiles reflecting their SweepScores. **Image 6:** Clients' view of SweepStars' profile



35 likes

sweepsouth_sa Here at SweepSouth we call our lovely cleaning ladies stars, SweepStars 🌟🌟 They are fri... more

Source: https://www.instagram.com/p/Bf-ilbDBDob/?utm_medium=copy_link

Upon viewing the proposed SweepStars' profiles, the client chooses their preferred SweepStar, keeping in mind their work performance score measured by the number of stars on their profile. Once the cleaning task is completed, clients are required to rate their SweepStar's performance to contribute towards their SweepScores for other clients to view on the platform. This suggests therefore that workers' continued access to jobs on the platform is highly influenced by their SweepScores which tracks their job performance on the platform.

Conclusion

SweepSouth is seeking to modernise the South African domestic sector through its digital platform technology. Modernisation in this regard involves the use of platform technology or apps to elimination of search costs for domestic workers and clients, and democratising access to work for domestic workers and convenient and affordable cleaning services to clients. Domestic work on the platform is structured on a work-by-time model and domestic workers are engaged as independent workers in service agreements with the platform. The work is part-time and access to work is determined by a performance-based score on the platform.

SweepSouth is rated highly by some observers such as the Fairwork Project in terms of fairness regarding working conditions such as fair pay, fair contracts, and fair management. The next two chapters explore the experience of these working conditions from the perspective of platform domestic workers themselves.

6. Workers' approach to platform domestic work: flexible working and platform leakage

This chapter presents a summary of the key findings from interviews with current and former SweepStars about their motivations for pursuing platform domestic work, and their engagement with this kind of domestic work. The findings revealed that domestic workers in South Africa choose platform domestic work because they are responding to widespread unemployment. They are also seeking platform domestic work because it provides an opportunity for flexible working. The main finding regarding this question, however, is that platform domestic work allows for the practice of platform leakage, where workers negotiate for cleaning work outside of the platform with users or customers of the platform. This study found that a common practice by platform domestic workers is to pursue platform domestic work for the opportunity for securing private clients to work for informally through the SweepSouth platform.

This chapter discusses these themes in more detail in the following sections. As indicated in chapter 5, domestic workers on the SweepSouth platform are referred to as SweepStars by the company, therefore the term 'SweepStar' and 'platform domestic worker' will be used interchangeably in this chapter and beyond.

6.1 Addressing Unemployment

SweepSouth is addressing unemployment in the domestic sector and in the country at large. All the workers interviewed in this study cited unemployment and the need for reliable access to cleaning jobs from the platform as the main reason for joining SweepSouth. Linda and Tatenda in the following quotes below are commenting on the reliability of the SweepSouth platform in ensuring they have reliable access to work and earnings on the platform:

You know, my expectations were about salary. I was thinking maybe I will be earning more so that my family and I will have food to put on the table, for my kids. Because everything that I do I have to do it for my kids, that is my priority... that is why I decided to go to SweepSouth; so that I know I will get the bookings to allow me to put food on the table. (**Linda**)

Perfectly, I recommend it [SweepSouth] a hundred percent because it's reliable! if you want to do something you can go to SweepSouth! (**Tatenda**)

The opportunity to earn and having a reliable supply of work is crucial for platform domestic workers. A majority of current and former SweepStars interviewed in this

study were unmarried women with children, who expressed the pressing need for easy access to work to provide for their children. Amongst those married, the need to earn an income was also seen as necessary to sustain their families.

The opportunity to work was also cited as a positive aspect of platform domestic work even amongst workers who were quite critical of their working conditions on SweepSouth's platform. Buhle, a former SweepStar, remarked that platform domestic work at SweepSouth is 'better than nothing' in her response about platform domestic work at SweepSouth. This is indicated in the quote below:

...when you're just sitting around doing nothing, you think of that place – even if you were getting peanuts; because even though it was almost just for transport money, you could at least put bread on the table. (**Buhle, former SweepStar**)

Buhle's quote above outlines the main criticism by many respondents in this study that although the incomes received from working through the SweepSouth platform are not enough to sustain their livelihood needs, the work is still worthwhile and preferable to not working at all.

Of the ten platform domestic workers interviewed in this study, seven were foreign migrants from Zimbabwe. For these SweepStars, SweepSouth is indeed democratising access to a hostile job market. More than half of these workers were experiencing domestic work for the first time at SweepSouth. Some had joined the platform because of it was difficult for them to gain employment elsewhere in the labour market. Linda, a migrant SweepStar from Zimbabwe, reports in the quote below that she joined SweepSouth because she struggled to access work elsewhere in the South African labour market:

I was a receptionist back home. I joined SweepSouth last year in January...Because I was not getting jobs, it was difficult to get a job. So, someone introduced me to SweepSouth then I joined Sweep South. (**Linda**)

Linda had no experience working as a domestic worker prior to joining SweepSouth but she chose the job because of the lack of other work opportunities available and because of the low entrance barriers for platform domestic work at SweepSouth. Patricia, another Zimbabwean SweepStar who holds a bachelor's degree in Teaching, also narrates a similar experience with the difficulties of gaining formal employment as a migrant worker in South Africa. Unlike Linda however, she began

working informally as a domestic worker in South Africa, and later became a platform domestic worker at SweepSouth. Her narration of her trajectory to platform domestic work is shown in the quote below.

It [domestic work] was my first option because at first, I didn't have enough papers for me to go to other jobs because mostly, they need permanent residence.

I came here in Cape Town in 2019 January, then I worked for almost 1 and half years privately. Then I lost work due to my client moving to another place... Yah, it was just my employer moving to another place that I had to apply to SweepSouth... **(Patricia)**

Patricia remarks that her lack of permanent residence status is a hindrance to accessing formal employment outside domestic work in South Africa. SweepSouth on the other hand is more accessible and only requires South African work permits or refugee IDs from migrant workers without permanent residence permits (SweepSouth, 2021).

Looking at the experiences of Linda and Patricia, it is evident that domestic work is an easily accessible job market for migrant workers. Platform domestic work is building on this trend and is improving migrant workers' access to work in the domestic sector for new entrants such as Linda, and for those with experience in domestic work like Patricia. In Patricia's account, we also see the problem of job insecurity that is inherent in informal domestic work. Domestic workers have little assurance for permanent employment with their employers in informal work. SweepSouth's platform therefore addresses this problem for domestic workers by offering them easy access to a large pool of customers, which provides a more reliable and stable access to work than is the case in informal work.

6.2 Opportunity for flexible work

While workers first and foremost seek reliable access to work through SweepSouth's platform, they are also seeking a chance to secure flexible domestic work employment. Flexibility is understood by platform domestic workers to be the ability to choose workdays and having flexible work hours. This is illustrated in the quotes by Tatenda and Buhle below:

...It's also flexible you see... if you go to work sometimes you can just finish by 1 and if you want to go somewhere, you can just go, you see? I recommend it, I always recommend it to everyone, everyone! **(Tatenda)**

Because what's really nice is that you are able to go in the whole week, right? If maybe you're not available, let's say you go in on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, then you decide that Thursday and Friday you won't be able to go in – then they won't ask you, 'What's the problem? Why can't you come in?', they simply say, 'It's fine, then we'll book you off.' So even if you were to log into the app, you won't get the jobs because you took that day off, you took those days off. So they won't question you, they won't do anything. **(Buhle)**

As a form of gig work, platform domestic work allows workers to work according to their own choosing as self-employed workers. Workers avail themselves for work on the platform whenever they choose and work on a piecework basis with individual customers on the platform. This allows them autonomy to choose the number of days they want to avail themselves for work on the platform.

Flexibility as one of the main perks of platform domestic work was mostly felt by married workers living with their families. This is because flexible work allows these women to balance their unpaid care work responsibilities with their paid employment. This point was heavily emphasised by the two married respondents in this case study, Sarah, and Angela, who recalled their struggles to balance the demands of their previous formal jobs with their care work responsibilities at home. Angela worked as a restaurant waitress before deciding to do domestic work with SweepSouth. She describes her decision to join SweepSouth as follows:

When I came here, in South Africa, I was a waitress, and then when I had my child, I then decided to be a domestic worker, because of my child. You know when you are a waitress sometimes you finish work at 10 pm... and yet you have a child! So it was too much for me. Then I decided to be a domestic worker, and later on, I started to enjoy it, and it was fine for me. **(Angela)**

Sarah likewise describes the long working hours in her previous retail job as being ill-suited for a working mother like herself in the following remarks:

...Firstly it was money and then the working conditions because I told myself, I'm a mother so I can't work nightshift anymore because I won't have time with my child. If you work in restaurants or in retail shops, you going to knock-off late. Because at that time I was working at Spar and that Spar would close at 9 o'clock and then from 9 o'clock you have to do the cash-out, the cleaning and stuff... so that will be half past 9 or quarter to 10. You still must go fetch the kids from day-care at that time and come back home; you need to rest, maybe tomorrow you're now changing shifts such that you're now working the morning-shift so now you have to wake the baby up early in the morning by 6 o'clock because at quarter past 7 you have to be at work to open the shop. So, for me it was not working...**(Sarah)**

Platform domestic work is hence understood by some workers to be a better alternative to many other low-skilled service jobs in terms of balancing paid and unpaid care work. It is crucial to point out that this finding about the ability to balance paid and unpaid care work through platform domestic work was only reported by SweepStars that were married and living with their children in this study. For unmarried SweepStars that were not residing with their children, the need to work and earn an income to care for their families back home was the main benefit of platform domestic work.

Another interesting finding about flexible working on the SweepSouth platform was that it can lead to underemployment and income insecurity among platform domestic workers. Some SweepStars expressed their desire to get more jobs from the platform than they were currently receiving at the time of the interview. For example, Linda, who is a single mother of three outlines her desire for more jobs on the platform to make ends meet for herself and her children in the following quote below:

You know if you are single all the responsibilities are yours, so I need to work like 7 days. But I think it's because there's lot of SweepSouth people so I can't get the days. I get maybe 3 days, other weeks I get 4 days... like that. (**Linda**)

Linda's remarks above show that flexible working can lead to income insecurity for domestic workers that are unable to fill their work weeks with enough jobs from the platform. As an intermediary, providing and maintaining job security for workers on the platform is not the function or the responsibility of SweepSouth. SweepStars understand this arrangement well, and this is captured in Buhle's remarks below:

You work, you get paid. If you don't work, it's up to you, they don't fuss over you! If you didn't get the job there on the internet, on that app, it's not their fault, it's not their problem... you see? (**Buhle**)

This statement by Buhle shows that platform domestic work offers domestic workers reliable access to work than is otherwise the case in informal work, but job security is not guaranteed on the platform. SweepStars access cleaning jobs through the platform but their continued employment on the platform is not secure.

Underemployment on the SweepSouth platform is also pushing SweepStars to search for additional informal cleaning work and other income earning activities because platform domestic work cannot guarantee them enough work and incomes.

Of keynote in this trend is that many platform domestic workers interviewed in this study reported that they also get some of their private, informal cleaning work customers through the SweepSouth platform. Section 6.3 elaborates more on this phenomenon, which is termed 'platform leakage' in the platform domestic work literature.

6.3 Platform leakage

Access to jobs on the platform and flexible working are the key benefits of platform domestic work. This study also uncovered that SweepStars are also appreciative of platform domestic work because it allows them to practice platform leakage; the opportunity to get clients from the platform to work for privately, under negotiated conditions. Eight out of the ten platform domestic workers interviewed in this study indicated that they combined platform domestic work with their own private cleaning work arrangements with clients that are mostly obtained from the SweepSouth platform (see Table 4 below).

Furthermore, all three former SweepStars interviewed in this study reported that they spent less than a year working as SweepStars before leaving the platform to work privately with clients they had met on the platform. 'Platform leakage' is hence a common occurrence among SweepStars and customers or users of the SweepSouth platform. As noted in the literature, platform leakage refers to the practice by platform customers and platform workers of transacting with each other outside of the platform once they are matched (Madden, 2015; He et al., 2020). Table 4 below provides an overview of the current working arrangements of all the platform domestic workers interviewed for this study, and it shows that many of them source private clients from the SweepSouth platform. The SweepSouth platform is hence being utilised as a networking tool by domestic workers to allow them access to private clients and additional work.

Table 4: Respondents' current working arrangements and 'platform leakage'

Respondent	Currently a SweepStar	Current job(s)	Sourcing private clients from the platform 'Platform leakage'
Angela	Yes	SweepStar; private cleaning jobs with SweepSouth clients	Yes
Sarah	Yes	SweepStar only	No
Patricia	Yes	SweepStar; does regular cleaning job with former SweepSouth client; private cleaning jobs outside SweepSouth	Yes
Nosipho	No	Receptionist at former SweepSouth client's business	Yes
Sindi	Yes	SweepStar; regular cleaning work with a former SweepSouth client	Yes
Buhle	No	Regular cleaning work with a former SweepSouth client	Yes
Rose	Yes	SweepStar; private cleaning jobs with clients from SweepSouth and any other private cleaning jobs when available	Yes
Linda	Yes	SweepStar only; is searching for private cleaning work outside the platform	No
Tatenda	Yes	SweepStar; private cleaning jobs with SweepSouth clients; informal trading	Yes
Lucia	No	Former SweepStar but share SweepSouth platform with another SweepSouth; does regular cleaning work with former SweepSouth client and other private cleaning jobs when available	Yes

For SweepStars, platform leakage is a strategy aimed at mitigating insufficient wages and underemployment on the SweepSouth platform. Platform leakage on the SweepSouth platform is also a direct result of the flexible work model practiced on the platform. Buhle describes this connection well, in the following quote below:

... let me say, if my client says, 'I love your work, so I would like for you to come on Wednesdays', you are able to tick yourself off as unavailable on Wednesdays at SweepSouth and they won't ask you why. Then you can go to the boss, and you earn extra at least.
(Buhle)

Based on the quote above, it is evident that because SweepStars are allowed to choose their own workdays, SweepStars can pursue platform leakage alongside their regular cleaning jobs on the platform; they can work on and off the platform as they choose. Platform leakage would not be possible without the flexible work model offered by SweepSouth.

Interestingly, SweepSouth's 'exclusivity clause' in their Terms and Conditions document, prohibits the practice of platform leakage. The following excerpt below is from the company's terms and conditions of service document on its website. It highlights the company's opposition to the exchange of cleaning services between SweepStars and clients outside of the platform:

- You agree that during the period of this agreement you will not book any services from, or engage, any Service Provider outside of our Website. You agree not to engage any Service Provider for 6 months after termination of this agreement.
- Placement Fee : Should you at any stage make an appointment with a Service Provider outside of booking said appointment via the SweepSouth platform, you will be liable to pay SweepSouth a placement fee reckoned at R1298 ex VAT, this placement fee shall be payable within 10 (ten) working days of his/her appointment with you. No termination of the appointment or variation of its terms will entitle you to any repayment of the placement fee. This clause will survive the termination of this agreement, and will apply for 6 (six) months after its termination.

The excerpt reads:

You agree that during the period of this agreement you will not book any services from, or engage, any Service Provider outside of our Website. You agree not to engage any Service Provider for 6 months after termination of this agreement.

Placement Fee: Should you at any stage make an appointment with a Service Provider outside of booking said appointment via the SweepSouth platform, you will be liable to pay SweepSouth a placement fee reckoned at R1298 ex VAT... (SweepSouth, 2020).

According to SweepSouth's terms and conditions, the company claims exclusivity over SweepStars, which means that clients on the platform can only engage with SweepStars through SweepSouth or pay a placement fee if they wish to employ SweepStars privately. The company also reiterates this position in its 'Frequently Asked Questions' section of their website and posits that SweepStars found to be working with SweepSouth's clients privately may even be permanently deactivated from the platform. The quote below is an excerpt from this section of the website:

Clients on the SweepSouth platform will have to pay a fine if they ask SweepStars to work for them privately. SweepStars who work for clients on the platform privately may be permanently deactivated... (SweepSouth, 2021).

The penalty for platform leakage for clients is a placement fee payable to SweepSouth while SweepStars may be subjected to permanent deactivation from the platform. Despite these warnings however, it may be the case that SweepSouth does not fully enforce this clause because none of the workers that engage in platform leakage reported experiencing any negative repercussions from SweepSouth. Instead, fear and suspicion about the dangers of platform leakage were expressed by only one SweepStar, Sarah, who does not partake in platform leakage. Sarah is a long time SweepStar on the platform. She started work as a SweepStar in 2016 and has been able to build a regular client base on the platform over the years. Sarah also admits that she has done well for herself on the platform,

has good reviews and a regular client base on the platform. Her remarks below capture her anxiety over losing jobs on the platform should she ever engage in the practice of 'stealing SweepSouth's clients':

I knew from the start that I want to work with SweepSouth because it's flexible for me. Sometimes I take a break for maybe a month to go home and then I know that my job is there when I come back. If you have a private client and they don't want you anymore they'll just say 'OK, I can't pay you anymore', and that is that! You don't have that leverage... that you're going to be there with them no matter what, or for a very long time. So for me, I rejected many, many offers! But there is one client that was very, very, very difficult to reject! [laughs] And then I had to tell them, 'OK fine, if you want me private, now you have to tell SweepSouth', because we also have a contract that you have to sign, and we are not allowed to. If they find out that you did this, for them it's like you are stealing the client... you see? So if they see that you stole the client, you're not going to get bookings for maybe some time! [laughs]. (**Sarah**)

Sarah's remarks highlight that she is not only worried about losing her job on the platform but that she is also seeking to avoid unreliable clients and the lack of flexibility in informal domestic work employment. For Sarah, platform domestic work gives her choice over her work and provides her job security. It can be argued that because Sarah has been on the platform for a long time, she has had the chance to build up her reputational score and cultivate relationships with clients on the platform and is hence not affected by underemployment, which could necessitate platform leakage on her part. SweepStar earnings according to SweepSouth also improve with time on the platform for SweepStars, hence someone like Sarah would be earning more than other SweepStars.

Platform leakage continues the SweepSouth platform as Table 4 indicates and this is despite the benefits of platform domestic work and SweepSouth's prohibition of the practice. The next section presents the findings on platform domestic workers' experiences of platform leakage.

6.3.1 Workers experiences of platform leakage

According to SweepStars, it is often customers on the platform that initiate platform leakage. A client might be impressed with a given SweepStar's work and want to hire her for themselves on a regular basis. This is captured by Buhle's response below to the question of who initiates the private booking requests in the client-SweepStar relationship:

The person just decides, 'I don't want to keep booking'. The reason why others just take you to work privately is because when you are making the booking, it's possible that you won't get the same person you got the last time. Now let's say you liked them, they cleaned thoroughly. So, when you're booking, because there's many of us, there's a lot of us! There's a lot of us at SweepSouth because I think there's one in Gauteng too, I don't know. So there are a lot, it's a huge company even here in Cape Town because there's a lot of us. So it's possible that when that person gets on the platform, they find that I have already been booked because I went onto the app early and got another person, I wasn't going to wait on them... and it turned out that when they came looking to book me, they found that I have already been booked, and they have no choice but to get a different person. So, that is why they decide to just take you to work privately because at least that way you are theirs because they liked your work. (Buhle)

Buhle's quote above suggests that clients utilising SweepSouth's cleaning service platform prefer working with regular workers who they like, trust and are familiar with. Buhle's remarks also capture the tendency towards desiring ownership and exclusivity over SweepStars by clients. As noted in chapter 5, SweepSouth is aware of this tendency and attributes this to the uniqueness of platform domestic work from other gig economy platforms. SweepSouth argues that it is aiming to provide 'ongoing relationships' between SweepStars and clients of the platform as posited by the company's CEO in an online magazine interview about the company's business model:

... Most of the bookings that happen on our platform are recurring, ongoing bookings as opposed to something like an Uber where you may only ever see your driver once. We are trying to build something where you can create ongoing relationships with the customer and the service provider... (Pandor cited in Mkele, 2020).

Unlike on-time service providers in the gig economy such as Uber, SweepStars are expected to be regular services providers for each client on the platform. As noted in chapter 5, SweepSouth even incentivises clients to make recurring bookings with their favourite SweepStar on the platform by lowering service charges for recurring bookings. However, platform leakage is still occurring on the platform despite this preventative measure by the company. This suggests that platform leakage in platform domestic work is caused by more than just the desire by clients to establish a long-term work relationship with platform domestic workers.

