

Confronting the “Racist Demon”: Renegotiating South African Domestic Entitlement in Aotearoa/New Zealand

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Abstract

The employment of Black women as maids in White South African households is common in the post-apartheid nation. When questioned outside of the discursive structures that sustain its functioning, this domestic labour arrangement is revealed as one deeply rooted in relations of power, oppression and privilege. The mass wave of South African emigrants to other White ‘homelands’ following the fall of apartheid, alongside their abrupt confrontation with a new social normality, promotes questioning into how they account for the differences in domestic labour between South Africa and Aotearoa/New Zealand. Using Foucauldian discourse analysis, the accounts of eight White South African immigrants are deconstructed. The four discourses of ‘invisible Whiteness’, ‘gendered domestic work’, ‘more equal’ and ‘lifting the veil’ give insight into how White South Africans negotiate historical indoctrination and contemporary White identity. In exploring White South African immigrants’ accounts of domestic labour relations, which are inconsistent with everyday life in Aotearoa/New Zealand, this research contributes to an understanding of how oppressive cultural normalisations can be reflected on and renegotiated following emigration.

Keywords: discourse; privilege; Whiteness; maids; immigration; post-apartheid; domestic labour

Introduction

It has been argued that to address postcolonial domination and privilege, the study of race needs to focus on discourses of privilege that stem from ideologies of White superiority (Green et al., 2007). Subverting the inherent power and privilege that comes with being considered ‘White’ thereby involves illuminating how these advantages continue through underlying systems of racial domination. Addressing and deconstructing racialised coloniality is a necessary task if the systemic conditions that perpetuate and reinforce White dominance are to ever shift (Collins & Watson, 2021). This article is situated within the broad study of ‘Whiteness’ and explores how historical discourses of privilege constitute the White South African identity through the lens of domestic work. Specifically, the previously normalised entitlement to Black maids is deconstructed, exposing the domestic privileges afforded to White South Africans by means of racial and gendered discourse.¹

¹ Ambiguity exists surrounding the title of domesticity as a job in South Africa, with literature using the terms maid and domestic worker interchangeably. Domestic service and domestic servants as workers are also occasionally utilised (Cock, 1981, 1987). For this article, the terms domestic worker and maid are utilised as these were used interchangeably by the participants and can be understood in both Aotearoa/New Zealand and South African contexts.

The article looks at South African immigrants to Aotearoa/New Zealand. As migrants they underwent a significant cultural fracture which enabled unique comparisons between two different societies: one living in the shadows of apartheid and the other a bicultural society. This article explores how participants talked about an important difference: the entitlement to domestic help in the form of maids. In Aotearoa/New Zealand, unlike South Africa, access to such an entitlement is not considered 'normal' (Griffiths & Prozesky, 2010). This disruption in domestic normalities was a point of comparison that affected the day-to-day running of households and contributed to the rationale for this research. The research is initially contextualised through a discussion of White identity, the history of apartheid in South Africa, and the development of White consciousness which underpinned European colonisation. Next, we background the historical evolution of domestic labour and the unique racial and gendered divisions imposed by apartheid. The colonial history of Aotearoa/New Zealand is considered along with the politics of gender and race, which differ from those in South Africa. Next, we outline the research method, before moving to the findings and a discussion of the four key discourses that frame the renegotiation of White domestic entitlements.

White identity and constructed superiority

Critiquing racialised domestic relationships that continue to normalise Black domesticity in contemporary White South African households requires an understanding of apartheid and the operation of White consciousness (Griffiths & Prozesky, 2010). *Whiteness* is a powerful theoretical concept which has emerged from multidisciplinary research into racism. The promise of this line of investigation is that it can shed light on both our understanding and study of racism and thereby contribute to the politics of decolonisation and social justice (Green et al., 2007). Much of this growing literature examines how Whiteness is assumed as the norm through its structuring of everyday practices (Steyn, 2004). The taken-for-granted nature of Whiteness can make the language of racism and associated institutional practices invisible. While White privilege is one focus, Whiteness studies also consider White shame, White guilt, White invisibility and White ignorance (Milazzo, 2017). Our research considers the views of the formerly privileged (as Whites living in South Africa) as they reflect on experiences of living in South Africa, but first we detail the history of Whiteness in South Africa.

