Abstract
This paper explores the driving force behind the growth of housecleaning service companies in South Africa. One of the characteristics of outsourced housecleaning service companies is the transformation of a personal maternalistic employment relationship into a triangular employment relationship between manager, domestic worker (former domestic servant/maid) and client (former master/madam/employer). The triangular employment relationship creates distance between clients and domestic workers as domestic workers are under the authority and supervision of a third person (the manager/owner of the housecleaning service company). While there have been many studies focusing on domestic work, few studies have documented the driving force behind this transition from private to outsourced housecleaning services. This study aims to fill this void by analysing clients’ and domestic workers’ perspectives on two housecleaning service companies in the Stellenbosch area. Two case studies were chosen in the Stellenbosch area which reflect the general trend in most housecleaning service companies in South Africa in terms of services, size and objectives. Data were collected by means of semi-structured interviews with the focus on providing a dual perspective from both clients and domestic workers on their perceptions of the growth of housecleaning service companies in South Africa.

Key words: domestic work, housecleaning service companies, outsourcing, employment relationship

1 Background to domestic work in South Africa
The employment of domestic workers is an integral feature of South African life. Given the informality of the domestic work sector, it is roughly estimated that between one and one-and-a-half million people in South Africa are domestic workers, although this number is merely a conjecture. Furthermore, the majority of domestic workers in South Africa are African women (Fish 2006:108). Domestic work includes cleaning up the dirt of others, sweeping floors, vacuum cleaning, washing dishes and cupboards and polishing furniture, laundering dirty clothes, preparing meals for employers, caring for the elderly, and for employers’ children and pets (Srinivas 1995:271; Anderson 2000:15). Traditionally, paid domestic work is recognised as part of the informal sector and not regarded as an occupation or even as formal employment; it has been

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associated with extraordinary servility, the absence of service benefits or opportunities for promotion and little job security (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001:x; Meagher 2002:53; Romero 1988:321). In addition, the domestic sector has typically fallen outside the confines of labour law, and the result has been that unfair dismissals, the non-regulation of minimum wages and working hours, the absence of benefits and in some cases verbal, sexual and physical abuse have become a typical feature (Ngidi 2004:22; Smith 1982:167).

In view of these working conditions, the post-Apartheid state implemented regulations to protect domestic workers from exploitation and abuse. The state introduced a national minimum wage, state-legislated annual increases, employment contracts between worker and employer and unemployment insurance benefits (UIF) and also made it possible for workers to belong to trade unions (Aly 2008:2). The effect of these regulations on the employment of domestic workers appears unclear as not much has been written on this topic in South Africa. What is evident, though, is that there has been a growth in housecleaning service companies, which may be the result of the enforcement of these new labour regulations.

Housecleaning service companies are causing a revolution in domestic work, because this form of enterprise changes the domestic work market from a private domain between madam and maid to part of the service sector, where outsourced housecleaning companies deliver services to clients (Devetter & Rousseau 2009:312). Mendez (1998:118) calls this the commodification of domestic service, while Ehrenreich (2000:64) refers to it as “a fully capitalist-style workplace”. For example, in the United States of America, commercial housecleaning service companies and agencies control almost 30 percent of paid domestic service (Ehrenreich 2000:64). Similarly, in France, the demand for domestic services has almost doubled from 190 000 in 1990 to 350 000 in 2005, due to the growth of housecleaning service companies and agencies (Devetter & Rousseau 2009:298). Actual figures for housecleaning service companies in South Africa could not be found, but housecleaning service companies are visibly a growing trend across the country.

A key characteristic of housecleaning service companies is the transformation of the standardised employment relationship between maid and madam into triangular and contractual employment relations between the manager (now the employer), domestic worker (former domestic servant/maid) and client (former master/madam/employer). The standardised employment relationship was typically paternalistic in nature. Briefly, the term paternalism was first coined by Rollins (1985), who argued that paternalism is a more suitable term to use than paternalism to describe the unequal relationship between maid and madam. The term “paternalism” is similar to paternalism, but not identical. Rollins (1985:179) argued that paternalism is part of the patriarchal authority, which extended from the head of the household to leaders of the church. Paternalism is one aspect of a “political-economic-ideological power base” (Rollins 1985:179), which proposes patriarchal protection in exchange for work, respect and reliability from workers (Anderson 2000:145). However, women’s sympathetic, interfamilial role of encouragement, kindness, caring and emotional involvement with maids refers to maternalism and it remains the central characteristic in the unequal employment relationship between madams and maids (Rollins 1985: 179,187; King 2007:12).

In this regard, Cock (1980:90) gives various accounts of maids’ perspectives on the maternalistic employment relationship. One maid said that “she (the white madam) thinks I am not fully grown. She treats me like a baby”, while another said that “she looks down on me and does not see me as a woman” (Cock 1980:90). Madams also
indicated in Cock’s (1980:134) study that “maids think I’m her mother”. For example, maids often share information about contraceptives and sex with maids just as they do with their daughters (Makosana 1989:118). Madams’ children often call maids by their name, although the maids may be almost the same age as their mother, which emphasises that maids are perceived as being on the same level as children (Makosana 1989:97).