According to platform domestic workers, clients are also initiating platform leakage because they are trying to get a cheaper cleaning service than SweepSouth's

service fees from workers under informal, private work arrangements. One such fee they can avoid through platform leakage is the fee charged by SweepSouth for extra cleaning tasks according to Sarah in the quote below:

They do that a lot because you know what, this other client told me that for them, it's much easier to pay me that extra money than to book with SweepSouth for those extra tasks because to clean the inside cupboards only, they charge you; to clean the fridge, they charge you; to clean the oven they charge, to clean uhm...what else do they charge... to clean the windows, they do charge and you're only cleaning the inside windows, you understand? So those extra stuff, when a client just books you privately and you are just going there to clean, she will just tell you that I need this to be cleaned, that to be cleaned, you know? So it's not like they have to pay extra, and then maybe you can just charge each other like 'OK, for this, all the work that I need to do, I'm going to charge you R300'. Whereas with SweepSouth they have to pay for extras, it's another extra cost they have to pay for to get those extra services.

(Sarah)

From this quote above, we can deduce that once clients have been matched with their preferred SweepStar on the platform, it becomes cheaper for clients to transact with them informally, outside of the platform. Through platform leakage, clients can circumvent the platform's fee structure and negotiate for a flat payment rate with SweepStars.

Regardless of the client's motive, workers maintain that platform leakage enables them to earn higher wages than they otherwise receive from SweepSouth. Indeed, income from SweepSouth was the most criticised aspect of the job by many former and current platform domestic workers in this study. Many posited that they received more in private, informal domestic work than through the platform. *Table 5* below gives an overview of respondents' income comparisons of working on the SweepSouth platform and working privately. Most workers in this study posited that the value of remuneration in private work is often more than that received from jobs provided by the SweepSouth platform. It was difficult to gain an exact estimate of these income comparisons from workers, hence the study relied on workers subjective estimates and explanations of their incomes from private domestic work and from SweepSouth jobs.

Table 5: Income comparisons between private work and SweepSouth

Respondent	Income from SweepSouth	Income from private clients	Platform leakage
Angela	Not specified	Not specified; charges above SweepSouth rates	Yes
Patricia	Average of R1664 per month	Average of R5800 per month	Yes
Nosipho	R28 per hour	R250 per booking	Yes
Sindi	R210 per booking	R300 per booking	Yes
Buhle	Average of R1000 per month	R250 per booking	Yes
Rose	R2000-R2200 per month	Average of R3600 per month	Yes
Tatenda	Not specified, is satisfied with her earnings	Not specified; charges above SweepSouth rates	Yes
Lucia	Not specified, says it was less than earnings from private work	Average of R2500 per month	Yes
Sarah	Not specified, posits that earnings are more than what she earned in previous retail job	N/A	No
Linda	Average of R2100-R3000 per month	N/A	No

It may be the case that private cleaning work pays more than cleaning jobs on the SweepSouth platform because SweepSouth is setting the price standard for SweepStars to use in their payment negotiations under platform leakage work arrangements. Their awareness of SweepSouth's pricing and fee structure gives them the ability to negotiate higher payment rates with clients from the platform that are seeking private, regular cleaning services from them. Tatenda's describes this negotiation tactic in her response below:

...Sometimes you have to reject them! [laughs] Because you will just be comparing, comparing with SweepSouth like, I'm being paid this much so how can I take a private client when I'm just being paid the same amount as SweepSouth? I can just work with SweepSouth...you see? So some of them we reject. (**Tatenda**)

Tatenda argues, in the quote above, that she does an income comparison of the payment she receives from the platform and that proposed by a client seeking platform leakage work arrangements to ensure that bookings received through platform leakage pay a higher rate than similar bookings on the platform. For other SweepStars however, platform leakage allows them to earn higher incomes even when prospective clients offer the same payment rates as SweepSouth. This is because under platform leakage, clients do not have to pay SweepSouth a service fee from the total booking fee when they transact with SweepStars outside of the platform. SweepStars therefore receive the full amount of the booking fee directly, without service fee deductions by SweepSouth. This is a point that several workers,

such as Angela and Sindi as quoted below, were quick to point out when asked about the main benefit of platform leakage.

Sometimes it will be the same. You see with SweepSouth, when the clients book us maybe it's R300 but with SweepSouth you only get R200, you understand? When they come privately, they can just say the same amount, the R300, and it's fine... it's still fine. (**Angela**)

I prefer private, where I work now because I'm not sure how much SweepSouth charged this client.. let's talk about money now. I'm not sure how much SweepSouth charged the client per day, usually it depends on the hours you're working. So, I'm not sure how much they'd charge the client I'm working for now. The client was willing to pay me R300 per day, do you understand? So, it was more than what SweepSouth used to give me, they used to give me, I think R210, it was usually 6 hours or 7 hours... I'm not sure, but I'm getting more than I used to get at SweepSouth. (**Sindi**).

According to Sindi and Angela, platform leakage allows platform domestic workers to charge the same prices as the platform but keep the entire booking fee without service fee deductions by the platform company. But it appears that SweepStars are willing to accept the same or comparable payment rate to SweepSouth's rates only if they perceive it to be an acceptable price for the cleaning work the client is asking for. This is a point well captured in the following remarks by Angela as she recounts her experience in this regard:

No, we negotiate. Like this other customer last time, I said no. The client was saying I must come private, right? I said 'how much are you going to pay me, from 8 am to 4 pm?' And then they said, 'it's going to be R200'. I said no because it's the same; on the app it's also R200. You want me to come privately and it's for R200? It's not going to work. (**Angela**)

From Angela's remarks above, we see that platform domestic workers are willing to work for the same pay rates as that offered by SweepSouth to the extent that they deem it to be worth the amount of work being requested by the client. In the quote above, Angela says that she does work an eight-hour job on the platform for R200 worth of pay, but that she is unwilling to do the same amount of work for the same price privately. Because work under platform leakage arrangements allows SweepStars the opportunity to negotiate working conditions with clients, Angela has the option to accept or decline clients' requests offering similar prices to SweepSouth depending on her assessment of whether the of the fee being offered is adequate. This also means that even though SweepStars have no authority to negotiate payment rates with clients on the SweepSouth platform, SweepSouth may be

indirectly influencing payment rates in the informal domestic sector through the occurrence of platform leakage on its platform.

None of the platform domestic workers involved in platform leakage reported accepting payment rates below SweepSouth's rates for similar cleaning job requests. Among those that were engaging in platform leakage, the standard rates they were charging clients tended to be above R250 (see Table 5 above and in the Appendix section). According to workers, these rates are largely based on factors such as the size of the house, the nature of the cleaning tasks to be done and the clients' budget. The quote below by Buhle capture this finding well:

Uhm the price depends... let's say, on the size of the house or sometimes on things like ironing, things like that you see? So, its R300 to R350... or even R250 sometimes, but nothing less than 250. So it can maybe go according to how the person is, if they are ok with spending money, you see? (**Buhle**)

It can be theorised therefore that under platform leakage working arrangements, SweepStars charge clients a flat rate, that is based on a complex work-by-task basis. This is different to SweepSouth's strict work-by-time model discussed in chapter 5. As argued by Buhle above, under platform leakage work arrangements, domestic workers negotiate their service fees according to their own judgements of the amount of work they will be doing for the client, which can include factors such the size of the house and the specific cleaning tasks to be done. This is different to the SweepSouth work-by-time model where workers are paid by the hour for cleaning tasks that are pre-selected by the platform and whose cleaning time is solely determined by the platform. Many SweepStars in this study were highly critical of SweepSouth's work-by-time model because they felt that it is often not reflective of the actual amount of work to be done at the client's residence. Commenting on SweepSouth's work-by-time work structure, Patricia notes the following:

...sometimes they don't even know how much the work consists of, like the hours needed. A person can say 'can you clean my four or five-bedroom house, my five bathrooms and lounge and the like; and this person wants it cleaned in 3 hours! That person has never cleaned before because it's impossible to clean that house...! (**Patricia**)

Sometimes clients themselves intentionally underestimate the amount of cleaning work needed when making the booking on the platform, as argued by Angela below:

...sometimes they write a 2-bedroom house or a 1 bathroom on the app, you find that it's written like that. But when you get to the house you can see, maybe it's a 2-bathroom house but on the app its written 1 bathroom. And us we don't have a choice; we just have to clean the house and then you go. (**Angela**)

Such instances of client deception are possible in the work-by-time structure in which workers have no negotiating power with clients and the platform as opined by Angela above. Engaging with clients off the platform hence allows workers to negotiate service prices in accordance with a work-by-task structure that they can control themselves. This is a more flexible payment structure which workers can negotiate and control. On the platform, prices are set by SweepSouth and none of the workers interviewed expressed any instances of price negotiations with either SweepSouth or SweepSouth's clients regarding work on the platform.

Platform leakage can also be a gateway to better career prospects outside of domestic work. The SweepSouth app as a networking tool can allow workers the chance to gain access to other career opportunities through interaction with a wide pool of individuals as part of their daily work routines. One of the SweepStars interviewed, Nosipho, left the platform for work with her former SweepSouth client in their start-up company. She sees platform leakage as the main benefit of platform domestic work, the possibility for making the right match and securing further career advancements opportunities. She outlines the following:

For me, it was that you meet people, I know a lot of people that got hired privately and some of them got better jobs because some of them were graduates but they couldn't find jobs. So that's the only benefit with SweepSouth, because you meet people, and maybe you'll meet someone who's starting a company and you qualify for that, or they need someone who can do whatever task, and then depending on your qualification, if you're lucky or if they like you, then you score yourself a better job. Or they hire you privately to be their own domestic worker. (**Nosipho**)

Nosipho's justification of the benefits of platform leakage for workers further emphasises the importance of the SweepSouth platform as a networking tool for domestic workers. The platform as an online marketplace allows domestic workers to not only sell their cleaning services but also establish relations and secure better income earning opportunities and career advancements through platform leakage.

Conclusion

Platform domestic work is providing domestic workers reliable access to work on a convenient and flexible basis according to the workers interviewed in this study. While platform domestic work addresses unemployment, it does not provide a solution to underemployment, and this forces workers to engage in platform leakage. The act of engaging with platform customers outside the platform appears to be a widespread occurrence on the SweepSouth platform, and many workers see it as a key benefit of the job of platform domestic work. According to workers, platform leakage is often initiated by clients seeking a cheaper and regular service from their preferred SweepStar from the SweepSouth platform. Platform leakage presents platform domestic workers the opportunity to get additional work to supplement their incomes from platform jobs. Jobs obtained through platform leakage also tend to pay more according to workers in this study. Lastly, platform leakage can also allow platform domestic workers to secure career advancements into other fields of work other than domestic work. These findings about platform leakage therefore suggest that many platform domestic workers approach the online platform provided by SweepSouth as a networking tool to allow for access to additional work, better working conditions and career advancements.

7. Workers' experiences of platform domestic work

In the previous chapter, the discussion focused on the various reasons why domestic workers choose to become platform domestic workers and the ways in which platform domestic work is shaping their working arrangements in the domestic sector. This chapter takes a closer look at workers' experiences on the SweepSouth platform by examining factors such as workers' experiences of becoming platform domestic workers, and the ways in which their work is managed and undertaken on the SweepSouth platform.

7.1 Adjusting to platform domestic work

Platform domestic work is in many ways like commercialised independent domestic work where domestic workers are self-employed contractors for a commercial agency that provides them with clients and regulates their service interaction (Anderson and Hughes, 2010). Platform domestic workers are working on demand, as independent contractors on a digital platform owned and controlled by a commercial company, which also regulates their service interaction with customers on the platform. They meet new clients each day and get paid per booking they receive each week (SweepSouth, 2021). SweepStars are responsible for securing enough jobs for themselves on the platform and are responsible for covering their own travelling costs as self-employed persons independently contracting for a company. While the provision of cleaning tools and products is the responsibility of clients (SweepSouth, 2021), workers are responsible for their own work routines, and they utilise their own knowledge and experience in their cleaning routines.

Of the ten current and former SweepStars interviewed in this study, four had no previous work experience as domestic workers prior to joining SweepSouth (see Table 1 in Appendix). This is despite the application requirement indicated on the company's website that SweepStars must have at least two years' worth of domestic work experience to be allowed to join the platform. Furthermore, none of the respondents in this study reported any experience in informal independent domestic work or 'char' prior to joining SweepSouth. Those who did have experience in paid domestic work before becoming SweepStars had been working as either live-in or live-out workers working on a part-time basis for single clients at a time. Table 6 below shows domestic work arrangements prior to SweepSouth among those experienced in it before SweepSouth:

Table 6: Domestic work employment before SweepSouth

Respondent*	Type of domestic work employment before SweepSouth	Was it under contract?
Angela	Not specified	Not specified
Patricia	Live-in domestic work	No
Nosipho	Live out domestic work	Not specified
Sindi	Live-out, part-time domestic work	No
Buhle	Live-out, part-time domestic work	Not specified
Rose	Live-in domestic work	No

7.1.1 Training and first-time experience of domestic work

The lack of experience in domestic work, and in independent domestic work has a significant impact on workers' experiences of platform domestic work when they join SweepSouth. Firstly, SweepSouth does not provide extensive training and there is no standardisation of work routines on its platform. This is a disadvantage to SweepStars without prior experience in paid home cleaning work. During the interview phase, prospective SweepStars only undergo a screening test to ascertain their own knowledge and expertise in housecleaning as stated by Sindi and Angela below.

Training? There's no training there...You obviously have experience, right? So they just take that experience, and then they call your references to confirm that what you have written is true. Then after that, it's the test, there's a test you write, right? If you pass this test and the interview, then you will get the job. **(Sindi)**

Sindi, in her remarks above, does not consider this screening process as training, but rather sees it as a process of verifying one's ability to do cleaning work. SweepSouth does indicate on its website that their service is about providing clients with experienced domestic workers and their screening process only evaluates a worker's knowledge about home cleaning (SweepSouth, 2021). As shown in Sindi's remarks, SweepSouth does not provide extensive training on cleaning routines and methods but only evaluates their competence and expertise in home cleaning. However, some SweepStars such as Angela spoke of some form of basic training occurring during the interview stage, which was akin to a one-day workshop before the main test.

...we only do one main test. You read; they teach us everything. It's only for one day and then they are done, they are done! **(Angela)**

The purpose of this on-day workshop may be to provide prospective SweepStars with some form of guidance on working on the platform, which can benefit those without the domestic work experience. Nonetheless, not providing extensive worker training on cleaning methods and routines is problematic for SweepStars because it means that the many SweepStars without prior experience in domestic cleaning work must learn on the job and rely on clients' inputs and supervision during their initial days of working on the platform. Tatenda was one such worker. In the quote below, Tatenda discusses her initial struggles with managing her cleaning bookings on the platform because she was not experienced in paid cleaning work for other people's homes:

Oh my first booking! [laughs] My first booking my God, Yoh! When you don't know anything... ay! You know my first booking I was like, yhu! I didn't know where to start. You know, you can clean your own house like it's just normal, I can do whatever like that. But for my first booking I was like hey, how do I start! I didn't even know how to use that application, how to clean, and where to start...from kitchen or from bedroom? Or from the bedroom or from the toilet, I didn't know anything! So I had to ask them, where do I start? And I'd even asked them 'which detergent should I use on this? What detergent should I use for the floor?' I would ask them, every time! (**Tatenda**)

Tatenda highlights the crucial point that without access to a rigorous training process on cleaning methods and routines, platform domestic workers must rely on their own experience in paid home cleaning work. Those without such experience are left at a disadvantage and must rely on learning on the job, and on clients' willingness to direct and supervise them. This may undermine SweepSouth's quality assurance claim that the platform provides experienced and competent home cleaning workers. It can also intensify management-by-customers on the platform at the detriment of workers' autonomy as independent contractors. Management-by-customers is already an integral part of platform domestic work and is described in more detail in the following sections below.

7.1.2 Adapting to independent domestic work

As mentioned above, platform domestic work is a form of independent domestic work. Independent domestic work itself is self-employment, and as such workers bear the costs of employment themselves. Adjusting to the demands of platform domestic work was found to be an issue for workers because none of the respondents interviewed in this study had experience in independent domestic work

prior to working as platform domestic workers. Many reported experiencing difficulties adapting to the demands of independent work on the SweepSouth platform. One of the most frequently expressed concerns by platform domestic workers in this study was the high costs associated with working in different households each day and embarking on extensive traveling to clients' locations. Sarah and Sindi express their initial experiences with the travelling demands of platform domestic work in the quotes below:

...When I first started there, I thought that maybe they would just say, 'Go to work,' something like that, you see? 'There's a certain white person, go work at their house.' I didn't know that I would have to travel the whole of Cape Town, and things like that, you see?... Most of the time I used to get lost, especially the first month, the first two months. I was not familiar with most of the places. But after that, it's been better. Even now, I know most of the places because of Sweep South ...And the clients, they don't understand, you know? The client I'm working for now was the only client that understood when I was late. She used to understand because I use public transport, I don't have my own car so sometimes I'm early, sometimes I'm late. **(Sindi)**

The first experience of travelling... oh my goodness! [laughs] It was a disaster! I won't lie, It was a disaster! ... I did struggle the first day to get to there because you know, it was a very difficult experience for a first day... I don't want to lie. I was late! [laughs]. **(Sarah)**

As independent contractors on the platform, SweepStars are expected to have their own transportation to clients' locations and as the two quotes above suggests, and this tends to have a negative impact on their working conditions. Being late for a booking and getting lost were the most cited experiences of platform domestic work, especially during workers' early days on the platform. As discussed in section 7.2 below, punctuality is monitored by the SweepSouth app as part of the platform's algorithmic management infrastructure, and hence instances of lateness and getting lost do have a bearing on workers' overall work performance scores which are monitored on the platform.

Working for multiple clients and embarking on different daily work routines on the platform was another problematic aspect of platform domestic work for respondents in this study. According to workers, this arises because platform domestic work has no standardised work routine and is done under the direct management and supervision by clients, and each client has their own preferences for what must be cleaned and how. Nosipho captures this fact quite well in the quote below where she

presents an apt description of the differences between platform domestic work and informal domestic work with private households:

The difference is that when you work for SweepSouth the client tells you what to do. Let's say they need someone for four hours maybe, and then in those 4 hours they'll tell you that they need you to sweep the floors, mop the floors, clean the windows, clean the fridge, clean the bathroom and then that's your four hours. And then, when you done, they check if you did all that, that was the only difference as compared to a private family. In a private family they tell you the first day that we want you to do 1, 2, 3,4,5,6... then that's your daily routine. But with SweepSouth you meet different people and every day you go to a different person, and they want different things to be done. (**Nosipho**)

SweepStars are therefore exposed to management-by-customers in their daily work routines on the platform. The requirement that SweepStars interact directly with the various clients they meet daily means that they must engage in intensified emotion work in each of their interactions with the multiple customers on the SweepSouth platform. This understandably creates a toll on workers, who are accommodating different client needs and personalities each day. Angela expresses this concern in her quote below:

It's a bit difficult because you are meeting a different person every day. Unlike working for one person where you know that I'm used to this person, I'm used to this house, and I know how this is done; I know what goes where and stuff... you know? But now you have to work with different people every day; on Monday you're seeing a new face, a new house and then Tuesday you're seeing a different house... It's kind of difficult! (**Angela**)

Working for multiple clients on the platform each day and engaging in intensified emotion work as part of their work routine has created a desire among some SweepStars for single-household employment. This was mostly expressed by SweepStars that had live-in domestic work experience before becoming SweepStars. While better remuneration was the primary reason for seeking private employment, these respondents also felt that private work with one family at a time can provide stable work routines and negotiated intimate work relations or 'personalism' with clients that can be developed over time. This is illustrated in Rose's and Patricia's remarks below. Both SweepStars had been working as live-in domestics before SweepSouth and have concluded that working for a single family at a time is less demanding than platform domestic work:

...One person is fine because you know that today I'm going to go and do this, and that. And you see, the more you get used to the people, the more they treat you like family. (**Rose**)

With my private employer I was like family there so that's how different it is. It's because it's a person you have never met...you know how it is when you meet different people who have different characters. (**Patricia**)

According to Rose and Patricia above, working for multiple clients at a time depersonalises the relationship between SweepStars and clients on the platform, and leaves workers without the power to exercise strategic personalism in negotiating control over their work. Furthermore, it intensifies their work because they embark on different work routines and accommodate different clients' demands and personalities each day on the platform. While the interaction between clients and SweepStars is depersonalised on the platform, SweepStars are nonetheless subjected to management and supervision by clients in their daily work routine.

Management-by-customers is a significant part of SweepStars daily work routines, but it is only one part of the managerial regime practiced by SweepSouth. The other managerial mechanism is the SweepSouth app itself as the site where platform domestic work is structured and organised. The next section presents a discussion of the overall 'management-from-a-distance' structure of platform domestic work, which is a key part of the permissive power regime deployed by platform companies like SweepSouth to regulate and control the labour process on the platform.