The White South African, born out of European colonisation, becomes known as a 'White' in parallel with the identification of those colonised as 'Blacks' (Thiele, 1991). In colonial South Africa, the construction of a master narrative of Whiteness has long since been fought over between British and Dutch colonisers (Gilliomee, 2003) with the Person of Colour treated as an 'alien' or outsider (Steyn, 2001). This master narrative of Whiteness established White identity as one of superiority. The meaning of Whiteness therefore has historical importance, not merely as a means of classification but of legal, political, economic and social relations. To be White was symbolic of intellectual and economic progress, enabling an understanding of the self as superior (Steyn, 2001). From early colonial days, who could be classed as White was contested, as Afrikaners (predominantly Dutch descendants) created and sustained their White ideological identity in opposition to the British (Gilliomee, 2003). The acceptance and normality of racial difference was enforced under Afrikaner rule from 1948 to the early 1990s, and so too was the presumption that if you weren't White, you could not be like me (King, 2007). Described as an "ethic of ontological evil" (Griffiths & Prozesky, 2010, p. 36), the foundations of apartheid determined who became and remained White. Although apartheid was implemented by an Afrikaner government and English-speaking South Africans were not culturally considered the 'same' as Afrikaners, apartheid offered privileges to White people more generally. A collective Whiteness thus transcended culture and language, signifying access to social, political and economic gain (Steyn, 2001). Defined as the "logical, if extreme, interpretation of the

trope of Whiteness” (Steyn, 2001, p. 24), apartheid was knitted into institutions and everyday social practices. Socially engineered racial identities became ingrained into normality (Griffiths & Prozesky, 2010), and people identified with either the ‘master’ minority or the ‘slave’ majority. Even mixed-race people, termed Coloureds, and people from India, the Middle East and other African countries came to be formally categorised in distinct racial groupings (Steyn, 2001). The government worked hard at manipulating the media to offset objection to their policies, creating the impression of the normality of South Africa’s racial divides. Rendering the system as innocent to White South Africa, economic and political advantages were sought and encouraged, thus enabling a public sense of White superiority as self-fulfilling and, importantly, sustained through the oppression of the non-White Other (Steyn, 2001).

Social hierarchies and domestic labour

Domestic employment arrangements in White homes have been shaped by racial and gendered divisions of labour as defined by the apartheid order. Although the domestic ‘slave’ population comprised of Black men during the colonial period, over time, Black women became regarded as better suited to domestic work because of their ostensible ‘innate’ childminding and domesticated abilities (Cock, 1987). Despite the abolishment of slavery in the 1800s (Gilliom, 2003), domestic slavery morphed into domestic work in White South African households, in the form of maids or domestic workers (Ally, 2009; Cock, 1987). Individual household arrangements varied, with some maids travelling to work from home, usually in a township or squatter camp, and others living in an outside room or maid’s quarters. Described as a microcosm of macro inequality (Cock, 1987), the Black domestic worker became a permanent fixture in White households during the apartheid years and continues today, often for minimal pay with precarious employment arrangements (Jansen, 2011). Although legislative changes have recently improved the working conditions, wages, hours and rights of domestic workers in South Africa, many fear seeking legal claims as their employers’ homes are their places of work and such claims may result in the loss of their jobs and accommodation (Dabala & Sefara, 2020).

Since the turn to democracy in 1994, White people no longer hold an explicit position of political dominance in South Africa and yet apartheid continues to shape social identities and relations. The entitlement to a household maid has become synonymous with post-apartheid White identity and cultural practice, experienced as normative, natural, universal and thus invisible. The domestic workers who clean, cook and care for children are almost exclusively Black and other non-White ‘lower-class’ women (Ally, 2009; Jansen, 2011). The economic and social dependency between the White household and the Black worker through the domestic arrangement is complex. This dependency is sustained by the apartheid operations that sanctioned racial segregation, and the socially engineered normalisation that the White household remains a site of preservation for Whiteness (Green et al., 2007; Griffiths & Prozesky, 2010; Jansen, 2011). The White middle- to upper-class woman, who is typically tasked with preserving the purity of the household (Gilliom, 2003), is able to buy social status for herself at the expense of the domestic worker by means of the racial structures that afford her this power. By exercising class privilege, the White employer transfers her own gender subordination to the racially and economically subordinate domestic worker. These power relations facilitate ideological justifications for the economic and racial system in which the White family derive great benefit (Ally, 2009; Bosch & McLeod, 2015; Bradfield, 2012). The relationship between the White household and the Black maid is therefore not confined to the walls of the household but is secured by political and economic structures of power that sustain gendered and racially determined social roles (Cock, 1981). The normality of domestic service in South Africa is difficult to separate from racial identities and the White way of life because the threads of Black female servitude run deep.