In contrast to a standardised employment relationship, which is steeped in exploitative maternalistic motives on the part of both maid and madam, a triangular relationship arises when “employees of an enterprise (the service provider) perform work for a third party (the user enterprise or client) to whom their employer provides labour or services” (Theron 2005:618-619). This hierarchical, triangular employment relationship between employer, domestic employee and client is based on particular contractual requirements and limits the exploitation of domestic employees (Glenn 1992:23). One consequence of a triangular employment relationship is that clients (former madams/employers) are no longer obliged to support their domestic workers financially, give their second-hand clothes and used household appliances to their domestic workers and their families, or supply them with Christmas or birthday gifts (Ehrenreich 2000:65). It appears that paternalism is limited between client and domestic worker in housecleaning service companies.

The nature and size of housecleaning service companies in South Africa varies considerably; some are nationwide franchises or area-based franchises, while others are one-women owned cleaning businesses. Housecleaning service companies in South Africa offer clients once-off, weekly or bi-weekly professional cleaning services by trained and specialised domestic workers. Services include a range of tasks such as ironing, general cleaning of bathrooms, kitchens, bedrooms, windows and floors, furniture, blinds and walls and also vacuuming, dusting, polishing and mopping. Domestic workers are trained in basic cleaning, which consists of how to wash dishes, how to clean a bathroom thoroughly, and how to use a vacuum cleaner and cleaning products. Their training also covers general issues such as cross-cultural communication skills and personal hygiene. They are shown how to do laundry, use a washing machine and iron clothes. In other words, housecleaning service companies change what society considers to be unskilled, low-status work into a skilled and professional service even though in essence the work performed stays the same (Jackie’s Cleaning Services 2009; Daisy Nteta Cleaning Services cc, Broomstix: For all your cleaning needs).

Housecleaning service companies provide clients with a team, which generally consists of three to five “uniformed” domestic workers, depending on the size of the house and the tasks performed. Hence, the team of domestic workers takes over the various tasks of the traditional domestic servant/maid. Unlike in the maid-madam employment relationship, the manager or team leader has the authority to speak to the client about the specific service that needs to be delivered (Ehrenreich 2000:64).

There are generally two contracts. A commercial contract is signed between the service provider (in this case the owner or manager of the housecleaning service company) and the user enterprise or client. The other contract is between the employee (domestic worker) and the service provider (owner or manager of the housecleaning service company). The employment contract sets out the terms and conditions of employment and working conditions such as wages, benefits, working hours and holidays (Vosko 1997:66).

From the perspective of the client, housecleaning service companies offer different types of employment contract. Some housecleaning service companies offer clients
“two contract options that don’t tie them down for lengthy periods” (Maids on Wheels 2008). Generally, employment contracts are flexible, as clients need not pay for services if they go away for a period of time (Broomstix: For all your cleaning needs).

Contracts ensure that both domestic workers and clients know what is expected in terms of services and workload. For example, employment contracts stipulate that domestic workers at a specific housecleaning service company are responsible for carrying out certain tasks such as the cleaning of bathrooms, while they are not supposed to clean swimming pools or wash pets. Employment contracts therefore protect domestic workers in terms of workload and tasks. Contracts also ensure that clients have no direct responsibility for paying the domestic workers and domestic workers' physical, financial and emotional problems are not the concern of clients, but the company. Furthermore, if there is a complaint by either the clients or the domestic workers, it is addressed through the owner of the company (Ehrenreich 2000:64).

In terms of service delivery, housecleaning service companies guarantee quality domestic service by “targeting specific types of client needs” (Mendez 1998:118), by using special equipment (Devetter & Rousseau 2009:306; Meagher 1997:22; Ehrenreich 2000:67). Mendez (1998:120) argues that “professionalism is a big part of the housecleaning service companies’ sales pitch”. Furthermore, domestic workers are trained to pay special attention to detail, such as to fluff-up pillows (Meagher 1997:14) and to leave all shampoo bottles and jam jars with their labels facing outwards (Ehrenreich 2000:67). Service delivery is also speedy and efficient, because domestic workers are trained to use the housecleaning service company’s cleaning techniques, which are fast and effective (Mendez 1998:121). Ehrenreich (2000:66) reports that speedy domestic service is the result of the division of tasks among the team of domestic workers. For example, one domestic worker washes the dishes and cleans the kitchen, another one cleans the bedrooms and the third cleans the bathrooms. Each of these rooms would be cleaned from the left to the right and from the top to the bottom (Ehrenreich 2000:66). This illustrates the standardisation of the cleaning methods used in housecleaning service companies.

Thus, an obvious question is whether this new type of employment relationship is preferred by clients and domestic workers, what the driving force behind this shift or transformation in South Africa is and whether housecleaning service companies have changed domestic work for the better.

A literature review on this subject indicates that this is a relatively under-researched area in South Africa. Most studies of domestic work in South Africa focus on the exploitation of domestic workers in the traditional maid-madam employment relationship and not on reasons why domestic workers and/or clients prefer housecleaning service companies as opposed to the traditional personalistic employment relations. Previous research on this specific issue could not be found in the literature and this study hopes to fill this gap in a small way.