7.2 Permissive power and the distant management of platform domestic work

According to this study's findings, platform domestic work does utilise and conform to the permissive power framework articulated by Vallas and Schor (2020) in the governance of the platform labour process. Permissive power by platform companies comprises of delegation of control over minor aspects of the platform labour process to workers and customers, while retaining immense power and control over those aspects that are crucial for platform revenues and profits (Vallas and Schor, 2020). This study found that while platform domestic work offers workers flexibility over workdays and choice over work routines and areas of work, the platform also seeks to exert control from a distance, over significant aspects of their work performance on the platform. These include things like work hours, payment rates, and performance reviews by clients.

SweepStars are organised and managed directly by customers and indirectly by SweepSouth, using the company's app. According to workers the first and only time they ever meet the SweepSouth office staff was when they were interviewing for a job on the platform. Linda, for example, says she has never met or interacted with any managerial official from SweepSouth in her remarks below:

We only use the app. The managers are there at the offices, but I don't even know them because we don't go to the offices, we only use the phones. (Linda)

All communications with SweepStars are conveyed through the SweepSouth app. According to workers, the day-to-day management of booking flows and issues therein on the platform are overseen by an 'Area manager' and the 'SweepSouth Support Team'. Interaction with these administration officials is done online or through telephone phone call. Workers posit that the area manager helps them navigate booking flows within a given area, while the SweepSouth Support Team is available to address emergencies such as conflicts with clients and administrative issues and to attend to their booking cancellation requests. It is possible for a SweepStar to never interact with either one of these officials during their time working for the platform as shown in Linda's remarks above. SweepSouth is therefore not exercising direct, in-person management of SweepStars but is instead, managing them from a distance through its app or platform, and the management-by-customers approach.

The SweepSouth worker app has a great influence over the working behaviour of SweepStars on the platform. The cleaning services that SweepStars provide clients on the platform are organised through this app. Clients make a booking request on the platform, based on booking price rates set by the SweepSouth and not SweepStars themselves. Payments for SweepStars are also made on the app and SweepSouth allocates them to workers after necessary service fee deductions have been made. From their worker apps, SweepStars receive their booking requests by clients, the clients' address and their work instructions, payment rates, and the work hours allocated for each booking. The three quotes below summarise the routine followed by SweepStars for each booking request they get on the platform:

Normally they will just tell you the house address, like where to find the client's house, and the time you're supposed to arrive there. When you get there, you are supposed to confirm that

you are at work. ... If you don't do that then they won't register you, to them it's like you didn't work that day... because you didn't confirm the booking. (**Lucia**)

When you get there, they just show you around, tell you what to do. And then in most cases when they book you, they write what they want you to do so when you get there they just show you around and then you do what you have to do. (**Angela**)

Yah the app is useful because it helps you see upcoming jobs and your performance if the client is rating you well or bad [laughs]. (**Patricia**)

The platform's algorithms also monitor workers overall work behaviours, such as their booking confirmation rates and keeps a record of any booking cancellations made. It also monitors hours worked as well as punctuality on booking appointment. This is captured in Sarah's quote below, which presents an overview of the ways in which the app does this monitoring of SweepStars' work behaviours:

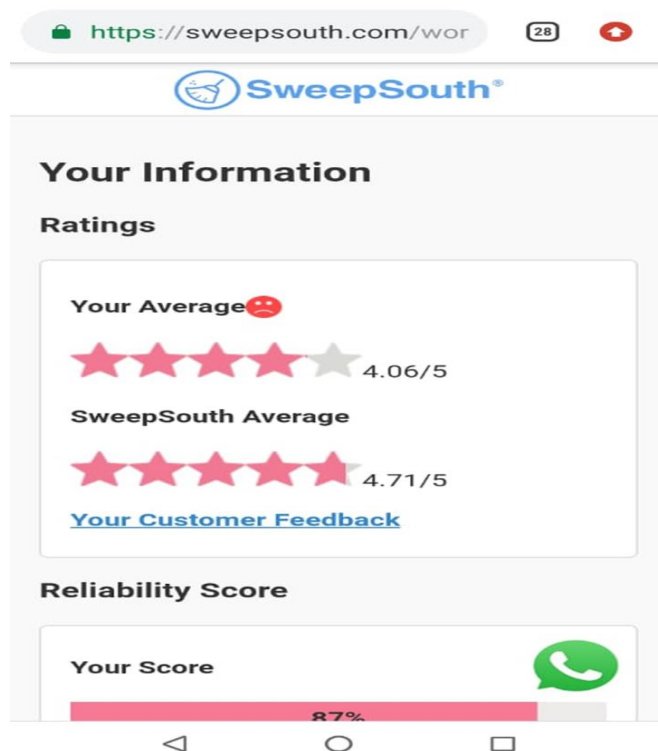
...You have a calendar; the calendar will show you that it has a red spot that means that you cancelled this booking [laughs]. And also, because we get paid every week, on the summary of every week, you can see your hours and if there's no cancellation. And the lateness as well; that you were not late on said day, or if you didn't close the job because when you finish the job you must close it there on the application side. When you are on your way to the booking, you have to start typing that 'I'm on my way'; you have to let the office know through your application. From the moment that you are in-transit the office is letting the client know that you are coming. So when you arrive at the job, you have to also log on and then click 'I've arrived or start job', and then when you finish you have to clock-out, 'I've finished', and then you submit your hours. (**Sarah**)

Based on Sarah's quote above, SweepSouth monitors workers' performance through measures such as the number of times a SweepStar rejects booking offers from clients, as well as work behaviours such as punctuality and hours worked each week. The app also monitors workers' behaviours from the time they accept a booking on the platform to the time they finish because SweepStars are required to 'clock in' and 'clock out' at the start and finish of each job. Clocking in and out is how the platform monitors hours worked by the SweepStar, as explained by Sarah in the quote below:

So if you don't 'close' the job, they won't know if you did indeed do the work for those 6 hours or something like that, so yah, you have to do that. So they will give you up until 8 o'clock to 'finish' your job because they know that maybe when you were travelling there was no network, or something like that, so they'll give you a grace period to clock the job.

By collecting data on SweepStars work behaviours, the platform’s algorithms can monitor and push workers to improve their performance. According to SweepStars interviewed in this study, the platform keeps a score of workers on-going work performance on the platform. SweepStars speak of the appearance of “red-face” emojis’ on their profiles whenever their work performance falls below average on the platform. The image below shows a typical SweepStar profile with a red-face:

Image 7: “Red-face” SweepScore on SweepStars’ Profile



*Retrieved from study’s participants

SweepStars report that an accumulation of these red-face emojis on one’s profile can have an impact on their continued access to booking requests on the platform.

Yah, like those with emojis on their profiles, those red ones! [laughs] if you have those ones, you won’t get anything! You will go 30 days without anything. (**Patricia**)

The platform, through its work performance monitoring algorithms, propels workers to maintain and continually improve their work performance to continue regular access to jobs on the platform. SweepStars are expected to maintain good scores on the platform regarding issues such as booking confirmations, hours worked and punctuality. In cases where there is no improvement on their work performance, SweepStars might face abrupt deactivation from the platform altogether.

Yhu! [laughs] It's bad because ey! If you get more than five or six red faces, they will deactivate you. So you have to be careful. (**Linda**)

Therefore, while there is no direct manager to oversee SweepStar's daily work behaviours, this management role has been automated to be performed by the app indirectly. The app acts as a disciplinary mechanism that monitors and ensures that SweepStars perform optimally on the platform or face deactivation and or reduced job flows.

7.2.1 Impact of rating systems on work behaviour on the platform

Another key aspect of the disciplinary power of the platform's algorithms over workers is the rating system on the platform which works in tandem with the management-by-customers approach by the platform. Clients on the platform are required to rate their SweepStar's job performance score after each booking. As shown in Chapter 5, ratings from clients are an integral part of a given workers 'SweepScore', which is an overall performance measure displayed on a SweepStar's profile for clients on the platform to see. The image below illustrates a typical view of SweepStars' performance ratings by her previous clients on the platform:

Image 8: *Ratings from clients*

Your Customer Feedback

Positive things customers are saying about you

Appointment date: [REDACTED]



- [REDACTED]

Appointment date: [REDACTED]



- [REDACTED]

Appointment date: [REDACTED]



Great work! - [REDACTED]



*Retrieved from study's participants

SweepStars in this study were overwhelmingly critical of the requirement that clients rate them on the platform. In discussions on the issue, there was the feeling that the rating system is biased against new workers because they are required to build-up their rating scores by searching for and accepting as many jobs as possible on the platform to build high reputation scores that will allow them to increase their chances of having more regular bookings. A worker that is unable to increase their overall number of hours worked and rating scores will receive less bookings and potentially quit the platform, as Sarah highlights in her remarks below:

So for these newcomers it's very difficult because some of them will quit and be like 'I can't! I'm not getting bookings because I've got a lower rating'... of which it's not like the clients are rating you low, it's just that you are still building up your ratings. (**Sarah**)

Discussions with SweepStars in this study also uncovered that there is suspicion among workers that the platform's rating system is also biased against SweepStars

more generally. Tatenda explains her suspicion of the platform's rating systems in the quote below:

I don't know about SweepSouth because it's their points... when a client rates you four out of five the ratings will go down, you understand? I don't know why; they just go down like...! But if the client rates you five out of five it doesn't go up! It will remain where it is... I don't know why! (**Tatenda**)

This study found that some SweepStars like Tatenda are of the belief that maintaining a good overall rating score on the platform requires a perfect rating score of five stars from clients; that a score less than five-stars decreases their overall ratings drastically. This suspicion of bias in the platform's rating mechanism compels workers to strive to attain and maintain five-star ratings from clients on the platform. Achieving this, according to some SweepStars, involves being attentive to clients' demands and relying on the deployment of emotion work to ensure that they are pleased with not only the work but with the overall service.

Now I'm used to it. It's like, you need to put on your best behaviour... like be kind all the time. You should listen, you shouldn't object to whatever the clients say... if he says don't do this, then don't; if he says do this, you should do...don't touch this, don't do this. Some people will be like rude to the clients but, it depends on the person. But if you are good all the time the employer wants to book you again...mostly the employers I get they want to book me again. (**Patricia**)

As Patricia's remarks above illustrate, being attentive to clients' demands and regulating one's emotional reactions with clients on the job is a tactic that ensures one receives a five-star rating and recurring bookings on the platform, and possibly, private booking arrangements or platform leakage. Being 'kind all the time' and attentive to clients' demands is only one part of this strategy, SweeStars also spoke about the need to demonstrate competence in their work with each client they get on the platform to increase their chances of receiving good performance review scores from clients. Buhle and Linda explain this tactic in their remarks below:

You must first start by cleaning properly, make sure that you clean properly; especially if they are around and be someone that's humble and be friendly. Do all of that so that at least they can rate you; so they can see that this person can do their job... you see things like that? (**Buhle**)

You have to please the client. You have to go extra miles to please the client so that the client will rate you 5 stars. (**Linda**)

According to Linda and Buhle, 'going the extra mile' and 'cleaning properly' must be practiced alongside being friendly and humble towards to the client if one is to receive and maintain five-star ratings from clients on the platform. Therefore, SweepSouth's client rating mechanisms on the platform function in conjunction with SweepSouth's strategy of management-by-customers and compels workers to impress the client as much as possible in their cleaning work and service treatment.

There was acute frustration with clients' subjective rating behaviours on the platform, however. Firstly, workers feel that their clients on the platform are not aware or sensitised enough about the ways in which the rating system works and the implications of their rating practices on their jobs on the platform. Some workers simply felt that clients are not aware that they ought to rate them:

Some of the people don't even rate... I don't know if they know about rating or what, but some of them don't. Like most of the time I get 5 stars but sometimes they don't rate me. I don't know... some clients don't know about it, while some do. (**Linda**)

There was also the feeling that some clients do not appreciate the significance of their rating practices on SweepStars. Tatenda's remarks below capture this sentiment among SweepStars about clients' lack of awareness about the implications of their rating practices on the platform:

...Some clients don't even rate because they don't even know how these ratings work. Because if you go to a client right, sometimes you'll be like I have cleaned this house very well but to your surprise, when they rate you, you'll be like how can this person rate me like this? After all she even said thank you, you just cleaned my house very well I appreciate you...? After that you check your application, you check your rating, and you see that this person has just rated you a four or a three...you see! What I have seen about these clients is that they don't know about this rating thing...they just rate! Some of them I think they just say, 'ah let me just give her a four out of five because you can't just say she was perfect, I can't give her a five out five; let me just give her a four because at least she's good'. Of which they don't know that four out of five is going to rate me down! (**Tatenda**)

Tatenda's remarks above illustrate the problematic outcome of using rating mechanisms in conjunction with the practice of management-by-customers. It allows clients to have a significant input on SweepStars' work performance scores. Clients' ratings can be highly subjective since many are unaware of the criteria for tallying a given workers' rating score, or how they add up on the platform and influence SweepStars' job access on the platform.

Lastly, while clients can see workers' reputational scores, SweepStars reported that they cannot see clients' own reputational scores by their fellow SweepStars. There is hence asymmetrical access to reputational scores on the platform. SweepStars are required to rate clients, but they do not get access to clients' overall rating summaries when they are accepting their booking requests on the platform. The company and customers on the platform are hence privy to SweepStars' reputational scores and yet SweepStars themselves cannot access clients' own reputational scores on the platform. This unequal exposure between clients and SweepStars on the platform can be a problem as indicated by Sindi in the quote below:

Sometimes you'll find that there's a client that some people no longer go to because maybe they are rude, so some people no longer go there. Because you don't know anything, you're just told to go to a certain client, and when you get there, you find that the client is rude! And you realise that maybe it's true that people were no longer going there because it was true that the client was rude, you see things like that? Because we don't see our ratings, we don't know how the others rated that boss, you see what I'm saying? (**Sindi**)

The lack of access to clients' ratings on the platform leaves SweepStars without knowledge about the client and what to expect from them. The extent to which SweepStars have a choice over clients on the platform is also significantly limited by this information asymmetry because workers have less knowledge about a prospective client's desirability as a potential customers and their treatment of workers.

Despite this however, SweepStars do exercise some agency in the case of managing bookings from bad clients. Workers in this study recounted a common strategy of 'going off-line' to evade repeated booking requests by less desirable clients on the platform. Rose relays this strategy in more detail below:

You see, if a client books you badly, it means your average is getting low. So sometimes I'll just take a day off, meaning that I don't want to go to that client on that day. If she keeps on booking me, I will keep on taking a day off. Or I can talk to them [SweepSouth], and they will ask you the reason why you're doing that and then they will remove that booking from the app...that's what they do. (**Rose**)

Therefore, because SweepStars are permitted limited opportunities to reject bad bookings and are not privy to clients' reputational scores on the platform, they resort to the tactic of 'going off-line' when confronted with a booking request from a

previously bad client. This can be an effective strategy that mitigates the need to risk a bad performance review on the app for rejecting too many bookings.

7.2.2 The limits of distant management in platform domestic work

The platform's performance monitoring algorithms, reputational metrics and management-by-customers tactic collectively exert control over the labour of SweepStars at SweepSouth. SweepStars are directly supervised by customers and indirectly managed by SweepSouth through its platform. The company does not engage in the direct supervision of SweepStars but utilises distant management based on the mechanisms of management by customers and algorithmic management.

The benefit of management from a distance for SweepSouth is that it affords the company the ability to employ a large pool of domestic workers who do not need to be directly supervised by middle-managers as is the case with other more traditional commercial cleaning agencies. However, for SweepStars, this lack of direct supervision and management by algorithms on the platform can have some serious negative repercussions on their work on the platform. Some workers that have experienced deactivation from the app or have seen it happen to fellow SweepStars, expressed the inadequacies of SweepSouth's automated managerial figure, which they perceive to be insensitive to the various challenges that SweepStars encounter in their work environments. Linda argues the following regarding the distant management of their work on the platform:

We have this challenge, in the morning its dark since its winter now; so, it's dark and you are staying in a location where you can't come out early in the morning...then there's traffic in the road... If you are late they put a 'red face' as well... it's really bad. ...No, they don't alert you! They don't, they just deactivate the account, and you only realise this when you are no longer receiving jobs, whenever you go to the app you don't see any job. They won't even give you a warning that they are going to deactivate your account. (**Linda**)

Linda's comments above on her experiences illustrate problems that arise due to the lack of direct management and supervision of platform domestic work by company personnel. It leaves SweepStars without adequate mechanisms to express their work challenges and grievances, and ultimately leads to abrupt deactivations from the platform due to perceived poor performance by the platform's algorithms. The platform's algorithms are less attuned to dealing with the complexities of workers'

daily experiences on the job in a manner that a direct, in-person manager would. These are the limits of automating the managerial figure. While SweepSouth does provide communication channels for SweepStars to use, such as the area manager or the SweepSouth support centre, workers still felt that these were inefficient.

...I remember once I was at a client's house, right? I was outside. So, I try calling the client, the client doesn't pick up. So, I wrote on 'Support' [on the app] that I'm outside, they must call the client. I stood there for two hours and then I decided to go back home! But I didn't get paid for that day because they said I wasn't there, yet I even described the place for them ... because you could see that there was a car, a red car but no one believed me! And I was writing to them, on the same app ...! You see what I'm saying? It's useless! You call, and call. And they are usually late, and the client is complaining. (**Sindi**)

The automation of the managerial figure and managerial decision-making procedures makes the labour process more stringent on SweepStars. The lack of direct human supervision of SweepStars' work and the complexities of the job can lead to unnecessarily harsh performance penalties on the platform, leaving SweepStars dissatisfied with the job.

7.2.3 Workers' understanding of their labour relation as platform domestic workers

Interview discussions with two SweepStars, Sarah and Angela, about their work relation with SweepSouth revealed some contradictory understandings of their labour relationship to SweepSouth. From these limited discussions, they expressed that they see themselves as employees of the company but also agreed that they are independent workers. For example, in the interview with Sarah, she identified herself to be an employee of SweepSouth and but also agreed that she is an independently contracting worker because her work is 'flexible', as the quote below shows:

Yes, that's what I said, that's what I also like about them because like now, if I want to go on maternity leave, it's not like what you do when you're in a company, that you can only go for 3 months...At SweepSouth I can leave for even 6 months, for 8 months, do you understand? So it depends, and it's up to you. So it's the flexibility, that I can choose to work or not, that's what is very, very good because there are times when you need to do other stuff... (**Sarah**)

Therefore, using Sarah's response, the flexible working arrangement of platform domestic work may be the defining feature of the labour relation for platform domestic workers. It may be the case that SweepStars understand themselves to be

employees of SweepSouth who are working under the control of SweepSouth but on a partially independent basis because they are being offered flexible work. More dedicated studies on the issue of how workers understand their labour relationship with SweepSouth are needed to clarify this hypothesis, however.

Despite the company's insistence that SweepStars are independent contractors, the portrayal of 'SweepStars' on the platform also contradicts this designation. For example, the company's marketing content is overwhelmingly intended for homeowners who are the other customers of the company. The company's mission statement, which is quoted below, also refers to domestic workers on its platform as 'our SweepStars', implying that domestic workers on the platform are employees of SweepSouth:

With over seven thousand cleaners, and thousands of satisfied customers being served monthly, we're just getting started. Our mission is to create happy homes by providing dignified, flexible work at decent pay to our SweepStars. (**SweepSouth, 2021**)

The quote above portrays SweepStars as workers of the platform, who are providing a cleaning service to homeowners who are the customers of SweepSouth. The company's marketing content also identifies homeowners as the customers of the platform. This is despite the remarks by the company that they are offering a platform service for domestic workers *and* householders (SweepSouth, 2020).

Furthermore, the company also applies restrictions on the levels of autonomy and choice that workers can exercise over their labour on the platform. For example, SweepSouth allows clients to select their preferred SweepStars but the same opportunity to choose clients without limit is not given to SweepStars. SweepStars in this study said that they can decline booking requests from undesirable clients on the platform but only for a limited number of times, three per month. The following quotes below by Tatenda and Patricia illustrate this finding:

Yes, it's up to me if I want to accept or if I don't want to accept it. But if I know I've worked for this person before, and I know my experience with this person then I cannot confirm it if I didn't like the person. So I just leave the person. But then, you can get a red face by rejecting a client! [laughs]. (**Tatenda**)

Yah because it seems like you are not interested in the work right... all the time you are denying jobs, if you are not available, they tell you to take a day off, or remove the day from your profile. (**Patricia**)

As argued by Tatenda above, there are penalties for exceeding the number of times workers are allowed to reject bookings on the platform. The penalty is a bad performance review (a 'red-face emoji on profiles) which can lead to deactivation from the platform if the score accumulates. According to Patricia in her comment above, it is hence better to take a day off from the platform than to decline bookings. The only time when SweepStars are allowed to exercise full choice over which clients they accept is on the platform's *Earn more* section of the app. This is a section of the app where the company uploads surplus jobs of the day, which were not accepted by workers on the main section of the platform. These are the jobs that have been declined by workers for the day and *Earn More* is where they are given to other interested workers. Workers describe this *Earn more* section as being highly competitive and uncertain:

Yah it's like athletics there, like the 100-meter race because everyone wants to be number one to get there! It's a matter of seconds; if you don't click fast it's gone, somebody has taken it! You see, you will be like, vigilant, always vigilant! (**Patricia**)

Therefore, workers have limited choice over clients on the main platform but are offered a chance to bid for further extra jobs on the platform as indicated by Patricia in her quote above.