There are calls for further research into the renegotiation of the privileges afforded to White South Africans during apartheid, and the psychological readjustments of these privileges for all South Africans (du Preez et al., 2010; Green et al., 2007; King 2007). In what has become known as ‘economic apartheid’, legislated racial segregation has been replaced by contemporary White affluence (Green et al., 2007). Racism has thus become removed from biology and is now organised around economic institutions and practices of privilege. This form of racism is less identifiable as overtly oppressive but nevertheless justifies White entitlements, such as White people having Black maids. The ‘comfort zones’ of White neighbourhoods are now enclosed behind high fences with security booms and restricted access (Griffiths & Prozesky, 2010). The White lifestyle that was enabled during apartheid can be sustained here, complete with a Black maid and Black security guards. However, political changes in the newly democratic country promote challenges for the cultural identities of those who benefited from an oppressive system, with Black governance in the country suddenly making Whites feel “out of place” (Steyn, 2001, p. 156). The meaning of home for many White South Africans is no longer congruent with an African country striving to build a multicultural democracy (Steyn, 2004). Furthermore, the ANC (African National Congress) government, political corruption, affirmative action and the increase in crime has led to large-scale emigration of White South Africans (Griffiths & Prozesky, 2010). South African emigration to other White ‘homelands’ such as Aotearoa/New Zealand, Australia, the UK and Canada has increased dramatically since the late 1990s. At more than 71,000 in 2018, South Africans are now the fifth most-common overseas-born residential group in Aotearoa/New Zealand (Stats NZ, 2018).

New horizons: Domestic labour relations in Aotearoa/New Zealand

Like South Africa, Aotearoa/New Zealand has a history of European colonisation although relations between the coloniser and colonised constitute ‘Whiteness’ differently. Servitude in colonial Aotearoa/New Zealand was ascribed to ideologies of social class and gender, as non-White domestic labour was considered a threat to the Whiteness of the British household (Macdonald, 2017). Colonisation of Aotearoa/New Zealand was shaped by the 1840 signing of the Treaty of Waitangi|Te Tiriti o Waitangi, which ostensibly promised equal partnership between Māori and the British crown. However, while racism in Aotearoa/New Zealand did not include slavery or servitude, Māori cultural values were undermined and marginalised as Other (Macdonald, 2017). Ideologically, Aotearoa/New Zealand, like other British colonies, was seen as a White man’s country, with the aim to civilise Indigenous peoples and build new societies modelled on the ‘old country’ (Pickles, 2001). This entailed setting up society with women in the household and men in public trade. In the early 1920s, British women were sent to Aotearoa/New Zealand and other settler colonies to work as domestic workers in middle- and upper-class homes, and this occupation remained the largest category of employment for women until its decline following the Second World War (Williams et al., 2009). British culture and Whiteness were therefore preserved in Aotearoa/New Zealand homes, establishing the household as a White, gendered space with its maintenance the responsibility of White women.

Māori continue to be marginalised through institutional practices and race talk. Pākehā’s (White New Zealanders of British or European descent) self-imbued beliefs of their own superiority, without an acknowledgement of the injustice of colonisation and ongoing racism, result in little prospect of equal outcomes in employment, health and education. Research shows bleak evidence of institutional racism with Māori dominating negative statistics in key areas such as crime, employment, education and health outcomes. Māori are twice as likely as Pākehā to be incarcerated for similar crimes (Workman, 2011), suffer employment discrimination (Robson, 2008), and have poor educational outcomes (Robson et al., 2007). Health statistics show Māori have lower levels of mental and physical health (Harris et al., 2013), and the

suicide rate for Māori in their late teens and early 20s is more than 2.5 times higher than for non-Māori (Ministry of Health, 2015). Despite this evidence, a disregard for the negative impacts of colonisation on Māori perpetuates a narrative that Aotearoa/New Zealand is a country in which all people are treated equally and fairly (Kahu et al., 2022). Bönisch-Brednich (2002) documents German immigrants' characterisations of Aotearoa/New Zealand society as more egalitarian, a place in which socially liberal views are valued despite major social and economic disparities between its people. Whiteness in Aotearoa/New Zealand is thus embedded within colonial discourses of domination and ongoing institutional racism (Pack et al., 2016) that maintain the myth of a seemingly equal and fair society.