2 Research problem and objectives
The key research question is: “What are domestic workers’ and clients’ perceptions on housecleaning service companies in South Africa?” Since the growth of housecleaning service companies in South Africa is under-researched at present, this article seeks to explore domestic workers’ and clients of housecleaning service companies’ perceptions of housecleaning services in terms of the employment relationship, working conditions and service benefits.
3 Methodology

Two case studies were selected for this study to determine why housecleaning service companies are preferred by some clients (former employers) and how domestic workers experience working for housecleaning service companies. The cases selected for this study are two different housecleaning service companies in the Stellenbosch area which are typical of other housecleaning service companies found in South Africa in terms of the employment relationship between managers, clients and domestic workers. The first selected housecleaning service company operates in Stellenbosch, employs eighteen black female workers and has a predominately white middle-class clientele of 475 a month. The other one operates in Somerset West, employs thirty-nine workers, made up of black and coloured women and one coloured man, and has a predominately white middle-class clientele of 195.

These two cases were selected on the basis of the following criteria: The racial profile of these two cases is different. The one housecleaning service company employs only African Xhosa-speaking women, while the other one employs a majority of Afrikaans-speaking coloured women, a few Afrikaans-speaking African women and one male Afrikaans-speaking coloured man. The reason why housecleaning service companies and not char services were chosen is that in the former, domestic workers work in teams.

In terms of similarity, both housecleaning service companies offer services in Stellenbosch in similar neighbourhoods. Therefore, the class, race and status of clients of both housecleaning service companies are similar. Both housecleaning service companies also deliver similar services. Other housecleaning service companies in Stellenbosch were not selected because they specialise in different services such as care work or cleaning of construction sites.

3.1 Interviews

Formal face-to-face interviews were conducted with clients and domestic workers of the two selected housecleaning service companies. In both cases, managers provided a list of all their clients and domestic workers. From that list, ten clients and eight domestic workers from each housecleaning service company were randomly chosen.

In the semi-structured interviews with clients and domestic workers, four broad themes were discussed. The first theme focused on why they make use of and work for housecleaning service companies. This gave the researcher useful insights as various themes emerged. Secondly, the interview focused on the employment relationship between clients and domestic workers. Thirdly, working conditions were discussed, such as specialisation of services, standard of cleaning, time management and bonuses for domestic workers. Lastly, the main benefits of housecleaning service companies for both clients and domestic workers were discussed.

3.2 Ethical considerations

Access to clients posed some problems. Interviews took place in their homes and here the researcher was conscious of two problems. The idea of being a stranger in someone’s home caused both researcher and respondent to be somewhat nervous and this may have had an effect on the interviews as some clients were reluctant to express themselves openly. Some interviews took place while domestic workers from the company were engaged in cleaning the clients’ homes. It is difficult to determine whether this had any effect on their responses.
Approaching domestic workers also gave rise to difficulties. The identity of the researcher, who is a white male, could have had a profound impact on domestic workers’ perception of the type of questions asked and the aim of the study. The language barrier also had implications regarding how well domestic workers understood questions because many of them have difficulty in understanding English or Afrikaans, as their first language is Xhosa. This may have had an impact on the richness of the data.

3.3 Challenges and limitations

In the one housecleaning service company, the main challenge was language, as many domestic workers’ first language is Xhosa and they sometimes found it difficult to understand English. Many questions had to be rephrased, but this did not appear to be a major problem, although admittedly domestic workers were not able to express themselves effectively during interviews. Because of financial and time constraints a translator was not used, and if one had been used, some domestic workers would have been better able to explain their perceptions of working for housecleaning service companies.

Another challenge was the time when interviews with domestic workers were scheduled. Most interviews took place between 06:45 and 07:30, when domestic workers were preparing for their daily tasks. As a result, some of the interviews were rushed and this allowed little time for in-depth probing.

The next challenge involved interviewing clients, especially older clients who spent lengthy periods discussing personal details about their families. This meant that some interviews had to be cut short and not all aspects could be discussed in detail.

Lastly, the nature of this sector makes it difficult to draw a representative sample, as the client population is not homogeneous. There are too many factors such as income level, occupation, age, race and gender that are involved in identifying, for example, the clients who have changed from employing full-time domestic workers to utilising housecleaning service companies. Thus, it was decided with the help of managers to use purposive sampling to ensure a spread of age and other profiles such as family size, income level and years of employing housecleaning service companies, to name a few. This variation is essential to understand whether selected clients and domestic workers make use of and work for housecleaning service companies. Since only twenty clients were interviewed, the results cannot be generalised. Although this is a limitation, the aim of this study was not to generalise results, but to understand why clients and domestic workers make use of and work for housecleaning service companies. These findings could be useful for the purposes of comparative studies in this field.