Therefore, while SweepStars are designated as independent contractors on the platform, the findings suggests that they may not view themselves as completely independent and that the platform curbs many aspects of their autonomy on the platform such as the ability to choose clients, reject bookings without restrictions, negotiate payment rates and have access to clients' reputational scores on the platform. The reality of their work relationship with SweepSouth on the platform severely undermines their autonomy and control over their work as independent contractors on the platform.

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed at length the experience of platform domestic work according to the ten key informants interviewed for this case study. Lack of experience in domestic work or independent domestic work prior to becoming a platform domestic worker was common among respondents in this case study. Many hence reported experiencing the adjustment to platform domestic work as a form of

independent domestic work quite challenging because the platform does not provide extensive training and standardised work routines for workers on its platform. Furthermore, this study uncovered that much like other forms of platform work, platform domestic work at SweepSouth is governed through a regime of permissive power, that is exercised through distant management using platform algorithms and management-by-customers. Platform domestic workers tend to be highly critical of the distant management of their work on the platform, for being unresponsive and ill-suited to the demands and complexities of platform domestic work. Furthermore, the reality of work on the platform suggests the existence of disguised employment and there is evidence that domestic workers on the platform perceive themselves as employees of the platform.

8. The impact of gig work in the domestic sector: Discussion

This study set out to investigate the emerging impact of gig work in the South African domestic sector. This involved the study of the labour process of platform domestic work and workers' experiences of providing home cleaning work through a digital platform.

The key findings that emerged from this study were that platform domestic work is a vital source of work for domestic workers because it addresses unemployment and underemployment in the South African domestic sector by providing easy, reliable access to cleaning work. Workers approach the platform as a networking tool intended to facilitate access to regular cleaning work with platform customers on and off the platform, and hence, there is a high prevalence of platform leakage among interviewed platform domestic workers in this case study. Platform domestic work is undertaken through the coordination and control of the platform. The platform practices permissive power over workers on the platform and this disguises the employment relationship and allows for market despotism, the regulation of work through market discipline, to ensure workers maintain productivity in their provision of home cleaning services to clients of the platform.

These findings lead to the argument that platform domestic work provides convenience and reliability to many domestic workers in need of work in the sector but falls short in ensuring that platform domestic workers enjoy job security and employment protection on the platform. This argument is discussed in more detail in the sections that follow in this chapter.

8.1 Platform leakage is an inherent part of platform domestic work

Much like other existing accounts in the literature, this study shows that platform domestic work is important and vital for domestic workers in South Africa as a source of income in an environment of high unemployment and entrance barriers to other formal jobs (Hunt and Machingura, 2016; Tandem Research and The Cloudburst Group, 2020). The latter is especially true for migrant workers who, despite their skills, often find it difficult to access the formal labour market. Many platform domestic workers interviewed in this case were migrant workers who expressed

platform domestic work to be one of the few easily accessible work options available to them as migrants in the country. Location-based or on-demand gig work hence offers migrant workers easier access to low skilled work with fewer entrance barriers (Hunt and Samman, 2019).

One of the major findings of this study, however, was the common occurrence of platform leakage amongst platform domestic workers interviewed. To reiterate, eight out of the ten platform domestic workers interviewed in this study engaged in platform leakage, some had even left the platform to work with their former SweepSouth clients as informal domestic workers or pursued other career options with them (see Appendix E, Table 1, and Table 4). The practice of transacting with platform customers outside of the platform arises from workers' needs for additional work opportunities to pursue alongside platform domestic work that is highly insecure and uncertain. Therefore, while platform domestic work is a vital tool for accessing domestic work opportunities, it appears to not solve the problem of low wages and underemployment for workers in the South African domestic sector.

Platform domestic work at SweepSouth pays workers above minimum wage per hour, but workers in this study argued that it is difficult to secure and maintain enough bookings on the platform, and that they experience persistent underemployment which leads to high income insecurity. Job security is therefore difficult to attain on the SweepSouth platform for workers, which necessitates the need to do additional informal work activities and platform leakage alongside platform domestic work. It has been observed by Hunt and Samman (2020) that indeed, platform domestic workers in South Africa are engaged in other income generating activities alongside platform domestic work once registered on a platform. A similar trend was observed amongst platform domestic workers interviewed in this study in that almost all the workers interviewed reported doing other jobs, including platform leakage, alongside their platform domestic work (see Appendix E, Table 4). These extra work activities were mostly informal cleaning work, but one respondent reported being an informal trader in addition to working as a domestic worker on and off the platform.

While emerging studies on gig work in South Africa have identified the tendency to pursue other work activities alongside platform domestic work, the phenomenon of

platform leakage in the local gig economy has until now, not been reported or discussed. Platform domestic workers in this study were found to be engaging in high levels of platform leakage because they were seeking to do both platform work and private work to address overall underemployment in the domestic sector. As shown by statistics, underemployment is a sector-wide problem in the South African domestic sector (Statistics South Africa, 2022). Therefore, combining both platform work and private work with former platform customers is a survival tactic used by platform domestic workers to mitigate low wages and underemployment on the platform and in the sector at large.

Platform leakage amongst platform domestic workers interviewed in this study was also found to be an indication that domestic workers are using the platform as a networking tool to gain access to private, informal domestic work where workers can negotiate their own terms of work and can earn considerably higher incomes than they do on the platform. The phenomenon of platform leakage corroborates the arguments in the literature that commercial agency domestic work often pays less than private, informal domestic work, prompting workers to pursue informal domestic work alongside commercial agency domestic work (Mendez, 1998; Devetter and Rousseau, 2009; Pérez and Stallaert, 2016). Domestic workers in agency work are reported to often combine private work with agency work because incomes paid out by agencies in the domestic sector are often more fixed and standardised by the agency, whereas in private work with private households, income rates are more fragmented and negotiated between workers and their private employers (Devetter and Rousseau, 2009; Mendez, 1998).

Platform domestic workers in this study were also more positive about private work with private households and were thus keen on securing clients from the SweepSouth platform to work for privately. This is contrary to Hunt and Samman's (2020:112) research findings on a different sample of SweepStars in South Africa who reported to be more appreciative of platform domestic work than traditional domestic work with private clients. It is also contrary to Du Toit's (2013) observation in his study of commercialised domestic work in Stellenbosch, South Africa. Domestic workers in his study were reluctant to return to private work because they were content with their working conditions as employees of the agency and were also relieved that they no longer had to establish personal relations with individual

clients (Du Toit, 2013). However, personalism in this work arrangement was still an important component of the labour process, but it had been shifted away from clients and onto agency managers who incorporated it as part of their managerial strategies (Du Toit, 2013). But for platform domestic workers in this study, the desire for the personalism of private work was expressed. This may be a reaction to the company's management practice of depersonalised management which takes the form of management from a distance by customers and algorithms, and greatly limits platform domestic workers' ability to exercise control over how they work. It is a desire to self-regulate and negotiate working conditions by establishing and appealing to an intimate work culture with their customers.

Platform leakage is an indication that gig work may not be best suited for the occupation of domestic work and its intimate workspace and work culture as pointed out by some observers in the platform domestic work literature (Madden, 2015; Huet, 2015). The finding about the commonplace practice of platform leakage among SweepStars, and that it is often initiated by clients on the platform affirms Maddison's (2015) observations of a similar trend in American platform domestic work companies. The findings also confirm the thesis by Tame (2018) that due to the intimate workspace in which domestic work occurs, clients of domestic work agencies are inclined to search for regular and familiar domestic workers that are 'comfortable others' to them; those workers who can be trusted and accepted to work in their homes because they meet their ideals of an intimate work culture. When it comes to platform domestic work, Madden (2015) also concurs with this idea of the intimate workspace dynamics of domestic work, which consequently makes platform leakage unavoidable in platform domestic work models.

Therefore, the business of commodifying workers' identities as comfortable others that can be trusted to work in other people's homes makes platformizing domestic work highly susceptible to platform leakage. However, future research ought to test this argument empirically to ascertain its validity in explaining platform leakage in platform domestic work because in this study, the platform company SweepSouth does acknowledge this need for relations of trust to be established among its SweepStars and clients on the platform, and consequently, allows clients the option for to do regular bookings with one's favourite SweepStar but yet, platform leakage persists on its platform.

8.1.1 Platform leakage and informality in the domestic sector

It is the conclusion of this case study that platform domestic work is useful for workers as a means of gaining access to work on the platform and as a networking tool to secure private working arrangements outside the platform, which are better remunerated and under the control of workers themselves. Chai and Scully (2016: 945) make the important observation that the flexible employment of the gig economy offers workers control over the time and place of work, but it does not guarantee a liveable wage and employment benefits. Workers must then engage in mitigation strategies to ensure a liveable wage and more favourable working conditions.

Platform leakage is one of the most significant mitigation strategies for platform domestic workers against the labour insecurity associated with gig work. This strategy can lead to either a clean break away from the platform by the worker to pursue full-time or part-time work with one or more clients from the platform, or as shown in this study, it can be a gateway to regular, off-platform work with multiple platform clients, pursued alongside ongoing platform domestic work.

This study shows therefore, that platformized independent domestic work coexists and is pursued alongside informal, independent domestic work by workers. This is because independent domestic work as a form of self-employment in the domestic sector is a highly insecure form of work (Brites, 2013). Fragal (2013 cited in Brites, 2013:439) cautions that independent domestic work may provide workers with opportunities to earn higher income levels than wage employment, but it also subjects workers to the disempowering costs of self-employment. Independent domestic workers, whether informal or commercialised face a similar problem of lack of employment and job security: ensuring that there are enough bookings from clients to earn a liveable income. In their study of independent domestic work that is pursued through conventional companies, Anderson and Hughes (2010) also observe that independent domestic cleaners working informally were more likely to pair informal independent work with formal paid employment to gain access to employment benefits and ensure economic security.

Platform leakage is therefore to be expected from platform domestic work because workers are seeking to address work insecurity associated with self-employment in the domestic sector. The evidence of commonplace leakage from the SweepSouth

platform also leads to the generalisation that platform domestic work may be inadvertently boosting informality in the sector at the same time as it seeks to modernize the sector by formalizing working arrangements through its digital platform.

8.2 Permissive power and its impacts in the platform domestic work labour process

Based on the reported experiences of the platform domestic work process in this case study, a theoretical generalisation can also be made that the permissive power framework of platform work governance discussed by Vallas and Schor (2020) does apply to the labour process of platform domestic work.

As the findings of this study suggest, platform domestic workers face significant controls by the platform company SweepSouth, which limit their work autonomy and choice as independently contracting workers on the platform. In their scheme, Vallas and Schor (2020) posit that unlike the traditional firm, platform companies exercise far less direct controls over the labour process, but these controls are very significant nonetheless, and they allow the platform company to remain a powerful actor in the gig work triangular employment relationship.

Platform domestic workers in this study revealed that they are allowed the flexibility and choice to choose their own work areas, set their own workdays, and to a large extent, to determine their own work routines and cleaning methods. However, the platform company exercises managerial control over the most significant aspects of the job from a distance through algorithmic monitoring and surveillance features on its platform, and through the delegation of the direct supervision of platform domestic workers to customers of the platform (management-by-customers). SweepSouth unilaterally sets the payment rates, types of cleaning tasks to be performed and average times for each booking. SweepSouth also monitors through algorithms platform domestic workers' work performance attributes such as job uptake levels on the platform, ratings and reviews by clients, hours worked and punctuality for booking appointments. A workers' overall performance in this regard impacts their on-going job recommendations and booking requests on the platform. Anderson and Hughes (2010) already note in the literature that commercialized independent domestic work leaves workers partially independent when compared to more

informal independent domestic workers. What differentiates the platformized independent domestic work of the gig economy from the commercialised independent domestic work discussed by Anderson and Hughes (2010) is the business model of gig economy platforms and the governance of platform labour through a distant management apparatus that is a crucial element of the platform company's permissive power over the platform domestic work labour process.

Exercising permissive power over platform domestic workers allows a platform domestic work company like SweepSouth to scale-up its operations both geographically and numerically in terms of the number of domestic workers that can be allowed to work through its platform. In her study of conventional commercial home service companies, Ehrenreich (2000) noted that growth and expansion was the key strategy for survival for commercial domestic work agencies because the domestic sector is a highly competitive sector. Furthermore, commercial domestic work agencies in the sector tend to suffer high labour turnover rates due in part, to competition with informal domestic workers (Devetter and Rousseau, 2009; Ehrenreich, 2000; Mendez, 1998). Platform domestic work companies like SweepSouth can get around these problems and attain high growth because of their chosen business model of digital intermediation and open employment (Vallas and Schor, 2020). As an intermediary, SweepSouth can avoid direct employment of domestic workers and their direct management and infrastructural costs associated with direct employment. The platform company is hence able to employ thousands of geographically dispersed domestic workers at a time on its platform as partially independent contractors which minimises the negative effects of high rates of labour turnover on the platform company.

The lack of direct management of platform domestic workers and the deployment of distant management is made possible using the platform's algorithm-driven features such ratings, deactivations and compiling of regular performance reports. Management-by-customers is also a key feature of the distant management strategy over platform domestic work at SweepSouth. Findings of this case study show that clients of the platform company are positioned as the middle-managers of domestic workers because they are afforded the authority to decide and supervise the cleanings tasks to be undertaken by domestic workers and are also charged with the power to give work performance reviews or ratings which are important for workers'

continued access to jobs on the platforms. This practice of management-by-customers in platform domestic work is like management by the employer in traditional domestic work where the madam or employer commands the worker, gives the worker instructions on how the cleaning work is to be done, and oversees their work performance (Anderson, 2000; Ally, 2009; Cock, 1980). Like platform domestic workers, workers in this arrangement rarely go through formal training and must rely on their own knowledge and experience in paid and unpaid care work and on the supervision by their employers to do the job of domestic work (Ally, 2009; Cock, 1980). Management-by-customers is also noted in the gig work labour process literature as a common feature of platform work in general and the attempts by platform companies to control labour effort in the gig work labour process (Gandini, 2019; Veen et al., 2019). However, the extent and procedure of management-by-customers in the gig economy varies according to the company and type of work performed on the platform (Veen et al., 2019). It is evident from this case study that management-by-customers is an integral part of the platform domestic work undertaken at SweepSouth and that it functions in conjunction with algorithmic monitoring and surveillance of workers as part of an indirect, distant management regime practiced by the platform company that allows it permissive power over the labour process.

Management-by-customers intensifies platform domestic workers' labour and increases the demand for more emotional labour to ensure that one acquires a good rating and hence regular access to more jobs on the platform. The rating system on the app and the ability of clients to choose their own preferred domestic worker on the platform also reinforces the practice of management-by-customers and ensures that the company maintains immense authority over the labour process by collating customer feedback into regular and highly visible worker performance scores on the platform. This forms a management from a distance strategy, and it gives the company significant control over workers' incomes, work behaviours and productivity on the platform.

Management from a distance through algorithms and management-by-customers in platform domestic work is distinct from the management approaches practiced by other commercial domestic work agencies that hire domestic workers as employees of the company, under direct supervision by the company's management staff

(Ehrenreich, 2000; Du Toit, 2013). Clients in this arrangement can practice some limited form of oversight over the worker and some companies do use customer feedback and ratings mechanism to ensure service quality (Du Toit, 2013). However, compared to platform domestic work's performance metrics systems, these are not as consequential for domestic workers in direct employment with service providing agencies whose employment is largely protected and secure. Platform domestic workers lack job security on the platform, hence overall performance scores that are monitored by algorithms on the platform determines their continued access to job security on the platform. This finding corroborates Hunt and Samman's (2020:111) own work on platform domestic work in South Africa where they likewise find that success in platform domestic work is largely determined by performance measures on the platform such as ratings from clients, job uptake levels and a workers' length of tenure on the platform.

The lack of job security, protection, and benefits, coupled with the existence of significant controls over workers' performance and job autonomy on the platform all indicate the existence of market despotism in the platform domestic work model. The following section below expands on this argument.

8.2.1 Market despotism in platform domestic work

Platform domestic work is intensifying the commodification of domestic work. Labour regulation in the gig economy relies on market despotism, the regulation of labour through economic insecurity (Wood et al., 2019). Market despotism in gig work stems from the existence of disguised employment on the platform, reinforced by platform company's practice of distant management and permissive power in their relationship with workers on the platform. This allows them to disguise the existence of an employment relationship with workers on the platform and evade employment protection-related costs. This study's finding about the various distant management controls and restrictions exercised on platform domestic workers suggest that they are indeed in a disguised employment relationship with their platform.

Disguising the employment relationship is at the core of the business model of gig work (Prassl, 2018). The stated business model of gig work is digital intermediation between service providers and end-users, not the production of a service like other traditional service firms. In the latter, the service firm profits from the labour of its workers and is hence incentivised to exercise managerial control, command, and

oversight over workers to ensure efficiency in the service provision and the growth of the enterprise (Thompson and Smith, 2000; ILO, 2011). The worker and the service firm in this arrangement are also in an employment relationship because the worker is subjected to the authority and command of the service firm in the governance of his or her work (ILO, 2005). The imposition of permissive power tactics over platform domestic workers by platform companies like SweepSouth reveals the difficulty of attaining growth and profitability from a gig economy business model based solely on the digital intermediation of labour (Huet, 2015). This is one of the main dilemmas facing platform domestic work companies; deciding between strictly providing a matching service for domestic workers and clients as a digital intermediary or operating as a service provider of domestic cleaning services that is in an employment relationship with domestic workers (Huet, 2015). This study's findings show that for platform domestic work companies like SweepSouth, the business model of digital intermediation is difficult to sustain because it prohibits the extensive use of the otherwise necessary direct management and control over workers' labour to enforce exclusivity over domestic workers on the platform and discourage platform leakage. Because of this challenge, the platform domestic work labour process is characterised by the contentious relationship between digital labour intermediation, distant management and platform leakage as portrayed by image 10 below:

Image 10: *Key features of the platform domestic work model*



Image 10 above outlines the contradictions inherent in the platform domestic work model. The limits of indirect, distant management on the platform allows for platform leakage to occur, which could have a negative impact on company's survival and growth. To potentially address this problem, the platform is forced to intensify its

controls over domestic workers, albeit from a distance. While management from a distance makes the managerial figure less visible to workers, it is still consequential for workers' job performance on the platform (Gandini, 2019). This was the case for the platform domestic workers interviewed in this study who's working conditions under distant management by their platform company resembles those of employees more than those of autonomous independent contractors in a commercial contract. Platform domestic workers are misclassified as sellers of a pure commodity on the platform and are, as a result, governed by self-reliance and competition with other workers and a good job performance record on the platform to ensure continued access to jobs recommendations by the platform.

It is true therefore that aside from the new technological innovation to the matching and supply of domestic workers and households, the platform domestic work model presents nothing radically different to traditional employment because it is likewise, a highly insecure form of work (Hunt and Samman, 2020). Platform domestic workers and traditional informal workers are similarly insecure workers. Gig work is actual wage work, but it is not protected or regulated because it is disguised employment (Prassl, 2018). Hence the regulation of platform work follows a despotic regime of control. Market despotism in platform domestic work is effective in extracting compliance and consent from platform domestic workers because they are in an environment of high unemployment and underemployment and are hence compelled to accept insecure work out of necessity. Such work lacks employment related securities including a stable job and income, protection from unfair dismissal and the right to collective bargaining (Standing, 2011). For the South African domestic sector, this is a serious issue given the intense efforts to regulate and improve working conditions in the sector from its Apartheid legacy of extreme racial exploitation and servitude relations.