There are significant historical differences in how domestic work is enacted in the two countries. In South Africa, most domestic workers are Black women with White employers; just under a million Black women are employed as maids (Khunoua & Tekie, 2021). In Aotearoa/New Zealand, this occupational class is more difficult to capture as divisions in classifications of paid domestic labour function differently (Williams et al., 2009), but the 2018 Census recorded just over 38,000 commercial and domestic cleaners (Stats NZ, 2018). Live-in domestic labour is rare and highly skewed towards women; domestic work tends to be outsourced by tasks, so a household might hire a childcarer or cleaner for a few hours a week.

How then, do South African immigrants navigate these positionings as White members of Aotearoa/New Zealand society amidst the different historical values and discourses that constitute domestic practice? Few studies have explored the experiences of the predominantly White, affluent South Africans who have left the country, and the possible ideological confrontations these experiences may trigger. Apartheid ideologies of Whiteness have been outlined as clear markers of race relations in South Africa, with suggestions that these markers are still shaping social relations, even among those who have emigrated (Green et al., 2007). Finlayson's (2019) anthropological study, driven by the claim that exposure to other cultural ways of being enables identity definition through informal comparisons, considered identity renegotiation for those living in their new host country. Finlayson asked how South African emigrants saw themselves fitting into Aotearoa/New Zealand society and how their ethnic identity had altered since arriving. Among changes participants reported were reflections on their South African backgrounds as conservative, traditional, class-conscious people. Increased awareness of where they had come from was useful for those seeking to integrate into Aotearoa/New Zealand's multicultural society. Louw and van Ommen (2021) also found that living in Aotearoa/New Zealand stimulates identity renegotiation among South African immigrants. In particular, the research found that South Africans needed to anticipate and rebut potential accusations of racism. Geyer et al. (2021) also consider the ways White South Africans now living in Aotearoa/New Zealand ideologically reconstruct different cultural understandings of domestic employment relationships. The study found that oppressive, prejudicial relationships were masked with the language of friendship and compassion with maids being referred to as "almost" family. Indeed, the experiences of South African immigrants provide a unique opportunity to study how domestic labour is renegotiated following relocation to a different society. The present study addresses the research question: How do White South Africans living in Aotearoa/New Zealand account for the differences in domesticity between the two countries? This question is broken down into two parts: How are previous normalisations of Black, female domesticity constituted in discourse? And how are these discourses negotiated in Aotearoa/New Zealand?

Methodology

Feminist perspectives and Foucauldian discourse analysis

Foucault's work on power and knowledge argues that human beings *become* subjects through the ways in which knowledge socially circulates and functions through discourse (Foucault, 1982; Rouse, 1987). Power

exercised through discourse constitutes and governs knowledge, social practices and subjectivity (Parker, 1990). Knowledge is inextricably connected to power, gaining the ability to constitute what then becomes ‘truth’. White South Africans’ constructions of identity are therefore the dynamic outcomes of highly complex and intersectional mechanisms of power perpetuated by dominant ideologies (Rousse, 1987). Within the current study, feminist perspectives are combined with Foucauldian principles to bring attention to how knowledge and subjectivity are constituted by complex and intersectional relations of race, gender and social class (Crenshaw, 2017).

We adopt a positioning termed *radical empiricism* in feminist research, which calls for research to be empirical, grounded and politically accountable without being reductive (Braidotti, 2005; Haraway, 1988). This perspective allows for the combination of critique with creativity in the research process, further mobilising critical theory into potential for change. Rather than merely pointing out the discourses that circulate to position subjects, this approach reveals how these relations of power are mobilised in material practices and spaces (Booher & Jung, 2018) to enable possibilities of difference (Braidotti, 2005), such as understanding how White entitlement to Black domestic labour was socially justified and how it could now be understood differently. The primary author of the paper also acknowledges that the multiple positioning(s) she occupies as a White, female, South African-born immigrant living in Aotearoa/New Zealand have shaped her interest in this topic. So too has her own family’s employment of a Black maid in South Africa prior to immigrating.

Procedure

Permission for the study was granted by the Ethics Committee of Massey University. A post was placed on three group Facebook pages of South Africans who have immigrated to Aotearoa/New Zealand, inviting people aged over 18 years of any race, culture, ethnicity, or gender to take part in the study. Participants were required to have either grown up with a maid in their home in South Africa or have employed a maid themselves. Interested people contacted the researcher through a private message and an information sheet was sent. Eight participants—five females and three males—were recruited. The participants’ ages ranged from 30 to 60 years. The participants were informed that the primary researcher was a self-identified White, South African immigrant. The ethnicity, racial category or identification of the participants was not predetermined, and they referred to themselves as White English, White Afrikaans, South African or New Zealander. Semi-structured interviews, between 40 and 90 minutes long, were conducted at the university. The interviews were audio-recorded and included discussion around topics such as what household life had been like for the participants when they lived in South Africa, the relationship they had had with their or their family’s domestic worker(s) in South Africa, and how they think Aotearoa/New Zealand and South African societal views on domestic work compare.