4 Theoretical background

In recent years, there has been a growth in externalised forms of domestic work, in the form of outsourced housecleaning service companies, as there are more benefits linked to these for clients (former masters/madams) and domestic workers (former domestic servants/maids). For clients, externalisation means access to expertise, as domestic workers are trained to deliver professional services, the flexibility and quality of service is improved and there is a reduction in costs as a result of competition. For domestic workers, externalisation means that they gain expertise in their field as they receive training, which again improves skills (Burnes & Anastasiadis 2003:357; Kremic, Tukel & Rom 2006:467).
From a manager’s (now the employer’s) perspective, one sees a classic application of the principles of scientific management. The first principle of scientific management is to list the traditional knowledge areas and skills of workers and classify and tabulate them according to a set of rules and regulations. For example, where domestic workers previously cleaned the entire family home, tasks are now divided among teams. This enables managers to enforce speedier cleaning methods, as “time is no longer passed, but spent” (Webster, Buhlungu & Bezuidenhout 2003:12). The second principle is the removal of any need to think while executing tasks. For example, domestic workers are trained to clean rooms in a standardised, professional manner by starting from the top and cleaning to the bottom. The work is repetitive and boring as the manager plans the execution of the tasks. The third principle is the knowledge required to control every step of the work process. Domestic workers receive detailed instructions on how to execute tasks and how long it takes to complete them. For example, teams spend a specific time in each house, where they clean according to fixed rules and time schedules (Webster et al 2003:14; Braverman 1974:112-120). Thus, scientific management is accompanied by the notion of deskilling, as domestic workers’ skills are fragmented by managers to increase speed and profits (Webster et al 2003:14).

Scientific management has many consequences for employees. Doing repetitive work, making just a small part of something (in this case, cleaning just a room in a house) and being too closely supervised result in feelings of insecurity, alienation and boredom (Watson 1995:144). One typically finds these trends in housecleaning service companies, as various scholars such as Mendez (1998), Ehrenreich (2006) and Devetter and Rousseau (2009) have indicated.

One could also argue, however, that domestic workers go through a process of upskilling. If one uses Bell’s upskilling thesis as a basis, training and specialisation provide positive qualities such as diversity in skills (Edgell 2006:62-63). Bell (in Edgell 2006:63) also argues that service work involves interacting with people rather than with machines, which in fact limits boredom and creates job satisfaction. But training and specialisation in the domestic sector do not mean that domestic workers equate to skilled labourers with autonomy, because they are constantly supervised by both managers and clients, which gives rise to a triangular employment relationship.

It is important to realise that in essence the employment relationship is still personal in nature, even though it is a formalised and triangular one between managers, domestic workers and clients. Many of the housecleaning service companies still operate on the principle that “we are one family” and follow what can be typically classified as unitarist employment practices.

Unitarism refers to the notion that employees identify with the company’s goals and values, which leads to organisational success, harmony and cooperation among employees and employers (Blyton & Turnbull 1994:23; Farnham & Pimlott, 1990:4; Dekker 1990:350; Venter, Levy, Conradie & Holtzhausen 2009:7). This is achieved by means of employees’ acceptance of their positions within the company and loyalty to the exclusive leadership and authority of the employer (Blyton & Jenkins 2007:168; Salamon 1992:31; Green 1994:4). Since employees are regarded as the company’s most important resource, and profit is made by selling their labour power, it is important to have cooperation, effective communication and teamwork between employees and employers (Dekker 1990:350; Blyton & Turnbull 1994:40; Storey & Sisson 1993:199).

Although domestic workers are now permitted to join trade unions, it does not appear as if many do because managers perceive this as unnecessary. Conflict is typically dealt with by trying to solve it within the company and not by external forces. However,
although domestic workers now have external support from the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration (CCMA), housecleaning service companies appear to be trying to obviate the need for trade unions by portraying themselves as caring employers. Thus, paternalism is still used by employers (managers) as a tool for obtaining cooperation, loyalty and reliability from domestic workers.

Union avoidance is usually successful where trade unions are weak or unable to organise employees successfully, which is typical of the domestic work sector. They do this by using unitarist principles such as giving domestic workers uniforms and opportunities to take part in social functions in order to create identification and loyalty with the goals and aspirations of the company (Finnemore 2002:216-217). For example, in housecleaning service companies, domestic workers are typically paid more than the minimum wages, they receive training, wear uniforms with the company’s name, have opportunities to express grievances, and often go on social outings. In housecleaning service companies that render a service to a client, loyalty and trust are critically important, as without them the company’s image can be severely tarnished. It is important to establish identification with company goals, since housecleaning service companies fall within the service sector.

Just like other service organisations, housecleaning service companies change domestic work from ordinary housework into service work. Service organisations, especially those that provide similar services, have to distinguish themselves from other organisations by providing a good service to clients in order to survive in a highly competitive marketplace. One way to ensure that a good service is provided is by supervising employees.

Supervision in housecleaning service companies takes several forms. Managers and domestic employees use feedback from clients as a tool to judge the quality of services (Pugh, Dietz, Wiley & Brooks 2002:82). Satisfied clients create loyalty, which leads to an improvement in sales, profit and possible rewards for the organisation and service employee (Pugh et al 2002:73). As a result, many managers use feedback from clients to monitor the services. For example, in housecleaning service companies, managers often use client feedback to determine whether domestic employees are delivering professional services. If clients’ ratings are bad, then managers confront domestic employees and could potentially lose clients.

5 Triangular employment relationship of domestic service

The literature and theoretical background provided general explanations for the growth of housecleaning service companies. This article tries to explore the key research question by focusing on clients’, domestic workers’ and managers’ perceptions of housecleaning service companies in Stellenbosch by examining, among others, the employment relationship, working conditions and benefits associated with housecleaning service companies.