8.2.2 Decommodifying platform domestic work through fair-work:

Despite the evidence of severe commodification on the platform, there is evidence that SweepSouth as a company is attempting to reduce insecurity on its platform. The platform company has implemented initiatives to provide health and death insurance cover and COVID-19 relief cash transfers to domestic workers working on its platform. According to SweepSouth's website content, the company sets its hourly pay rates above minimum wage and provides optional insurance contributions by

clients, to covers loss of property and accidental breakage for each booking; and optional insurance contributions by clients to cover death, disability, and critical illness for their SweepStar (SweepSouth, 2021). It is worth noting however, that clients are the main contributors to these initiatives, and contributions are optional. Therefore, it is up to the client to decide to provide cover for their SweepStar on the platform. SweepSouth also raised funds from corporate donors and the public to provide SweepStars with some financial relief vouchers during COVID-19 lockdown periods in 2020 (SweepSouth, 2021). According to the company, these funds were restricted to those SweepStars that had been working on the platform for at least two months prior to the initiation of national lockdown policies in March 2020 (Pandor, 2020, *eNca interview*).

Furthermore, SweepSouth is also rated highly by the Fairwork Project for its attempts to provide fair working conditions on its platform, which can be seen as evidence of an attempt towards lessening insecurity among platform domestic workers working on the company's platform (Fairwork, 2021). The University of Oxford's Fairwork Project which evaluates working conditions in the gig economy internationally rates SweepSouth an eight out of ten in terms of fair pay and fair working conditions on its platform, and the recognition of workers' right to freedom of association and collective bargaining, and implementation of mechanisms and structures to allow for workers' input on their working conditions (Fairwork, 2021).

However, the fair work principles used by the Fairwork Project to evaluate the working conditions of gig work do not address the key issue of employment insecurity in the gig economy in its assessment. The five principles of Fairwork focus on the fairness of the job of gig work as opposed to decent work that adheres to employment protections and social security contributions mandated by law. While SweepSouth does attempt to provide its workers with some form social security, platform domestic work still lacks many of the employment protections mandated by law for domestic workers in the country. The SweepStar welfare initiatives on the platform are still largely dependent upon the clients' goodwill and public donations and are hence not guaranteed to every domestic worker on the platform. Therefore, employment-related costs on the platform are still the sole responsibility of platform domestic workers, even though the company's profits are dependent on workers' labour and a satisfied customer-base. Discussions with platform domestic workers in

this study revealed that their access to jobs is strictly determined by their work performance and that abrupt deactivations from the platform due to poor performance are common. So, employment risk in the platform domestic work model is primarily shouldered by the domestic worker. For the platform company and its customers, providing protections and benefits to domestic workers on the platform is optional.

The lack of employment protections for platform domestic workers echoes the concerns raised in the literature about the potential erosion of the progressive move towards full labour protections and employment benefits for domestic workers that have been instituted in the post-Apartheid era in South Africa (Hunt and Samman, 2020; Hunt and Machingura, 2016). These gains in labour protections and benefits for domestic workers include legal provisions for mandatory work contracts in the sector that stipulate regulated work hours and employment protection provisions such as paid maternity leave and extensions to paid leave, sick pay, and the payment of overtime work to name a few (Basic Conditions of Employment Act 1997: Sectoral Determination 7; Ally, 2009; Du Toit, 2013; Hunt and Machingura, 2016). Domestic workers also have the right to payment of minimum wage and social security contributions including domestic workers' access to the Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF) (Unemployment Insurance Act 2001; Ally, 2009). These protections and social security benefits are the responsibility of the domestic employer and are hence accessible to registered domestic workers who are in an employment relationship with their clients (Hunt and Machingura, 2016:21).

Although Sectoral Determination 7 of the Basic Conditions of Employment Act does include independent domestic workers in its definition, and thereby entitling independent workers to the same rights as employees, the problem with platform domestic work is that neither the platform company nor the customers on the platform identify themselves as the employer of platform domestic workers on the platform. Consequently, platform domestic workers cannot access many of the rights and protections stipulated by the Act and mandated to be fulfilled by an employer (Hunt and Machingura, 2016). Platform domestic work is therefore in a category of its own that is yet to be regulated under the legal framework for domestic workers' employment rights in South Africa. A union representative, Gloria Kente, emphasised and was critical of this inherent problem of identifying the real employer in platform

domestic work to make the necessary social security contributions on the worker's behalf. Her remarks were as follows:

Yes, it is good because now the workers can get a job for themselves, right? They can go to that app and apply for a job, right? But our main problem is that they're not going to get access to the UIF, or they're not going to get the benefits when they are pregnant...do you understand? ... Because they don't have one employer; they work three hours here and then they must move to another one, in the same day, to another employer and another employer! So who is going to be the employer from these four people? Because you have to be registered when you're working more than twenty-four hours a month. So if you're working for this employer for three hours, how are you going to be registered? That is our main thing, that we want to sit down and talk about it that at least the domestic worker must benefit from the rights of domestic workers in South Africa. (**Gloria Kente, SADSAWU union organiser**)

What we see from this quote above is the concern that without the existence of an employer in platform domestic work, domestic workers are left excluded from benefiting from South Africa's extensive legal rights and employment protections for domestic workers. This makes labour insecurity a fundamental problem of platform domestic work and attempts at decommodification must focus on expanding employment protections to platform domestic workers.

8.3 Modernisation, digital revolution, and decent work in the occupation:

Platform domestic work represents the transformation of independent domestic work in the informal economy. On one level, it is an example of the external modernisation of domestic work employment through commercialisation or industrialisation as argued by Devetter and Rousseau (2009), whereby the independent commodity production of domestic work previously done outside of the capitalist work process is finally commodified and brought under the logic of profit accumulation by commercial companies. Mendez (1997:118) makes the important observation that the difference between traditional domestic employment relations and domestic work in commercial companies or agencies is that the company profits from the labour power of domestic workers as third-party intermediaries in the employment relationship.

Platform domestic work can also be argued to represent more than just modernisation through the commercialisation of independent domestic work. It goes a step further by bringing in technology and the phenomenon of the gig economy and its attendant merits and demerits into the equation. Platform technology and gig-

work arrangements are now being combined with the commercialisation and industrialisation of domestic work. We are hence witnessing a multi-pronged modernisation process being applied to the occupation of paid domestic work through the combined forces of technology, the gig economy and commercialisation. Much like technology companies in the gig economy, SweepSouth is advocating this multipronged transformation through platform technology as a means of reorganising an 'old-school' industry like domestic work for the better (Pandor, 2020). SweepSouth conveys its modernization objective to be the formalization of the sector and reduction of exploitation through its digital platform (Pandor, 2017).

Based on the findings in this study, SweepSouth's platform is very effective in matching workers with clients instantly and efficiently, while also providing workers above minimum wage hourly payment rates. There is also evidence that the platform may be indirectly increasing average payment rates in the sector through the occurrence of platform leakage among clients and workers on the platform. However, this occurrence of platform leakage also shows that platform domestic work itself does not eliminate the need for informal domestic work in the sector because platform domestic workers are combining platform domestic work with informal domestic work to augment their incomes. Compared to informal domestic work, platform domestic work is still a highly insecure form of work.

This finding challenges the idea that modernization and 'industrialization' of domestic work by commercial companies is sufficient to address exploitation and labour insecurity in the sector (Devetter and Rousseau, 2009). The literature along with the findings of this study highlight that commercial agency work in the domestic sector is often on a part-time basis, and is poorly remunerated, prompting domestic workers to seek out informal working arrangements where they can directly negotiate for better working conditions with their clients (Pérez and Stallaert, 2016:163; Farris, 2020:1461; Devetter and Rousseau, 2009:303; Mendez, 1998).

While the International Labour Organisation (ILO, 2010:12) is careful to frame the modernization of domestic work as simply a change in the norm of status-based employment relations into rights-based relations that are based on 'modern' labour legislations and standards, Cole (1998:322) warns that often the modernization narrative and rhetoric is used ideologically to justify and articulate the needs of

capital at specific moments in history. The Marxist school of thought hence sees modernization as a social process that is determined by the process of commodification; capitalism's most central feature (Cole, 1998:322). For the domestic sector, many care work and Marxist-feminist scholars observe that improving the working conditions of domestic work through commercialization will receive marginal success if any, because growth and profits in capitalist domestic service enterprises is the primary objective and is dependent upon the commodification of domestic workers' labour and identities as care workers (Farris, 2018; Mendez, 1997; Maher, 2004; Meagher, 1997; Ehrenreich, 2000). Because the platform domestic work model excludes workers from accessing employment protections, domestic workers' status as cheap providers of reproductive labour in South Africa is being reinforced and intensified by the gig economy in the sector.

Modernization efforts in the sector have been observed to be effective in improving working conditions for workers only when and if they are a worker-led movement and transformation, borne out of a pressing need to improve their conditions of work. For example, the turn to part-time and independent domestic work is acknowledged as an improvement on the working conditions for domestic work when it is a worker-initiative that transforms the worker from a servant to a tradesperson who is appropriating their own surplus and working as a skilled and autonomous service provider (Rio, 2005; Romero, 2012; Ally, 2009). However, as Ally (2009) observes, employer-led shifts towards part-time and independent domestic work are seen by workers as attempts to depersonalize the labour relationship in the employer's favour, which allows them to demand more work from the worker as a dehumanised service provider. In this employer-led transformation, workers cease to be 'like one of the family' and are unable to utilise personalism in their favour to negotiate working conditions (Ally, 2009). Employers hence effectively intensify their work and exert increased control over their labour without negotiation and appeal by workers.

Du Toit (2020b) also opines that the shift towards contract cleaning by commercial cleaning service companies further depersonalizes the domestic labour relation in favour of clients and to the detriment of workers' negotiating power because clients can now purchase a depersonalised, and anonymised service from the agency. Domestic workers employed by agencies are numerous and interchangeable and are often hired on a part-time basis thereby experiencing reduced incomes and

increased employment insecurity (Du Toit, 2020b; Devetter and Rousseau, 2009). However, commercial cleaning service companies engage in an employment relationship with domestic workers (Du Toit, 2013). In the case of placement agencies as well, the worker is placed in employment with a prospective client (Maher, 2004; Tame, 2018). This means that workers under conventional agency work are entitled to full labour protections and employees with clearly designated employers (Du Toit, 2013). This is a fact that is absent in platform domestic work. Therefore, like conventional commercial agency domestic work, platform domestic work is an externally driven transformation of the occupation but unlike commercial agency work, it severely intensifies the commodification of domestic workers by excluding domestic workers from access to employment rights and protections as workers in disguised employment. In the platform domestic work model, emphasis is placed on providing a cheap and convenient cleaning service to customers. While domestic workers are allowed a chance to engage in flexible work that is beneficial for the balancing of paid and unpaid work or attaining a 'work life balance', this comes at the cost of employment security and protection on the platform.

Interviews with workers revealed that collective negotiations and workers' voices in key issues regarding the organisation of their work on the platform was not practiced. Furthermore, attempts at engaging in dialogue with SweepSouth by union officials at SADSAWU had not been successful at the time of this study, as argued by the union organiser Gloria Kente in the quote below.

...yah because we sit down with agencies... Those they do; like *Marvellous Maids* and *Domestica*... there were three of them, they came to our meeting. So yah, we saw that it's good, they have their worker contract, and it was just like what we want. (**Gloria Kente, SADSAWU union organiser**)

As indicated in the quote above, the union SADSAWU is calling for dialogue with SweepSouth and maintains that they seek to engage in dialogue with all commercial agencies in the South African domestic sector and that successful interactions with some of the major agencies except for SweepSouth had been achieved. The voices of domestic workers and their union representatives are therefore absent in this crucial transformation of domestic work into a form of gig work. It is evident that once again in this renewed effort at modernising the occupation, domestic workers are still relegated the position of being recipients of change, as noted by Ally (2009), rather

than active agents and co-creators of the digital revolution that's transforming their work.

Critical engagement with domestic workers and their incorporation into management and decision-making structures, and platform design processes is needed to ensure that platform technology in the sector is a net positive for domestic workers. This is particularly relevant because platform domestic workers are described as independent workers on the platform, so more rights, full autonomy over their work, and how it is organised on the platform must be granted to them as independent contractors. There is also the need for platform domestic work companies to demonstrate in their actual practices the difference between providing an intermediary service to domestic workers and householders; and providing a direct home cleaning service to customers as employers of the domestic workers on their platform. Many of the criticisms of gig work as being a form of disguised employment arise from this ambiguity in the actual practices by platforms towards their customers and workers.

However, it may be the case that because platform domestic work companies like SweepSouth are profiting from the severely commodified labour of domestic workers on their platforms, implementing these measures aimed at decommodifying work on the platform may prove difficult to implement because they can significantly impact the profitability of the company whose growth and scale is greatly influenced by not being in an employment relationship with its workers.

9. Conclusion

This interpretivist case study sought to investigate domestic workers experiences of platform domestic work in South Africa, based on a select sample of ten platform domestic workers from the platform company SweepSouth in Cape Town. The study sought to understand workers' motivations for becoming platform domestic workers, and using a labour process theory lens, it also sought to understand the ways in which their work is structured and executed, and how workers experience and engage with the job of platform work.

Findings from this study reveal that platform domestic work offers domestic workers reliable access to work in an environment of high unemployment and underemployment in the domestic sector. These problems have intensified in recent years due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and due to the historical trajectory towards part-time work in the sector. Platform domestic work also provides domestic workers the opportunity to work on a flexible basis and attain a work-life balance. Additionally, this case study uncovered the existence of platform leakage in the South African platform domestic work model, where platform domestic workers and platform customers decide to transact with each other outside of the platform after their initial service encounter on the platform. This is evidence that platform domestic workers approach the platform as a networking tool to gain access to additional work under more favourable conditions and to also attain career advancements opportunities. Platform domestic workers are also responding to underemployment and job insecurity on the platform through platform leakage because it allows workers to have a regular client base on and off the platform. Platform leakage is thus an inherent feature of platform domestic work which, until now, had only been reported by authors reporting on North American contexts.

Using an interpretivist approach to case study methodology, this study also sought to interrogate workers' experiences of the labour process of platform domestic work. Findings in this regard reveal that platform domestic work is governed through the permissive power of the platform company. Permissive power over the labour of platform domestic workers is practiced through a distant management approach. Distant management of the platform domestic work labour process is exercised through algorithmic surveillance and monitoring of workers' performance on the platform, and through the tactic of management-by-customers whereby the company

delegates the direct supervision and evaluation of domestic workers' labour to service requesters as customers of the platform. Overall, the findings of this case study show that platform domestic work as a form of gig work in the domestic sector is a useful job model for domestic workers because it plays a key role in providing easy and reliable access to work. However, platform domestic work is a highly insecure form of work, and workers are forced to combine this platformised independent domestic work with their own informal independent domestic work or part-time work with a single regular client.

Platform domestic workers are also without access to mandated labour protections as workers in disguised employment. This study shows that gig work, as an externally driven force of modernisation in the domestic sector, leads to the severe commodification of domestic workers. There is therefore a need for a worker-led and/or negotiated gig economy transformation of the domestic sector that goes beyond providing work to include the empowerment of platform domestic workers in the form of include active worker participation in the platform design process and management structures, and through work that guarantees their access to rights and labour protections as gig workers.

9.1 Recommendations

This study reiterates the position that platform domestic work is a highly precarious form of work that could, in the long run, potentially undermining gains made with regards to the employment rights and protections of domestic workers (Hunt and Samman, 2020). Platform domestic work companies ought to engage in a dialogue with platform domestic workers and their union representatives more holistically in their platform design process and management structures. As independent workers, platform domestic workers ought to be also provided full autonomy and control over their working conditions on the platform.

Alternatively, a different model of platform domestic work that is not premised on the severe commodification of workers for profit ought to be explored. This could include the adoption of platform technology for the convenient and reliable matching of domestic workers and clients by direct service providing agencies that hire workers directly as employees, thus offering employment protection guarantees. Another model of platform domestic work could also build on the recruitment and placement model of many already existing agencies and utilise platform technology to easily

connect and place workers with employers that can be compelled by law to offer employment protections and benefits to their domestic workers. A more radical alternative to commercial, profit platform domestic work could be the creation of worker-owned platform cooperatives to potentially overcome the severe commodification of platform domestic workers for profit maximisation and provide a truly worker-led gig economy transformation of domestic work. Worker-owned platform cooperatives could provide the crucial service of convenient and reliable matching of domestic workers with customers more equitably and fairly through collective ownership decision making in the design process and management of the platform. Some observers have begun working on such initiatives as a lasting solutions to promoting decent working conditions in the South Africa gig economy (see Mullagee and James, 2021).

In the meantime however, there is a great need for more dedicated studies on the currently existing model of platform domestic work in the South African domestic sector. This interpretivist case study sought to contribute to this literature. It broadens our understanding of the permissive power regime in the management and control of the platform domestic work labour process and highlights the importance of the platform technology as a networking tool to be used by domestic workers for additional employment through platform leakage. However, this study was a limited to a sample of mostly Zimbabwean platform domestic workers in Cape Town that had been platform domestic workers for a relatively short period of time of mostly less than two years on the platform. Future studies ought to investigate larger, and more diverse sample sizes of platform domestic workers in South Africa to interrogate similarities and complexities in the experience of platform domestic work. It would be worthwhile to know if workers' approach and engagement with platform domestic work are in any way impacted by sociodemographic factors such as age, gender, nationality, and length of tenure on the platform, to name a few. This study's sample size was too limited to draw any in-depth or substantial conclusions on this issue. Such an undertaking would have to be done using a more quantitative or mixed-method research design to provide estimates on the diversity of workers in platform domestic work and their varied and complex experiences of platform domestic work.

More dedicated studies on the labour process of platform domestic work are also required. Most importantly, in-depth qualitative case studies on platform domestic work companies themselves are required to understand the social process involved in designing and managing the platform domestic work model. In other words, a managerial perspective and narrative is required for a complete understanding of the platform domestic work model in the literature. As such, research is also needed about other South African platforms such as GetTOD for a comprehensive analysis of the impact of gig work on the working conditions of the domestic sector in the country. Lastly, a client-perspective can also elucidate more on the reasons behind the phenomenon of platform leakage in platform domestic work which, as workers in this study argue, is often initiated by their clients on the platform.

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Appendices

A. Research Invitation document (Blurb):

Do you or anyone you know use online platforms to get access to domestic work jobs? Online platforms or 'Apps' are increasingly being used by companies to give workers access to domestic work gigs in South Africa. However, little is known about the experiences of these domestic workers that are using these apps to find work.

My name is Tengetile Nhleko. I am a second year Research Masters student in the department of Sociology at the University of Cape Town (UCT). I am doing a research study on 'uber-ized' domestic work in South Africa, and how workers are experiencing this new type of domestic work.

If you know someone or are a domestic worker currently working through these Apps or have had experience working with them in the past, I would like to hear your story.

Please contact me via email:

or WhatsApp me on:

I look forward to hearing from you!

B. Consent form:



Consent form

Researcher: Tengetile W. Nhleko

What do the experiences of on-demand domestic work reveal about the potential impact of gig work in the domestic sector?

Invitation and Purpose of study

You are kindly invited to participate in this study of 'uberized' domestic work in South Africa. I am undertaking this study to fulfil my Master's dissertation on technology in the domestic sector.

This study seeks to learn more about the experiences of 'uberized' domestic workers in South Africa. My aim is to understand the ways in which technology is transforming the working experience of domestic work in South Africa.

The study is conducted under the supervision of **Bianca Tame** for the pilot project of BRAAS (Building Research Active Academic Staff).

Study procedure

This research will be conducted through individual and group interviews with yourself and other domestic workers working with the platform company SweepSouth to find out about the experience of uberised domestic work in South Africa. Interviews will also be conducted with SweepSouth company representatives for context purposes.

Given that this study aims to understand the nature and working conditions of on-demand domestic work as a phenomenon, the identity of all participants in this study will be kept anonymous. This means that the company's identity and the identity of company officials participating in this study will be kept anonymous. Any information that may reveal the identity of participants will be disguised.

Participation in this study is voluntary, and you have the right to withdraw from the study at any time

Interview procedure:

Interviews will be done via telephone and will be recorded. These recordings will be kept secured and private. Only I and my research supervisor, Bianca Tame, will have access to these recordings.

The interview session will take approximately 60 minutes of your time. In these interviews, you will be asked to share your experiences working as an uberized domestic worker.

Any data or airtime costs that may arise in the interview process will be covered by the researcher.

Participation in these interviews is voluntary, and you have the right to withdraw from the interview at any time. You also have the right to refuse to answer questions you feel uncomfortable answering.

Privacy and anonymity

Should you decide to participate in this study, your identity will be kept anonymous by changing your name. Any information that may reveal your identity will be disguised.

All your personal information will be kept private and secured. Only I and my research supervisor, Bianca Tame, will have access to your personal information, interview transcripts and recordings.