Analysis

There are multiple ways to undertake discourse analysis (McNay, 1994), and the accounts presented here could have been identified and interpreted in a range of different ways (Ussher & Perz, 2019). We therefore acknowledge that this analysis of discourse cannot be separated from the positionings of the author(s). Full transcription of the interviews was undertaken consistent with a discourse analysis adaption (Fairclough, 1992) that focused on identifying sets of statements that reflected shared patterns of meaning (Ussher & Perz, 2019). Following the interviews, the primary author immersed herself extensively in the data by transcribing, reading, re-reading, identifying, mapping and discussing patterns and practices with the co-authors that appeared consistent among the participants. These patterns were then further explored in terms of the knowledge systems and practices they enabled or disabled. The implications of these patterns

and practices for subjectivities and the social practice of domestic service in both countries were then grouped into discourses and named in a way that best represented the knowledge systems created by the participants. Many more discourses were identified but here we present four dominant discourses.

Findings

Four dominant discourses construct the ways in which domesticity is constructed and renegotiated by the participants. None of the participants mentioned employing a domestic worker in Aotearoa/New Zealand, and the following analysis illustrates how the different social, cultural and political context would make that inappropriate, if not impossible. The justification for employing domestic workers in White South African households is constituted by the *invisible Whiteness* discourse, where racial hierarchy justified White entitlement to Black servitude. The normalisation of domestic chores as reserved for women in South Africa, and not for White men, is justified through the discourse of *gendered domestic work* where masculine entitlement perpetuates traditionalist ideologies within Whiteness. These two discourses are confronted with the *more equal* discourse in Aotearoa/New Zealand, where the operation of domestic chores in Aotearoa/New Zealand conflicts with previous racial and gendered positionings. The final discourse—*lifting the veil*—produces an ideological tension following emigration and promotes a questioning of South African domestic practice.

Invisible Whiteness

This discourse accounts for a normalisation of White authority in South Africa which is constructed as a racially charged society with categorisations and hierarchies that enable White privilege to be regarded as expected, justifiable and largely unquestioned by White people:

“I never questioned the Black and White thing; it was just part of the lifestyle that we led. And you know it astounds me now how there was no questioning, no anything. It was just part of life.” (Joanne)

Racial categorisation is constructed as a part of everyday life. A ‘we’ and a ‘them’ achieves what Foucault (1982) terms “dividing practices”. Joanne becomes subject to racial categorisation, recognising herself as a White subject through division from the Black. What Joanne perceives as the ordinary, everyday nature of this categorisation means it was accepted without question. The privilege of not questioning her positioning within the racial hierarchy is surprising to her now as her knowledge of herself is tied to the power of her Whiteness (Foucault, 1982).

Whiteness granted Joanne the privilege of never needing to question, nor confront, the authority granted to her because it was just “part of life”. The invisibility of racial hierarchy made the entitlements of Whiteness seem natural. Stuart expands on how the embeddedness within a racial hierarchy for White South Africans rendered racism invisible to them:

“It’s so difficult to say to a White South African: ‘Were you a racist?’, you know. The obvious answer is always going to be, ‘No I wasn’t a racist’, but that’s bullshit. You were so embedded within that hierarchy of race that it’s become part of your psyche.” (Stuart)

Stuart constructs systemic relations that justify racism. Racial hierarchy is embedded within the White “psyche”, a societal positioning so powerful it becomes embodied. Racial hierarchy as a knowledge set that is invisible to its beneficiaries suggests that the privilege it grants to White people applies itself to everyday life as a normative, permissible way to function in society (Foucault, 1982).

Knowledge of racial subjectivity also informs what forms of employment were regarded as appropriate for people depending on skin colour:

“Well, in South Africa you wouldn’t ever find a White woman as a domestic worker because it was beneath them as a job. The lowest they’d do is filing paperwork in an office ’cause they’re better than that.” (Brenda)

Black and White are not simply a means of categorisation, but bear what Foucault terms an “action orientation”: racial categorisations control, constrain or allow action (Foucault & Gordon, 1980). The same hierarchy constrains the Black person; namely, the Black woman who typically fulfils such duties and whose worthiness is then implied as below that of a White woman. Domestic work becomes constituted not only by racial hierarchy but also by gendered constructs of domestic work. The Black maid’s subjection is therefore derived not only from racial classification but from other economic and social processes of class and patriarchy informed by the ideology and power of Whiteness (Foucault, 1982).