5.1 Employment relationship

In housecleaning service companies, there is a transformation from a personal relationship between maid and madam to a structural triangular employment

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1 Grievance procedures give employees the opportunity to tell the manager or owner of a company if they are dissatisfied with the management within the workplace. The manager will attempt to resolve the grievance in a manner which is acceptable to the employees concerned and the company (Klaas 1989:450-451).
relationship, which creates distance between clients and domestic workers (Glenn 1992:22). Several clients expressed their satisfaction at having an impersonal relationship with domestic workers. Some said that they find it “stressful” to have a personal relationship with domestic workers, and since employing housecleaning companies they no longer get involved with domestic workers’ “personal issues” anymore, which they describe as “fantastic”, “a great relief” and “less demanding”. One client, for example, said:

*In the past we did the mothering and fathering. They lived with us in the houses and we gave them food just like our children. They became part of our family.*

Traditionally the term “live-in maids” was applied to maids who lived on the premises of madams and became “part of the family”. The relationship remained highly dependent, as the rooms allocated to maids were usually in the back yard, were frequently furnished with their madams’ second-hand furniture and they were often clothed in their madam’s discarded garments (Goncalves 2010:41). The conditions were infinitely inferior to those of the madam (Gill 1990:129). Madams provided maids with furniture, clothing, household goods and other materials, which they would not otherwise have been able to afford. This goodwill on the part of the madams depended on the obedience and personal loyalty of the maids (Abercrombie & Hill 1976:418).

Since housecleaning service companies offer clients an impersonal relationship with domestic workers, clients are liberated from getting involved with their domestic workers’ lives. One client explained why it is better to have an impersonal relationship with domestic workers:

*I ask them how they are and that is it. It is different when you have a permanent worker. You always get involved with their social and personal set-up. Even if you don’t want to get involved with that, you always do. So it is much nicer not to be involved any more. If their child is sick, then they may ask you R100 or R200 and I can never say NO. Because I am the tree under which they sit, and now they sit under someone else’s tree. That is very convenient for me.*

Clients also expressed frustration at having to do the “mothering and fathering” when they had a permanent domestic worker. These responses emphasise the fact that clients find having an impersonal relationship with domestic workers one of the reasons why they prefer employing housecleaning service companies to employing private domestic workers. Clients no longer want to get involved with domestic workers’ personal lives and do not want domestic workers to be dependent on them. Similar responses were found across the board.

Domestic workers hold similar views on having an impersonal relationship with clients. All the domestic workers of both housecleaning service companies said that they are not allowed to share their problems with clients. Domestic workers also said that clients do not know their problems, and that it is better that way, because “they are not my boss”. When domestic workers have personal problems, they address these to the manager of the housecleaning service company. One domestic worker said that she is “scared of the family” (referring to the client), afraid that they will take her money when she tells them of her personal problems. This underlines the fact that domestic workers have more confidence in their managers than in their clients.

In addition, having an impersonal employment relationship with domestic workers also liberates clients from other responsibilities such as the payment of Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF) contributions, sick leave, pensions and medical funds. These responsibilities are transferred to the managers or owners of housecleaning service companies.
companies. Clients expressed great relief at avoiding these responsibilities, which were described as “a schlep”, “a painful process” and “very difficult”.

The domestic workers, for their part, said that they trust their managers and know that their managers are following the law by giving them what they are entitled to. As one domestic worker said, she knows the manager is paying into the Unemployment Insurance Fund, and that when she leaves one day she will get “some money”.

5.2 Legitimisation

The employment relationship between managers, clients and domestic workers is based on particular contractual requirements and limits the exploitation of domestic workers (Glenn 1992:23). Domestic workers in the employ of a service provider are usually employed on a fixed-term contract, which may be either a full-time or a part-time contract (Vosko 1997:43). These contractual employment relations affect the working conditions of paid domestic work, because the owner of the house is no longer the employer, but the client (Mendez 1998:119).

Generally, employment contracts are flexible, as clients need not pay for services if they go away for a period of time. This was found to be one of the reasons why clients employ housecleaning service companies. One client, for example, said that:

They know we leave for four months every year to go to our house in Greece, then we stop the services. When we come back, they work here again and we don’t need to look for someone new.

Apart from limiting exploitation in terms of workload, contracts also provide domestic workers with job security. In addition, because housecleaning companies have many clients, domestic workers are not dependent on one family. One domestic worker explained:

I know I have a job. If one of the families moves away, I know I still have a job. They don’t take my job if the family moves away. I still have my job.

Thus, contracts are signed between clients and managers, and between domestic workers and managers, the aim being to protect both clients and domestic workers.

5.3 Promotion opportunities, loyalty and commitment

Unlike in the previous personal and maternalistic maid-madam employment relationship, where domestic workers had no chance of improving their status and were dependent on the goodwill of their madams, housecleaning service companies offer opportunities for promotion. For instance, middle management positions are offered to some domestic workers in order to enhance loyalty and commitment to the housecleaning service company. This enhances the status of these domestic workers, because they are responsible for supervisory tasks and receive higher wages than the others (Devetter & Rousseau 2009:306). It was found that housecleaning service companies in South Africa often do this too. Domestic workers indicated the importance of having a “team leader” (namely a domestic worker who has been promoted to a supervisory position), to give assistance when managers cannot.