Please be aware that the information you provide during the interviews will be quoted and used in my Master's thesis paper to be submitted for examination at the University of Cape Town. It will also be used in future publications by myself and my research supervisor Bianca Tame. **Your identity will still be kept anonymous in these publications.**

Benefits of your participation in this study

Your participation in this study will provide information on the real-life experiences of working as an uberized domestic worker in South Africa, its benefits, and challenges.

This information is important to know because it will improve our understanding of uberized domestic work and what needs to be done to improve working conditions in this new type of domestic work in the country.

Risks, inconveniences, and discomfort

Participating in this study should not bring any risk to you.

Any confidential statements you make about your work and about the company SweepSouth will not be traced back to you. Your identity will not be published, and I will ensure that your identity is kept private and anonymous.

If you get distressed during the interview session, you are free to leave the study and withdraw your consent to participating.

Contact details

If you have any questions or would like to receive more information on the research study and your contribution to it, please feel free to contact me or my research supervisor.

Consent agreement

I agree to participate in this study

The nature, purpose and scope of the study has been explained to me and I consent to being interviewed by **Tengetile W. Nhleko** for her Master's research project at the University of Cape Town.

I understand that I have the right to withdraw my consent to participate in this study at any time, and that I have the right to refuse to answer any questions I may feel uncomfortable responding to.

I understand that my identity will be kept anonymous by changing my name and that any information that may reveal my identity will be disguised.

I consent to my interview being audio-recorded, retained, and used for research publications.

I understand that these audio recordings will be retained and kept secured by Tengetile. I also understand that her supervisor, Bianca Tame, will have access to my information and audio recordings.

I understand that extracts from my interview may be quoted by Tengetile in her research thesis. I also understand that they may be used by her supervisor Bianca Tame in her future publications.

I understand that I am free to contact Tengetile and/or her supervisor Bianca Tame to seek further clarification and information about this study and my contributions to it.

Signature of research participant:

Date:

Signature of researcher:

I believe that the participant is giving informed consent to participate in this study.

Date:

C. Interview Guides

Main research question:

What do the experiences of platform domestic workers reveal about the potential impact of gig work in the domestic sector?

Interview guide for platform domestic workers

Introductions

Can you tell me a bit more about yourself?

- Age
- Nationality
- Current residence and living arrangement
- Highest educational level achievement
- Marital status and child status

General experience with Domestic work

What made you choose domestic work?

How long have you been working as a domestic worker?

What kind of domestic work did you do before SweepSouth?

- Full-time versus part-time

Do you consider yourself a professional worker?

- Source of domestic working skills

In your opinion as a domestic worker in this country, what can be done to improve the job of being a domestic worker?

Joining SweepSouth

What made you decide to join SS?

- Recruitment method
- Length of employment with SS

What aspects of this job do you like?

If things were to be done differently at SS, what would you recommend they change or improve on?

Would you recommend this job to other domestic workers? Why?

Working with Sweep South

Do you have any other job besides SweepSouth currently?

What was your experience of the job application process at SweepSouth?

- Skills requirement
- Training requirements
- Work contract

What was your experience of the first job with SweepSouth?

- Hopes and expectations about the job prior to working

SweepSouth work routine

What kind of domestic work do you do with SweepSouth?

Are you satisfied with the number of jobs that you are getting at the moment?

- Regular clients
- Typical number of jobs per day, per week
- Experience with working for multiple clients

Does it ever happen that you meet clients outside of the App?

- Working conditions under this arrangement: payment, type of task typically done, length of work and workdays,
- Informality status and work contracts.
- Recruitment strategies for private work

Can you please describe for me how your routine for a job generally looks like?

- Job tasks, work hours given and time management strategies
- Experience with clients
- Interaction with SweepSouth managers

Experience with the 'App'

What has been your experience with using the App?

- Usefulness of the app and ease of use
- Setting up worker profiles
- Nature of work organisation on the app

What kind of information about the client do you receive before accepting a booking?

- Visibility of client's own ratings and potential impact on booking confirmation
- Satisfaction with amount of information given about client

Experience with Clients

How would you describe a good client for you?

- Opinion on being able to choose clients on the app

How would you describe your ratings from clients so far?

- Rating procedure and the impact on work behaviour
- Strategies for securing a good rating
- 'Red-faces' phenomenon

So what happens when you have a disagreement with the client, how is this dealt with?

- Safety concerns or damage to property
- Dispute resolution procedure

Income comparisons

Are you satisfied with your income at SweepSouth?

- Typical monthly earnings from SweepSouth versus work with private clients
- 'Tipping' experience from SweepSouth clients

- Other financial incentives from SweepSouth e.g., vouchers. “earn-more” incentives on the app

Support from SweepSouth

What kind of support do you receive from SweepSouth?

- Assistance during lockdown
- Insurance and UIF
- Customer care training for good ratings

Impact of COVID

What kind of impact did COVID and national lockdown protocols have on your bookings?

- Coping strategies

SweepSouth worker-networks and potential Unionization

Are there other SweepSouth workers that you are in contact with?

- Nature of interaction and platforms used

Have you heard about SADSAWU?

Closing question

Do you see yourself continuing with working with SweepSouth a year from now?

Expert Interview guide (SADSAWU interview)

Introductory questions

What is the goal and mission of SADSAWU in South Africa?

What are the challenges that domestic workers are currently facing in this country?

What has been the impact of SADSAWU in the domestic sector in recent years?

- Challenges and successes

Union’s perspective on the gig economy

How do you define this new kind of domestic work provided by platform companies?

- Union’s position and approach to this new kind of domestic work

What aspects of this new kind of work are of most concern to your organization?

- Have you had any engagement with platform companies about working conditions for the on-demand domestic workers they engage?
- Have you had any engagements with government and policy makers about the regulation of this new form of domestic work?

Union activity in the SA gig economy

Have you had any interactions or engagements with the on-demand domestic workers doing this kind of domestic work?

Have you had any engagement with any other unions representing workers in the gig economy of South Africa?

- Do you foresee any future collaborations in this regard?

D. List of Secondary data used

Document	Author	Title	Source	Date Published	Date Retrieved
Online Interview	Aisha Pandor	"Aisha Pandor: How My Start-up Will Transform The Informal Employment Sector In Africa"	https://youtu.be/ib-12FIsVxs	2/8/2017	1/7/2021
Online Interview	Aisha Pandor	"Aisha Pandor: Building A Successful Platform Business"	https://youtu.be/5SpfkjaelHA	7/11/2019	1/7/2021
Online Interview	South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC)	"SweepSouth seeks to address unemployment in SA"	https://youtu.be/bhRxSMMQWE	31/3/2018	1/7/2021
Online Interview	eNews Channel Africa (Enca)	"SA Lockdown: SweepSouth launches fund to assist domestic workers"	https://youtu.be/VQcX_8EFqmg	10/4/2020	1/7/2021
Online Article	Njeri, G.	"Interview: South African techpreneur Aisha Pandor out to Sweep Kenya"	https://businesstoday.co.ke/south-african-techpreneur-aisha-pandor-makes-a-sweep-in-kenya/	26/3/2021	1/7/2021
Online Article	Mkele, Y.	"SweepSouth: The app that is sweeping the nation"	https://www.careersmagazine.co.za/2020/12/01/sweep-south-the-app-that-is-sweeping-the-nation/	9/12/2020	16/12/2020
Survey Report	The Fairwork Project	"Fairwork South Africa Ratings 2021: Labour standards in the gig economy"	https://fair.work/en/fw/publications/fairwork-south-africa-ratings-2021-labour-standards-in-the-gig-economy/	2021	13/10/2021
Online website content	The Fairwork Project	"SweepSouth (South Africa)"	https://fair.work/en/ratings/platforms/south-africa-sweepsouth/?y=2021#continue	2021	13/10/2021

Company Survey Report	SweepSouth	"Report on pay and working conditions for domestic work in SA 2019"	https://blog.sweepsouth.com/2019/05/20/report-on-pay-and-working-conditions-for-domestic-work-in-south-africa-2019/	20/5/2019	5/12/2019
Company Survey Report	SweepSouth	"Pay and working conditions for domestic work in South Africa 2020: COVID-19 edition"	https://blog.sweepsouth.com/2020/09/21/3rd-annual-sweepsouth-report-on-pay-working-conditions-for-domestic-work-in-south-africa/	21/9/2020	29/1/2021
Company Survey Report	SweepSouth	"Pay and working conditions for domestic workers across Africa"	https://blog.sweepsouth.com/2021/06/28/pay-working-conditions-for-domestic-workers-across-africa/	28/6/2021	10/10/2021
Company Terms and Conditions	SweepSouth	"Terms and Conditions"	https://sweepsouth.com/terms/	10/11/2020	20/3/2021
Company's website content:	SweepSouth	"South African cleaning services"	https://sweepsouth.com/locations/		17/7/2021
		"Meet Some of the SweepStars"	https://sweepsouth.com/		04/11/2021
		"Let us take care of your home"	https://sweepsouth.com/		04/11/2021
		"One million reasons to celebrate"	https://blog.sweepsouth.com/2020/10/27/letter-from-our-ceo-2/		29/1/2021
		"Popular SweepSouth Services"	https://sweepsouth.com/		10/7/2021
		"About your clean"	https://sweepsouth.com/book/step1?indoor=true		9/9/2021
		"How are fees calculated?"	https://help.sweepsouth.com/hc/en-us/articles/115005450485-How-are-fees-calculated-		9/9/2021
		"What is the service fee?"	https://help.sweepsouth.com/hc/en-us/articles/115005450465-What-is-the-Service-Fee-		9/9/2021
		"Is my SweepStar insured?"	https://help.sweepsouth.com/hc/en-us/articles/360015379000-Is-my-SweepStar-insured-		9/9/2021
		"How to select a SweepStar- The numbers"	https://help.sweepsouth.com/hc/en-us/articles/360007629979-How-to-select-a-SweepStar-The-Numbers		9/9/2021
		"Become a SweepStar today"	https://campaign.sweepsouth.com/become-a-sweepstar/		9/9/2021
		"Are SweepStars trained?"	https://help.sweepsouth.com/hc/en-us/articles/115005446509-Are-SweepStars-trained-		9/9/2021
		"SweepStar support"	https://help.sweepsouth.com/hc/en-us/articles/360012628299-		9/9/2021

			SweepStar-Support		
		"SweepStar education"	https://help.sweepsouth.com/hc/en-us/articles/360012533500-SweepStar-Education		9/9/2021
		"My client has asked me to work for them privately"	https://help.sweepsouth.com/hc/en-us/articles/360001692239-My-client-has-asked-me-to-work-for-them-privately		9/9/2021
		"How can I earn more as a SweepStar"	https://help.sweepsouth.com/hc/en-us/articles/360001691979-How-can-I-earn-more-as-a-SweepStar-		9/9/2021
		"What % of the fee do SweepStars earn?"	https://help.sweepsouth.com/hc/en-us/articles/360008460719-What-of-the-fee-do-SweepStars-earn-		9/9/2021
		"How should I prepare for a booking?"	https://help.sweepsouth.com/hc/en-us/articles/360013976660-How-should-I-prepare-for-a-booking-		9/9/2021
		"Do SweepStars bring cleaning products?"	https://help.sweepsouth.com/hc/en-us/articles/115005450405-Do-SweepStars-bring-cleaning-products-		2/11/2021
		"Do SweepStars bring equipment?"	https://help.sweepsouth.com/hc/en-us/articles/115005450385-Do-SweepStars-bring-equipment-		2/11/2021
		"Domestic Worker Insurance"	https://insure.sweepsouth.com/sweepsouth		9/11/2021
Labour force statistics by the Government of South Africa between 2010-2020	Statistics South Africa	Quarterly Labour Force Survey: Quarter 4	http://www.statssa.gov.za/?cat=31	2010-2020	10/11/2021
Labour force statistics by the Government of South Africa	Statistics South Africa	Quarterly Labour Force Survey: Quarter 3	http://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/P0211/Presentation%20QLFS%20Q3_2021.pdf	2021	10/11/2021

E. Tables and figures:

Table 1: Overview of respondents' work history with SweepSouth

Respondents	Was a domestic worker before SweepSouth	Currently a SweepStar	Length of time at SweepSouth
Angela	Yes	Yes	1 year
Sarah	No, worked retail jobs	Yes	5 years
Patricia	Yes	Yes	6 months
Nosipho	Yes	No	1 year
Sindi	Yes	Yes	2 years
Buhle	Yes	No	less than a year
Rose	Yes	Yes	2 years
Linda	No, worked as a receptionist	Yes	1 year
Tatenda	No, was an informal trader	Yes	1 year
Lucia	No, was a Beauty Therapist	No	less than a year

*Respondents' names have been changed to maintain their anonymity

Table 2: Overview of demographic characteristics of workers

Respondents	Age	Nationality	Highest level of education
Angela	26	Zimbabwean	Matric/O-Level
Sarah	32	Zimbabwean	Diploma in Tourism and Hospitality
Patrica	33	Zimbabwean	Bachelor's Degree in Teaching
Nosipho	35	South African	Grade 11
Sindi	29	South African	Grade 11
Buhle	28	South African	Not stated
Rose	33	Zimbabwean	SA equivalent to Grade 11
Linda	33	Zimbabwean	Matric/O-Level
Tatenda	32	Zimbabwean	Matric/O-Level
Lucia	26	Zimbabwean	Diploma in Beauty Therapy

Table 3: Marital statuses and living arrangements

Respondents	Nationality	Marital status	Number of children
Angela	Zimbabwean	Married, lives with spouse	1, lives with child
Sarah	Zimbabwean	Married, lives with spouse	3, lives with children
Patrica	Zimbabwean	Unmarried	2, currently not living with children
Nosipho	South African	Unmarried	2, living arrangement not specified
Sindi	South African	Unmarried	1, currently not living with child
Buhle	South African	Unmarried	2, living arrangement not specified
Rose	Zimbabwean	Unmarried [Divorced]	2, currently not living with children
Linda	Zimbabwean	Unmarried	3, lives with children
Tatenda	Zimbabwean	Unmarried [Separated]	2, currently not living with children
Lucia	Zimbabwean	Unmarried	1, currently not living with child

Table 4: Respondents' current working arrangements and 'platform leakage'

Respondent	Currently a SweepStar	Current job(s)	Sourcing private clients from the platform 'Platform leakage'
Angela	Yes	SweepStar; private cleaning jobs with SweepSouth clients	Yes
Sarah	Yes	SweepStar only	No
Patricia	Yes	SweepStar; does regular cleaning job with former SweepSouth client; private cleaning jobs outside SweepSouth	Yes
Nosipho	No	Receptionist at former SweepSouth client's business	Yes
Sindi	Yes	SweepStar; regular cleaning work with a former SweepSouth client	Yes
Buhle	No	Regular cleaning work with a former SweepSouth client	Yes
Rose	Yes	SweepStar; private cleaning jobs with clients from SweepSouth and any other private cleaning jobs when available	Yes
Linda	Yes	SweepStar only; is searching for private cleaning work outside the platform	No
Tatenda	Yes	SweepStar; private cleaning jobs with SweepSouth clients; informal trading	Yes
Lucia	No	Former SweepStar but share SweepSouth platform with another SweepSouth; does regular cleaning work with former SweepSouth client and other private cleaning jobs when available	Yes

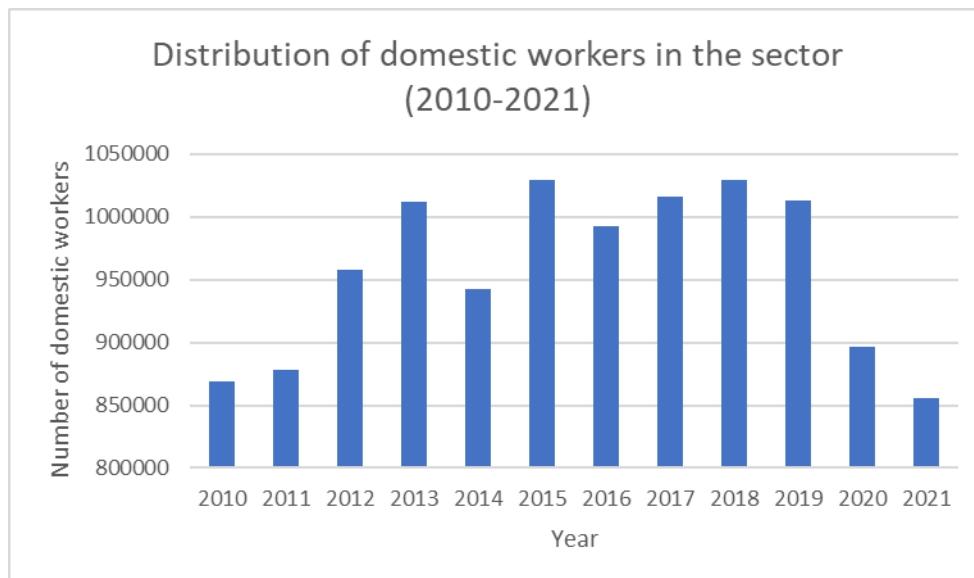
Table 5: Income comparisons between private work and SweepSouth

Respondent	Income from SweepSouth	Income from private clients	Platform leakage
Angela	Not specified	Not specified; charges above SweepSouth rates	Yes
Patricia	Average of R1664 per month	Average of R5800 per month	Yes
Nosipho	R28 per hour	R250 per booking	Yes
Sindi	R210 per booking	R300 per booking	Yes
Buhle	Average of R1000 per month	R250 per booking	Yes
Rose	R2000-R2200 per month	Average of R3600 per month	Yes
Tatenda	Not specified, is satisfied with her earnings	Not specified; charges above SweepSouth rates	Yes
Lucia	Not specified, says it was less than earnings from private work	Average of R2500 per month	Yes
Sarah	Not specified, posits that earnings are more than what she earned in previous retail job	N/A	No
Linda	Average of R2100-R3000 per month	N/A	No

Table 6: Domestic work employment before SweepSouth

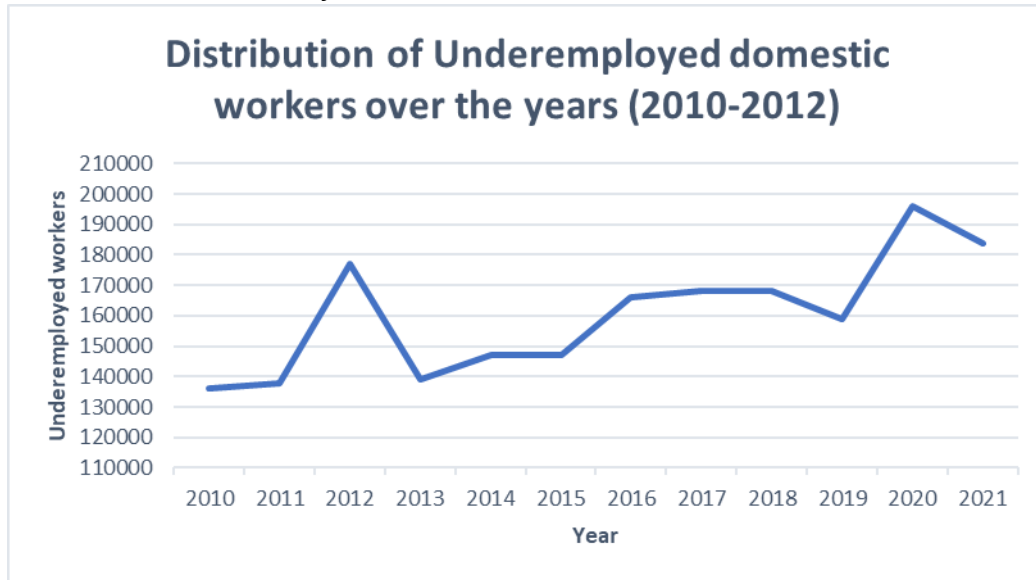
Respondent*	Type of domestic work employment before SweepSouth	Was it under contract?
Angela	Not specified	Not specified
Patricia	Live-in domestic work	No
Nosipho	Live out domestic work	Not specified
Sindi	Live-out, part-time domestic work	No
Buhle	Live-out, part-time domestic work	Not specified
Rose	Live-in domestic work	No

Figure 1: Number of domestic workers in South over the years 2010-2021



Source: Quarterly Labour Force Surveys (2010-2021), Statistics South Africa

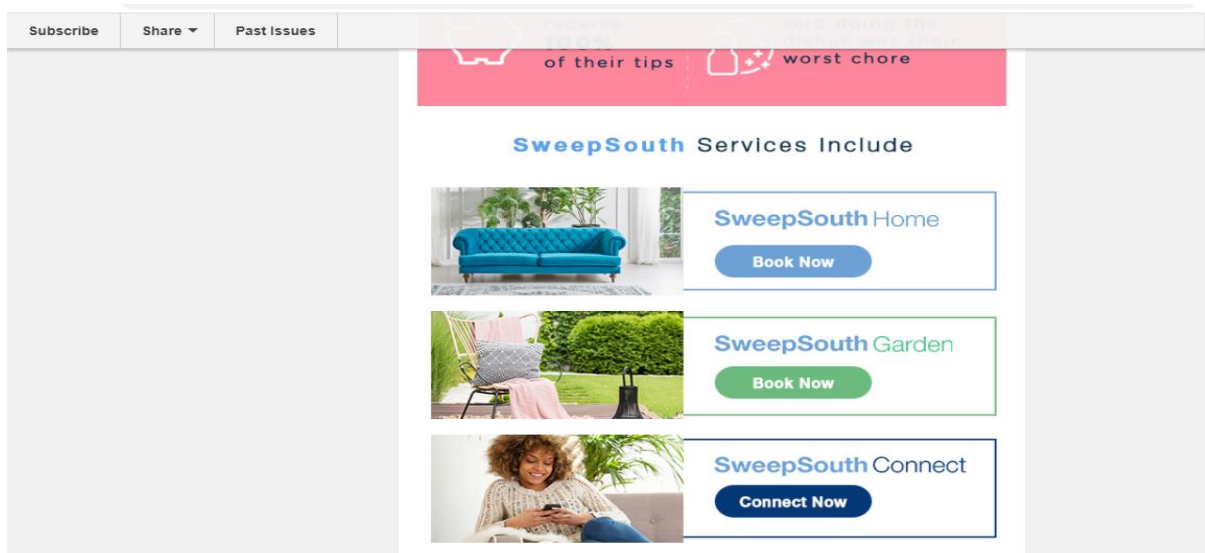
Figure 2: Levels of underemployment among domestic workers in the last 10 years



Source: Quarterly Labour Force Surveys (2010-2021), Statistics South Africa

F. IMAGES:

Image 1: SweepSouth’s marketing content is intended for middle-class householders



Source: SweepSouth email newsletter

Image 2: Current SweepSouth branches in South Africa and Kenya

The screenshot shows the SweepSouth website header with the logo, phone number (087-711-0573), and navigation links: CONNECT, INVITE & EARN, HELP, SIGN IN, and a BOOK A SERVICE button. Below the header is a blue banner with 'Download on the App Store' and 'GET IT ON Google Play' buttons. The main content area features the heading 'Find out if we're in your neighbourhood' and a map of South Africa with red dots indicating branch locations in Cape Town, Johannesburg, Centurion, Pretoria, and Durban. A text block explains that SweepSouth currently operates in the majority of suburbs within these areas. A 'LEARN MORE' button is located below the text.

087-711-0573 CONNECT INVITE & EARN HELP SIGN IN BOOK A SERVICE

Download on the App Store GET IT ON Google Play

Find out if we're in your neighbourhood

SweepSouth currently operates in the majority of suburbs within Cape Town, Johannesburg, Centurion, Pretoria and Durban

LEARN MORE

Source: <https://sweepsouth.com/>

Image 3: Benefits of becoming a SweepStar

The screenshot shows a SweepSouth campaign page with the heading 'Become a SweepStar Today'. The page features two smiling women in white SweepSouth uniforms. The text describes the benefits of becoming a SweepStar, such as choosing when and where to work. An 'Apply Below' button is prominently displayed.

Become a SweepStar Today

Apply to become a SweepStar on SweepSouth today. The SweepSouth platform connects you to thousands of clients near you. You get to choose when you want to work and where you want to work.

Apply Below

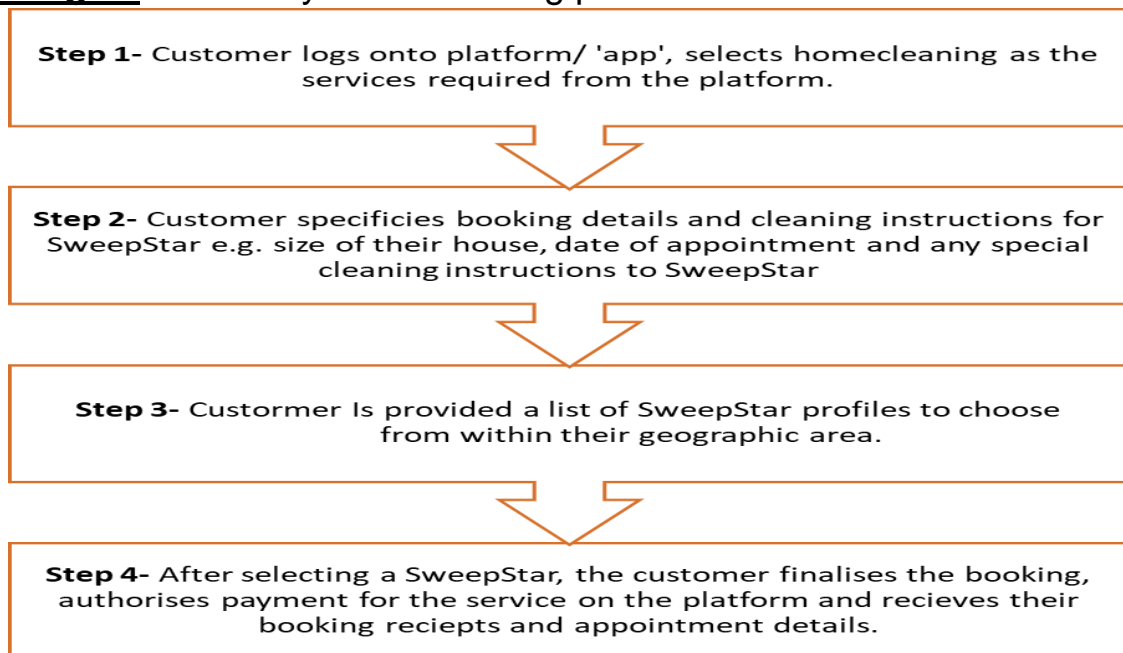
Source: <https://campaign.sweepsouth.com/become-a-sweepstar/>

Image 4: website booking platform

The screenshot shows the SweepSouth website booking interface. At the top left is the SweepSouth logo. In the top center, there are three numbered steps: 1, 2, and 3, with step 1 being the active one. At the top right is a 'SIGN IN' link. The main content area is divided into two columns. The left column is titled 'Extras' and contains a section 'Select your extra tasks below' with six icons: Laundry & Ironing, Inside Fridge, Inside Oven, Inside Cabinets, Interior Windows, and Interior Walls. Below this is a 'How Often' section with a note 'Regular cleaning, save up to 28%' and two buttons: 'ONE TIME' and 'REGULAR'. There are also fields for 'Select Day' (Fri, 10 Sep) and 'Select Time' (08:30). At the bottom of the left column is a 'Booking Insurance' section with a link 'What is this?'. The right column shows booking details: '3 Hours', 'When: Fri, 10 Sep @ 08:30', 'Where: Milnerton, Cape Town 7435', and 'Rooms: 1 Bedroom, 1 Bathroom'. Below this is a 'Service Fee' of R 35.00 and 'Insurance' of R 19.00 with a 'Remove' option. There is a 'VOUCHER CODE' input field and an 'APPLY' button. The 'Total' is R 214.00. At the bottom of the right column is a pink button that says 'Find SweepStar >'.

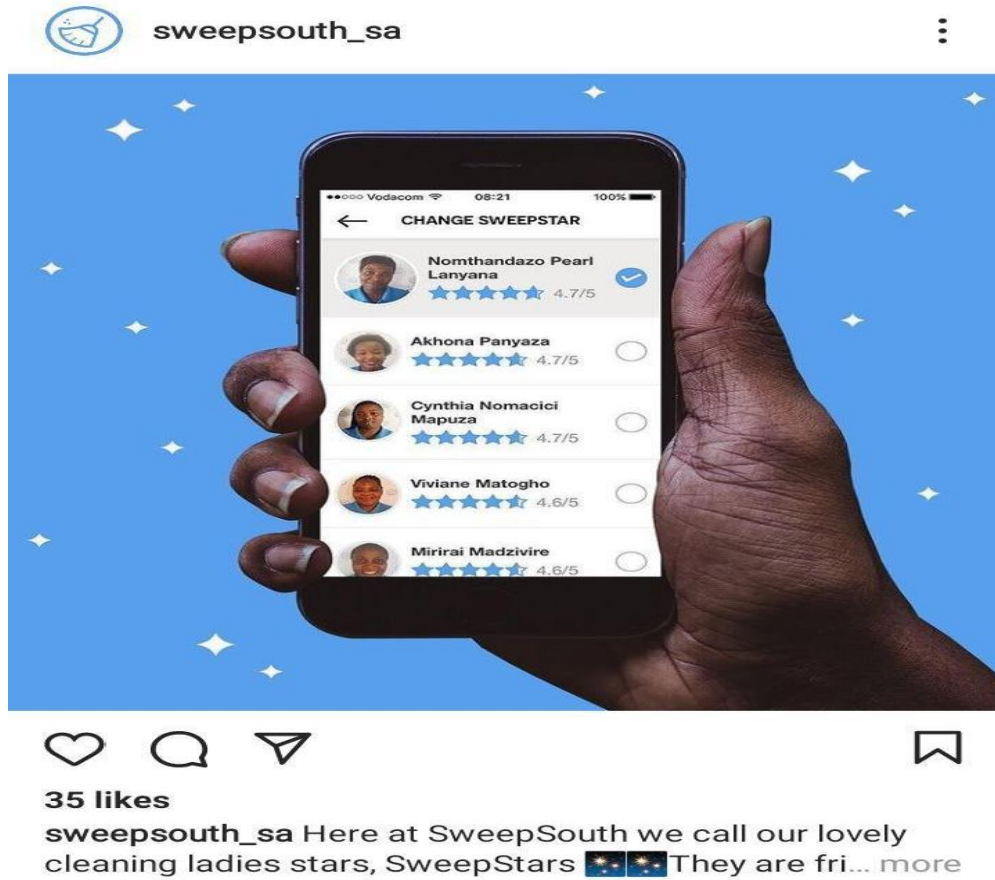
Source: <https://sweepsouth.com/book/step1?indoor=true>

Image 5: Summary of the booking process



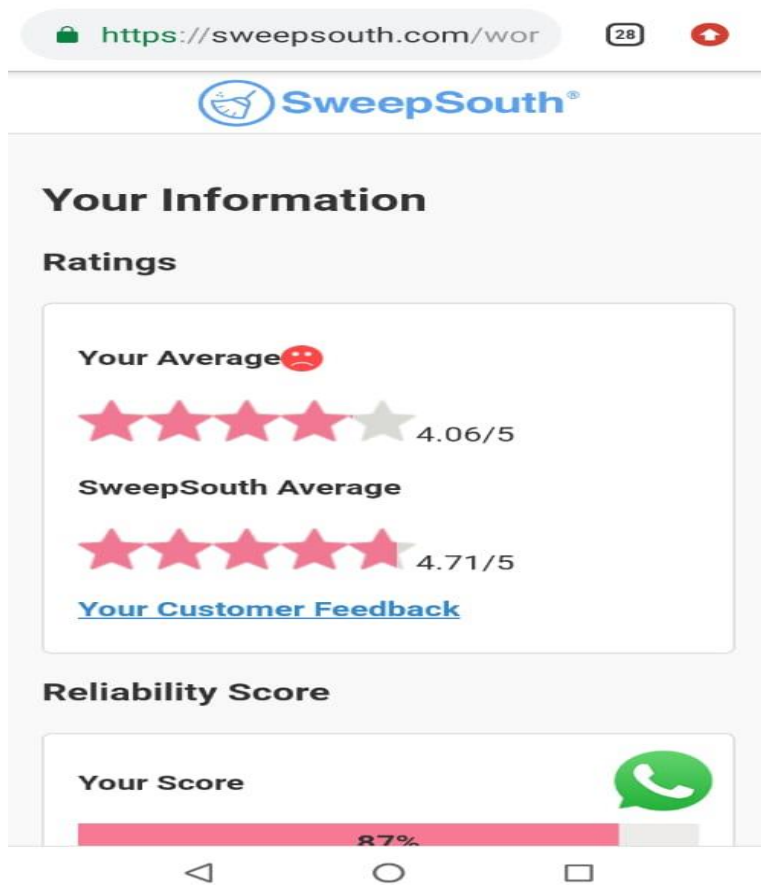
Source: Own summary

Image 6: Clients' view of SweepStars' profile



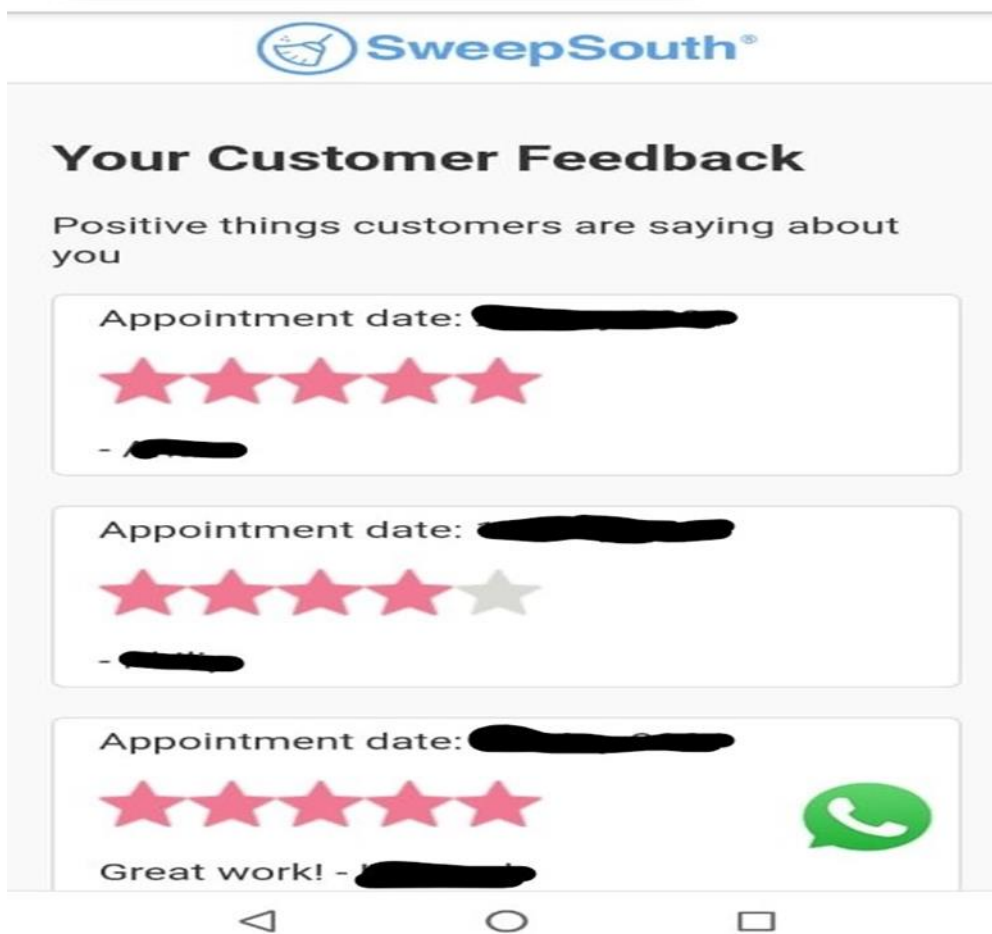
Source: https://www.instagram.com/p/Bf-ilbDBDob/?utm_medium=copy_link