Many of these housecleaning service companies also foster a “culture of caring” by acknowledging birthdays and anniversaries by providing gifts or bonuses. This helps to foster worker loyalty, identification and solidarity with housecleaning service companies (Mendez 1998:124). This was found in both housecleaning service companies as
managers explained that they give domestic workers birthday, Easter and Christmas gifts, to enhance commitment to the company and to foster a caring personal relationship with domestic workers.

In addition, to enhance loyalty and commitment to housecleaning service companies, managers send domestic workers on “uplifting courses”. It was found that domestic workers are treated to “a day at the aquarium”, “buffet dinner at a restaurant” or “a day trip to Robben Island”. The manager explained that some of these domestic workers live in South Africa but never get the chance to see their surroundings owing to financial difficulties or transport problems. Domestic workers responded excitedly to these “uplifting courses” by stating that one of the reasons why they work for housecleaning service companies is that “the manager has God in her heart”. Thus, treating domestic workers to either birthday or Christmas gifts or “uplifting outings” evokes positive attitudes and perceptions in domestic workers in terms of the image and aims of the company.

From the managers’ perspective, both managers confirmed that they see themselves as a “team”, become personally involved with their employees’ problems and take a personal interest in their welfare. However, both said that they still have the “authority” to control domestic workers.

This is a classic example of the unitarist perspective. It was found in this study that whenever conflict arose, managers held a meeting with all the domestic workers, to remove the misunderstanding and solve the issues between them. In this relationship, trust between managers and domestic workers is vital for the success of the housecleaning service companies. Domestic workers responded that they trusted their managers with issues ranging from financial to medical problems, which according to Blyton and Jenkins (2007:169) is one of the ideals of a unitary approach. Unitarism succeeds where there is a shared value system. For example, managers are trusted as leaders or preachers, who protect and take care of their workers, which is central to the success of both housecleaning service companies. Unhappy workers cause conflict, which is “pathological” for the success of an organisation (Blyton & Jenkins 2007:169).

However, it was found that managers also use maternalistic gestures of gift-giving to enhance the loyalty of domestic workers. One domestic worker said:

She [the manager] is very good to me. She gives me presents when it is my Birthday and with Mothers’ Day, we get something and when it is Christmas, we get something from her. She has a lot of love inside her. And those things she gave us, us as people. She has God in her heart and that is why she has so much love that she gives us. I can see that and I enjoy my job."

Thus, housecleaning service companies do not erase unequal maternalistic employment relationships, which still occur between managers and domestic workers. As in private employment arrangements, managers use gifts as a management tool to improve commitment to the company, which in turn enhances the success and profits of the housecleaning service company.

### 5.4 Working conditions

In terms of remuneration, both managers of housecleaning service companies confirmed that they pay domestic workers salaries that are the same as or above the average of the required minimum as stipulated by the state. Depending on the housecleaning service company, domestic workers receive on average between R1600 and R2032 per month (US$ 208.36 and US$ 264.71 per month). This is much higher than the wage determined by Sectoral Determination Seven: Domestic Workers Sector,
which stipulates that domestic workers are entitled for R7.72 per hour if they work more than 27 ordinary hours a week, which works out at around R1400 per month (US$ 182.45 per month). It can be argued that managers use better remuneration as a strategy to encourage and assure loyalty, commitment and reliability from workers.

From a unitarist perspective, it can be argued that managers use better remuneration as a strategy to encourage and assure loyalty, commitment and reliability from employees. This was confirmed by statements by domestic workers that they are “very satisfied”, that the “money is okay” and is “more than the minimum wage”. However, this trend is not unique to housecleaning service companies in South Africa, as Mendez (1998), Ehrenreich (2006) and Devetter and Rousseau (2009), among others, have found that paying domestic workers higher wages is a typical characteristic of housecleaning service companies internationally.

Not only are domestic workers’ monthly wages more than the wages stipulated by law but their workload is also restricted because managers specify exactly what is expected from domestic workers. Previously, under the maid-madam employment relationship, domestic servants/maids served as “cooks, cleaners, childminders, wet nurses, security guards, secretaries, laundresses and dog walkers” (Rubbo & Taussig 1983:15, 18; Gill 1990:122; Barnes 1993:28). It was found that both managers of housecleaning service companies clarify domestic workers’ job roles in their employment contracts. For example, the manager specifies in the contracts with clients that domestic workers are allowed to iron “a maximum of twenty-five articles of clothing per session”.

As regards working hours, domestic workers in both housecleaning service companies said that working hours are better regulated. In both housecleaning service companies, domestic workers clean the house in two-and-a-half hours and they clean three houses a day. They start working at “08:00 and finish at 16:30”. This is a major improvement on the working hours of live-in maids, who generally work from early in the morning until late at night. This is a classic application of the principles of scientific management, where the skills of workers, the workload and the time spent in clients’ houses are managed according to strict rules, regulations and detailed instructions.

In contrast to the literature, in which scholars like Mendez (1998), Ehrenreich (2006) and Devetter and Rousseau (2009) indicated that the division of domestic tasks between teams can cause alienation and boredom, domestic workers in this study expressed a different opinion. One domestic worker, for example, said:

*Every day I see different stuff, different people and houses and that is so exciting for me. I can’t talk enough of all the things I have seen throughout the years. I will never do private work again. I will stay here. If you work privately, then you have to do the same stuff over and over again. It is very boring. In this company you have different families and privately, you only have one family. That is very boring.*

Managers confirmed that they rotate the tasks of domestic workers between different shifts. As the manager explained,

*I make sure that they (domestic workers) do not do the same tasks in all three shifts. For example, if one worker has done the ironing in the 8 o’clock shift, then she must clean the bathrooms in the next house. I like it when they do a variety of tasks during the day. The one won’t do ironing the whole day or clean kitchens the whole day.*

It is clear that managers are in control of the planning and execution of tasks, and prevent domestic workers from becoming bored or alienated from their work by rotating tasks between houses. This is also a way of ensuring loyalty, as some of the domestic workers said that they will not work “privately ever again”.

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5.5 Control and punishments

Domestic workers in both housecleaning service companies are under constant supervision. This is an additional burden, which is unique to housecleaning service companies. Surveillance in housecleaning service companies is enhanced by the use of service evaluation forms by clients. Clients confirmed that they need to evaluate the cleaning services provided by the team of domestic workers. Clients need to indicate how rooms are cleaned, according to a scale ranging from “super” to “bad”. When the rating is “bad”, domestic workers are punished by the manager. In addition, one client responded:

I usually check whether the rooms are cleaned afterwards. Then I won’t call their boss, but the next time when they come, then I will tell the leader that I am not satisfied and they need to sharpen up. I get a very good response from this. I think they are scared of their boss and they don’t like it when I call her (the manager). That is absolutely wonderful, because I know that there is someone else now who does the discipline. That is better for me, because I don’t like conflict.

During the master-servant employment relationship in previous eras and other regimes, punishment of domestic servants was physical which included harsh whipping (Hansen 1989:50), withholding of payments or imprisonment (Coser 1973:32; Lundh 2004:83; Anderson 2000:462; Strobl 2009:166). These forms of punishment are illegal in South Africa, since domestic workers became legally protected by law after the demise of apartheid. However, it was found that managers of South African housecleaning service companies punish domestic workers by subtracting money from their salaries or asking them to redo rooms if managers or clients are dissatisfied with the cleaning.

Apart from service evaluation forms, managers are often in radio communication with all drivers and if teams finish late, they are called and asked to work faster. This emphasises the fact that the speed of service delivery by teams is controlled and carefully calculated by the managers of housecleaning service companies. All these factors emphasise the fact that the employment relationship is not symmetrical and that the manager has the authority to choose how and what she thinks works best for the company as a whole.

Surveillance also takes the form of inspection. When clients are dissatisfied with services, managers ask the team of domestic workers to “redo a room”, but the problem is that the workers then get “behind schedule” and arrive “late at home”. One manager said the following about inspection:

When I do my inspections, then I will specifically pay attention to their weak points. I know what my workers’ weak points are. So I know what to look out for when I do my inspection. Then I will ask them to clean under the beds for example, I will also wait until it is done. Then the team has to work together, because they do not want to be behind schedule and come late at home. If a client complains about a certain issue, then I will make sure I pay attention to it the next time that we visit.

This relates to the principles of scientific management in the sense that “time is no longer passed, but spent” (Webster, Buhlungu & Bezuidenhout 2003:12). In this regard, domestic workers responded that they have “certain responsibilities” regarding their job. This emphasises the fact that they know the rules and consequences associated with their job role in the housecleaning service company.

5.6 Service delivery

Unique to housecleaning service companies is that they characteristically guarantee quality service delivery due to competition and by “targeting specific types of client needs” (Mendez 1998:118), and using special equipment (Devetter & Rousseau 2009:
306; Meagher 1997:22; Ehrenreich 2000:67). The use of trained domestic workers and the division of tasks among teams of domestic workers ensure that service delivery is fast and effective (Mendez 1998:121; Ehrenreich 2000:66). This was found to be a reason why clients employ housecleaning service companies in preference to private maids.

It was found from clients’ responses that the competitive environment in which housecleaning service companies in Stellenbosch operate causes clients to expect the “best service” from the housecleaning service company they employ. One client said:

You see, because there are so many companies out of which one can choose from, I expect that they deliver the best service. I need to see the difference after they have cleaned. I also expect that they are trained, because I don't want to train them. I want to know that they know how things work. I want to be able to call their boss if I am not satisfied with the service.

Another client confirmed that the standard of cleaning remains “good”, because it is “like a business set-up”. This relates to externalisation theory, where clients have the benefit of improved quality in service delivery and a reduction in costs due to competition (Burnes & Anastasiadis 2003:357, Kremic et al 2006:467). Thus, although workload is controlled, domestic workers have extra pressure on them to clean clients’ houses according to managers’ and clients’ expectations. All domestic workers receive professional training by managers, which is unique to housecleaning service companies. Although informal, on-the-job and to a lesser extent formal, external training of domestic workers may take place by private arrangement. It can be argued that the fact that housecleaning service companies train domestic workers in specialised and unique skills differentiates them from other companies.