Image 7: 'Red-face' and SweepScore on SweepStars' profile



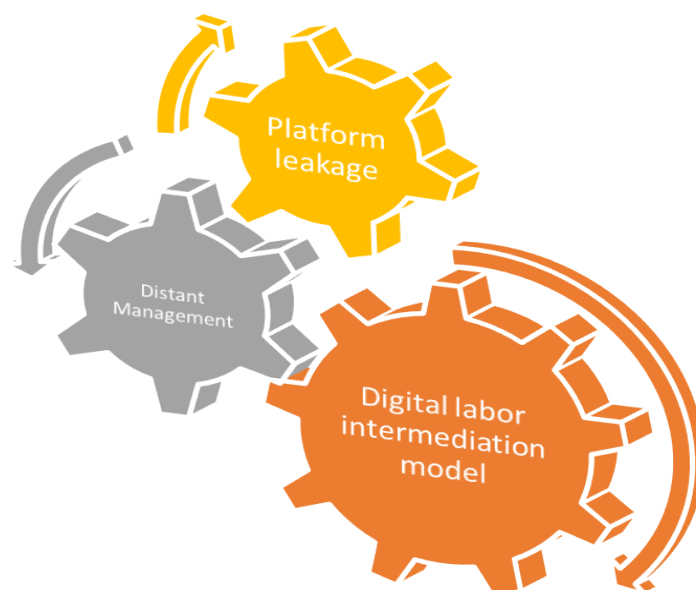
**Retrieved from study's participants*

Image 8: Ratings from clients



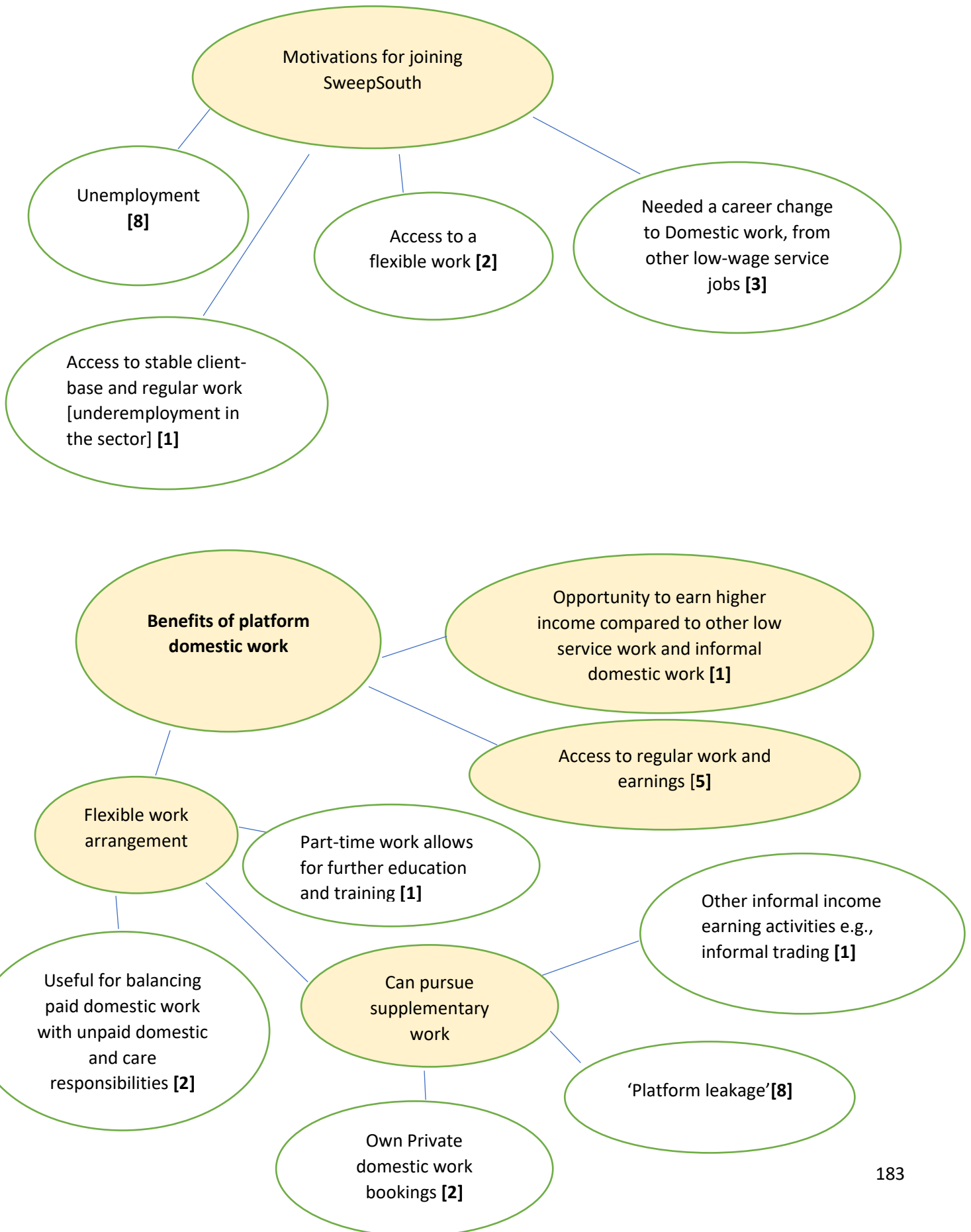
*Retrieved from study's participants

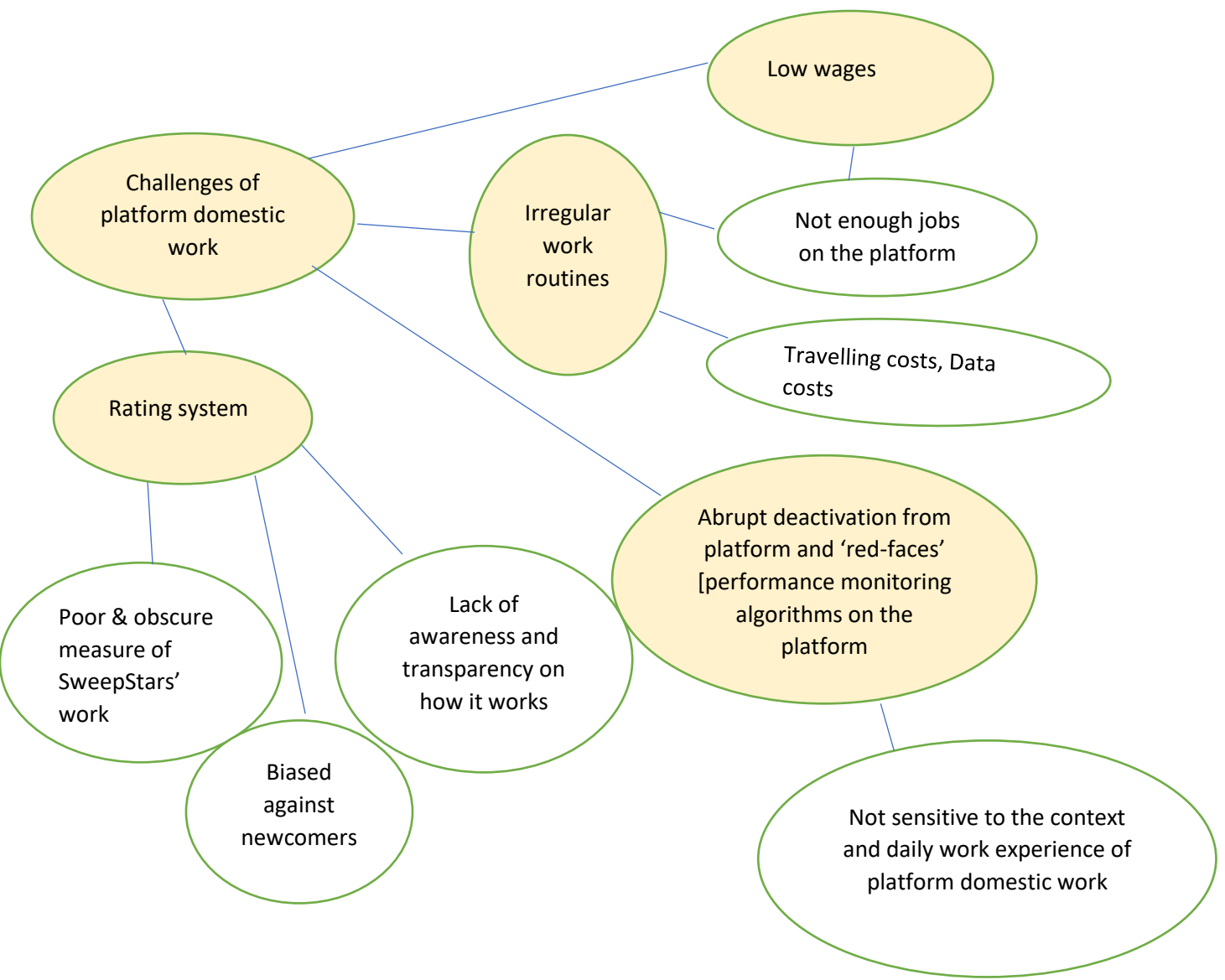
Image 9: Key features of the platform domestic work model



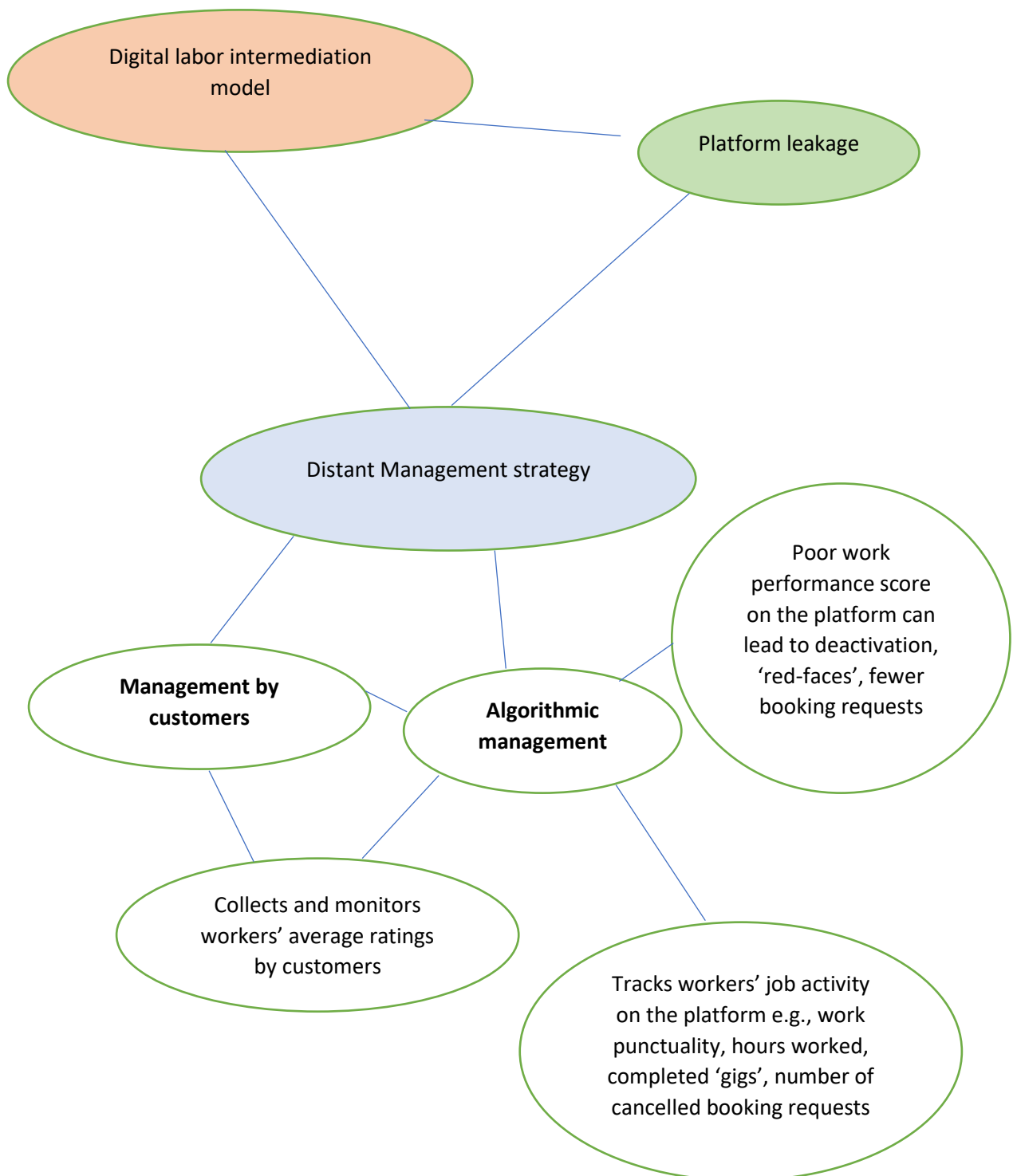
G. Coding Framework:

1. Basic themes and organising themes:





2. Global themes and main theoretical propositions



Extract of transcript coding for 'Buhle'

Nodes\\Worker Interviews\\SweepStar Work Routines and Organization\\Rewards and Support from SweepSouth\\Income recieved from SweepSouth

No	0,0344	1
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1 TWN 2021/10/06 18:21

Researcher: I mean like, the money you are getting from Sweep South, has it changed or is it the same as you started?

Interviewee: I'm no longer there now. I'm no longer there. But how much I got used to depend on, like what I've said to you, you push yourself. It's possible that you would get 3 hour shifts the whole week and we get paid weekly, right? When you're getting 3 hour shifts, then clearly you're only going to get R300 and something, it won't even reach R500 and something because you've been getting R75s the whole week, so you won't get a lot of money... it won't even reach R1000. And you still need to take transport money from that too, you understand?

Nodes\\Worker Interviews\\SweepStar Work Routines and Organization\\'Supplementary Work'- Combining gig work with traditional Char work

No	0,0607	2
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1 TWN 2021/10/06 00:48

Researcher: So, when did you start being a domestic worker?

Interviewee: I started in 2016. I started in 2016 but then it wasn't even for a year because I ended up stopping, I don't want to lie, I ended up stopping. But then, it was because I was already working, so you see ...

2 TWN 2021/10/06 16:49

But I couldn't keep up with it because it's too much, because you need to travel. Today you're going to Cape Town, tomorrow you're going to this place, to Waterfront and maybe tomorrow it's Wednesday you're in Rondebosch; you don't work in one place because we use an app there, so you need to make sure that before 7 you're connected to the app. Let's say there's a problematic network connection, you see? Maybe it's an issue with your phone, perhaps you don't have data, you still need to hurry because you are not told about jobs by the office like, "No, there's a job available now," or what-what. You need to look for it yourself on the phone. So on your phone, you could get a place that is far, that will cost you in terms of transport. Now let's say you got 3 hours, you will be working for R75, but you have spent over R70 because maybe you don't just use one taxi to get there, you understand?

Nodes\\Worker Interviews\\SweepStar Work Routines and Organization\\'Supplementary Work'- Combining gig work with traditional Char work\\Income comparisons of gig work and private work

No	0,0397	1
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1 TWN 2021/10/06 18:13

Researcher: And then in private arrangements, how do you set the price?

Interviewee: Uhm it depends, let's say on the size of the house or sometimes on things like ironing, things like that you see? So, R300 to R350 or R250 sometimes, but nothing less than 250 to 350. So it can maybe go according how the person is, if they are ok with spending money, you see?

Researcher: Yes, so who sets the price? Is it you the worker or the client who suggests that, 'Ok, personally, I can afford this much?'

Interviewee: Sometimes it's ... it's ... what can I say? It depends on your agreement; maybe they will ask how much you will want and then you'll maybe say R300, then they say no maybe it's too much or they say it's alright or 'I will add R50 on top of that, it's fine.' You see?

H. Fieldnotes

Sampling and recruiting SweepStars

-Angela was the first respondent to be contacted and interviewed for this study. After our initial interview, she put me in touch with 5 other SweepStars that she was in contact with. From these, I managed to secure 3 more participants, Sarah, Patricia, and Rose with relative ease.

- After these successful interviews, I began experiencing difficulties recruiting more participants and organising interview session times. I was able to make contact through a friend with one SweepStar, who confirmed that she was willing but was unable to find time to have a sit-down with me. I also felt that some of the potential participants that had been recommended to me by Angela and Patricia were wary about my intentions. This was mainly due to my initial decision early on in my fieldwork to have interviewees share their SweepSouth profile so I could confirm that they were indeed engaged as platform domestic workers with SweepSouth. One potential participant was apprehensive about this during my initial contact with her; she demanded to know why it was necessary and decided to not engage further. So I ended up abandoning this requirement. To ensure that those recruited were indeed SweepStars or former SweepStars, I relied on my interviewees to recommend credible candidates, compared respondents' interview transcripts and cross-checked interview inputs with material from SweepSouth website.

Lack of trust from potential participants may have also been because I was using WhatsApp chat to make my initial contact with potential respondents, so I decided to use direct telephone calls to increase rapport and build familiarity with participants. I began to use direct phone-calls in my initial contacts with recommended informants where I would fully explain who I am, what my research was about, consent forms and any other related details of the study relevant for them to know. This worked well because it allowed me to reassure potential informants about the credibility of my study and the ways in which their input will be used.

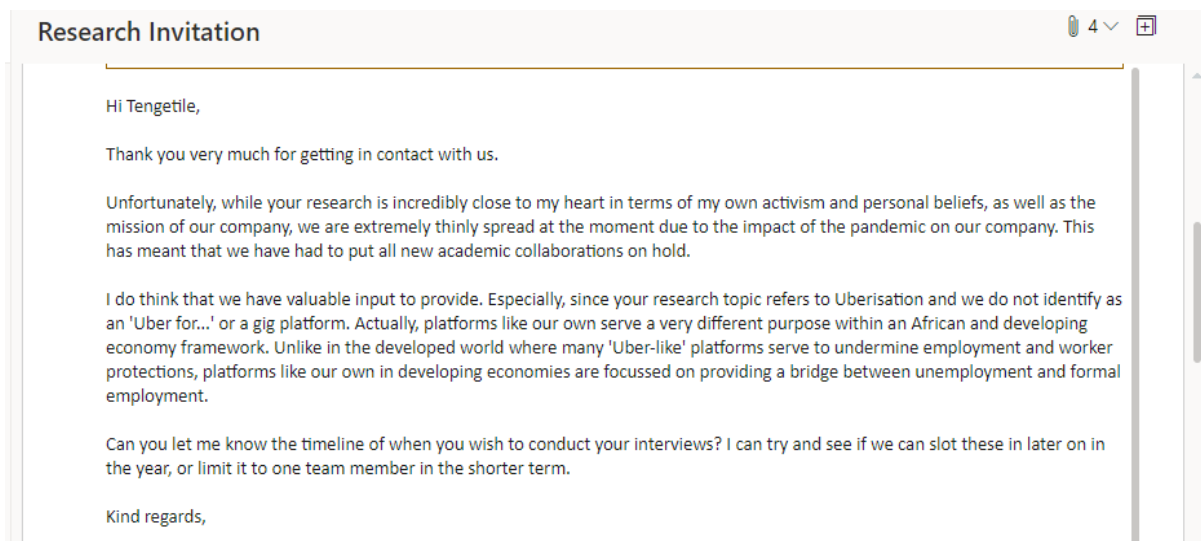
Request for interview with SweepSouth:

Multiple interview requests were made with SweepSouth. These were unsuccessful. The following timeline summarises the trajectory of these efforts.

14 May 2021- I visited their Cape Town office to introduce myself, establish my credibility as a student and researcher, and do a formal in-person request for an interview with the company. Upon arrival, I was informed that the relevant personnel to contact for my request were working remotely. I was advised to send an email research invitation to the company's support team (support@sweepsouth.com) who would direct the request to the relevant authorities. I drafted this email the same day and awaited response.

26 May 2021- I received an email response to my interview request from a SweepSouth official, who posited that the company had cut back on research collaborations due to COVID disruptions on the company. They enquired about my

research timeline to see if interviews with company staff could be arranged. Below is a screenshot of this email:



Email response to interview request by SweepSouth

I immediately responded and outlined that I was open to their scheduling convenience, anytime between June and August. However, in the end, I was unable to successfully set up a meeting with the company.

Interviews

1st pilot interview- 'Angela':

-24 March 2021: I met Angela through a SweepSouth booking. When she arrived at my place, I disclosed my interest in her work experience as a platform domestic worker and if she would be interested in sharing it with me formally in an interview; she agreed.

-Angela was keen on sharing her experiences with me but setting up an interview date with her was challenging. I found that finding enough time for an interview session was difficult because of her tight work schedule, both at SweepSouth and with her own private domestic cleaning jobs. We had to reschedule our interview date two times.

-We eventually agreed to do our first interview on the 31st of March. The interview was done in the evening because the participant could not find time during the day. Firstly, the interview was much shorter than anticipated and I attributed this to two main issues at this stage. Firstly, I noticed that my interview guide would be more effective if it had more structured questions rather than my initial unstructured question format. Reducing the amount of academic jargon in my questioning during the interview was also challenging and may have hindered my ability to convey my questions to the participant in an accessible manner. I thereby added these two

changes to my interview guide and did a first follow up interview with Angela to cover some of the questions that were missed and not adequately conveyed in our initial session.

2nd pilot interview- Sarah

-The second pilot interview with Angela went well, having made changes to the structuring of questions in the interview guide, the conversation with her was much more productive. The structured question guide allowed me to identify the key questions to be asked but the interview itself was very unstructured; it was more of a 'free-flow' style of conversation, and I would occasionally refer to the key questions for guidance and to direct the discussion.

-Time constraints were also a factor in the setting up of the interview session with Angela.

Further SweepStar interviews:

-The interviews for this study did produce insights relevant to the study's objectives and research questions. The only problematic issue was depth in the discussions. Apart from Sarah, all the telephonic interviews done for this study were shorter than expected. In most cases, the discussions were not as in-depth as I wanted them to be because the inability to read physical cues made it quite difficult to prompt for more in-depth responses. There was hence a great need to establish good rapport and create a relaxed environment as best as I could for participants given that they had never met me and never got the chance to do so even after the interviews. So I invested my efforts towards establishing rapport (e.g. using humour, elaborating more on my research objectives and experiences therein) with respondents. I also undertook follow-up interviews with willing and available respondents.

-The audio quality of interviews in some instances was poor (poor cellular reception, voice mummings, or background noise and disturbances). However, these were minor instances and therefore did not affect the overall quality of the telephone interviews in any significant way.

Expert interview- Union organiser for SADSAWU:

08 June 2021- A 38-minute interview was conducted with Gloria Kente, an organiser in the Western Cape for the South African Domestic and Service Allied Workers Union (SADSAWU). SADSAWU is one of the main national unions representing domestic workers in South Africa.

The interview was done in person, at the local SADSAWU office in Community House, Salt River, Cape Town. The main objective for this interview was to get the union's perspective on platform domestic work.

Transcription and Translation of interviews.

-All recorded telephone interviews in this study were transcribed in 2 stages under the guide of Jenks (2018). The first stage was 'open-transcribing' where all aspects of each interview conversation were transcribed. These were unedited speech/sentences in the interviews.

The second stage was a more 'closed transcribing' and involved the editing of speech and grammar in the transcript to allow for readability. However, relevant speech marks and verbal cues were included in some instances where it was deemed relevant to do so. Hence, the final interview transcripts have included in them key conversational aspects such as laughs, pauses, exclamations and some vernacular phrases.

Translation:

-I also experienced some minor difficulty in interviewing some of the isiXhosa speaking SweepStars (mainly 'Buhle' and Sindi') because, while I do have some basic understanding of isiXhosa, I am not fluent in the language.

-These interviews were hence done in both English and IsiXhosa. Analysis was done on English translated transcripts. Translating and transcription of these interviews outsourced to a fellow UCT postgraduate student in the Gender Studies department, Asemahle Ngandi. She performed open transcription and translation of the interviews. Once this process was completed, I proceeded to do a 'closed transcription' of the interviews whereby I edited the interviews to allow for easy readability and coherence. This second step was crucial because some of the translations to English would remove context to what the respondents were saying so a careful editing of the transcripts was crucial. Editing was guided by the audio recordings of the interviews and was done in consultation with Asemahle's translation notes. The extract below is an abstract of Asemahle's transcription and translation:

I: Oh uGrade 11? Ok. You dropped out and then wagena kwiDomestic work?
I: Oh grade 11? Ok. You dropped out and then you got into domestic work?

P5: Ewe, sisi.
P5: Yes, sisi.

I: Ok and then Sweep South yona? How did you find out about iSweep South?
I: Ok and then Sweep South? How did you find out about Sweep South?

P5: iSweep South? Andivazi noba ... I think ... ndivibone phi na? I think ndavibona kuFacebok. Ukhubone lanto uman'ubona kuFacebook, lanto kumane kuvela izinto, ne? So ndabona pha. Ndabe sendisiva kengoku kuncokolwa etaxini ngabanye oosisi, nam ke xa ndifika endlini ndayiTry(a).

P5: Sweep South? I don't even know ... I think ... where did I see it, again? I think I saw it on Facebook. You know how you always see on Facebook, that thing of constantly having things come up, right? So that's where I saw it. Soon after that, I heard conversations in the taxi from these other ladies, so then when I got home, I also tried it.

I: Mhm.
I: Mhm.

³ A phrase that means "so/but/ok then". Can appear as "so/but/ok ... then". In Xhosa, you can use the phrase multiple times in a sentence, but in translation into English it doesn't make grammatical sense.

Analysis and write-up

-Analysis was done using the software NVivo and Excel spreadsheet

-Workers were giving their own perspectives of the platform of domestic work; how they experience it, and their understandings of how it works. These insights were compared against SweepSouth's own data about their business operations and their approach to the organisation of domestic work

-Analysis began during the interview phase up to the write up of the final report.