From the perspective of domestic workers, it was confirmed that they are trained in methods of cleaning rooms faster and more effectively. Domestic workers are trained to clean rooms from the “top” to “the floor”. This confirms the argument that the training of domestic workers in housecleaning service companies aims to enhance their “professional image” by increasing the speed of cleaning, which has to be “fast and effective”, and is not necessarily intended to increase the status of domestic workers as trained specialists, as domestic work is still seen by many as unskilled labour.

5.7 Benefits for clients and domestic workers

Although clients may lose control over the domestic workers in terms of the transformation from employer to client, there are several benefits for clients and domestic workers. Firstly, the impersonal relationship frees clients from supervision and management tasks (Mendez 1998:120). Supervision is carried out by either team leaders or managers who carry out random checks to prevent theft and to ensure that cleaning is performed according to specific standards. It was found in this study that all clients prefer having someone else do the supervision rather than doing it themselves. Secondly, many clients prefer this impersonal relationship, because they are no longer involved in a “time-consuming and emotionally draining personal relationship” with their domestic workers (Mendez 1998:123). This is an important indicator of why clients choose housecleaning service companies, because personal contact is reduced, which increases the distance between clients and domestic workers (Devetter & Rousseau 2009:308; Mendez 1998:123) to such an extent that clients do not even recognise the people who work in their houses. This was confirmed by clients, who said that they do not even know whether their domestic workers “are married or not”. Similarly domestic workers said that they do not know the names of some of their clients' children, but only
see “photos of them in their rooms”. Thirdly, clients no longer have to support their domestic workers financially or give their second-hand clothes and used household appliances to the domestic workers, or provide Christmas or birthday gifts for the domestic workers and their families. This may be unfavourable to some domestic workers employed by housecleaning service companies, as they are less likely to receive free lunches, cast-off clothing or gifts (Ehrenreich 2000:65). Clients expressed their relief at avoiding the financial dependency of their domestic workers on them and having the choice of giving their second-hand garments to other charities.

Domestic workers also preferred impersonal relationships with clients. Firstly, working for different clients every day allows domestic workers more independence and decreases the chances of exploitation (Romero 1988:322). For example, domestic workers are no longer financially dependent on the goodwill of one family. Secondly, domestic workers do not deal with the clients directly. For example, criticisms of cleaning methods and spontaneous demands for unscheduled household tasks are directly referred to the manager or owner of the housecleaning service company. Thirdly, this impersonal contractual relationship between domestic workers and clients protects domestic workers from abuse (Romero 1988:332). Housecleaning service companies have specific contracts with clients, which state explicitly what is expected from domestic workers in terms of workload (Devetter & Rousseau 2009:307). All domestic workers indicated that they know what is expected from them in terms of cleaning. Fourthly, domestic workers develop friendships with their colleagues, and this reduces feelings of isolation and loneliness. This is often cited as a reason for choosing to work for housecleaning service companies (Mendez 1998:131; Glenn 1992:23; Cohen 1991:204). All the domestic workers said that they will never work privately again because “it is too boring”. While some said that dividing the workload between teams in housecleaning service companies means one gets “less tired”; others expressed their excitement at seeing “different houses every day”. Lastly, impersonal employment relationships in housecleaning service companies improve domestic workers’ status (Salzinger 1991:156). Meagher (1997:21) argues that domestic workers are lifted out of their subordinated position when they are paired with clients and not with masters, madams or employers. This was confirmed to be another reason why housecleaning service companies are preferred by both clients and domestic workers. For example, all domestic workers said that they do not see themselves as “slaves” but as “workers”.

6 Conclusion

Presently, housecleaning service companies are transforming the employment relationship from a personal to a triangular employment relationship between managers, clients (former madams/employers) and domestic workers (former domestic servants/maids). The triangular employment relationship is two-fold: On the one hand, it remains personal between managers and domestic workers, and on the other, it is impersonal between clients and domestic workers. This is transforming domestic work on both a micro-level and a macro-level.

On the micro-level, housecleaning service companies are transforming domestic work “for better” for those permanently employed by these companies. Just like other workers who are employed on a full-time basis, they are reaping the financial rewards and benefits and have some sense of job security, in that they cannot be arbitrarily dismissed. It was also found that teamwork, the allocation of workload and working for
different clients created a sense of excitement and limited the feelings of isolation and boredom associated with previous private employment arrangements.

Housecleaning service companies also transform domestic work “for better” from the perspective of former employers – now clients. Not only does this system reduce the burden of dealing with the labour laws, but it relieves employers of their social obligations towards their “maids”. These are some of the benefits at the micro-level.

Although this aspect did not fall within the ambit of this study, one can predict that this trend may have a negative impact on employment in this sector at the macro-level. For example, a single housecleaning service company in this study consisting of around twenty or more workers cleans up to 400 houses a month. This means for every ten houses, one domestic employee is employed, if one roughly divides the clientele by the number of domestic workers employed. Should this trend continue, the growth of housecleaning service companies may create better employment for a few, but foster growing unemployment in the domestic sector, which has been the main source of employment for black women in South Africa.

7 Recommendations for future research
Since the sample only included housecleaning service companies that offer services in terms of teams and not char services, it may be useful to ask why domestic workers work as chars and why clients employ char services as opposed to private servants and teams. Future research may also be needed to determine what effect housecleaning service companies are having on the employment and unemployment rates of domestic workers, since housecleaning service companies absorb many of the potential clients of private domestic workers.

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