The invisible Whiteness discourse constructs a normalisation of White privilege and assigns Whiteness the power to determine positionings within the racial hierarchy. Outwardly supremacist positionings are shielded by the nuances of having previously been unaware of racial privilege and the assumed superiority this privilege afforded White people. White women are positioned as higher in the hierarchy, justifying the construction of the Black woman as worthy of servitude. Gendered and racial ideologies emerging from this discourse are sustained by oppression and the invisibility of White privilege.

Gendered domestic work

Through the discourse of gendered domestic work, the White South African household as a domestic space is constituted as female. Gendered ideologies are constructed as entrenched, positioning women as dutiful to the maintenance of the household. The power of a patriarchal Whiteness enables a gendered hierarchy within racial categories:

“I think South Africa is still more... in general, is a lot more traditional than New Zealand so I think those gender roles and stuff and even sexism is still a lot more alive over there, you know. And... I think it would take a lot longer to shift.” (Harry)

Harry’s account suggests an historical establishment of patriarchal ideologies, but “even sexism” suggests an awareness of these ideologies and how entrenched they are. A traditionalist mentality suggests a stubbornness in which these beliefs around racial entitlement, domesticity and gender remain resistant to change. Foucault (1977) deems the modern Western state’s form of power, termed “pastoral power”, as originating in institutions such as the church. Such institutionalised forms of power are congruent with the common constructions of British colonies and Afrikaner culture as rooted in religion (Gilliom, 2003). Pastoral power creates and sustains such traditionalist knowledges of gender, spreading from the church and into the broader functioning of society (Foucault, 1977). In this instance, action is constrained or enabled through roles governed by sexist ideals. Rebecca extends Harry’s introduction of gender roles, positioning the “typical” South African male as entitled not to participate in domestic chores:

“The typical South African guy doesn’t help in the house at all. They come home, they sit on the couch, watch TV, expect their plate of food. I think the culture made them who they are, and I think it’s because of many years before the Black domestic workers doing everything, giving them everything.” (Rebecca)

Gender intersects with race (Crenshaw, 2017), granting the White male the ability to avoid domestic activities due to his superior positioning within the household. Whiteness is therefore constructed not only as a form of power positioning people within a racial hierarchy, but as a traditional, patriarchal culture that affords White South African men the expectation that women undertake all domestic activities within the home. This suggests male expectancy of female servitude in the home is widespread and is a mechanism through which female domestic labour is legitimised (Crenshaw, 2017).

Annie extends on the subjectivities of women as governed by the expectations of the White, patriarchal household:

“A household in South Africa is busy but I think it’s the same more or less everywhere. You come home from work and there’s a certain amount of work that you have to do for the household to continue. I think if a mother is working full-time, like I did at that stage, domestic workers are...we thought, and we grew up with the thought that it is necessary to have that domestic help.” (Annie)

Annie places the woman of the household within constraints, juggling the demands of work, children and household chores. Drawing on personal experiences, she positions the lifestyle of the White woman as dependent on the Black domestic worker. Domestic help is constructed as necessary as it enables Annie to work full-time instead of cleaning and childminding, increasing her financial advantages and thus her place in the social hierarchy. Both women, however, are positioned as dutiful to the domestic space, their relation to each other the consequence of patriarchal and economic relations.

This discourse intersects racial categories with gendered subjectivities (Crenshaw, 2017) to position domestic tasks as women’s work. The institution of the household thereby holds the authority to enforce totalising forms of power on an individual level (Foucault, 1982), where both Black and White women remain tied to the preservation of its maintenance. A collective duty to the maintenance of the household for South African women grants the White household the power and authority to hire Black women for subservient roles and, in doing so, protects the economic superiority of Whiteness. Whiteness, and in particular White male expectancy, thereby enables the White household to continue its privileged societal positioning and justifies Black female domestic servitude as necessary to maintaining the White household’s social and economic superiority.

More equal

In contrast to the previous two discourses, this discourse highlights how participants position domestic relations in Aotearoa/New Zealand society as fairer than in South Africa. Aotearoa/New Zealand is constructed as a society premised on egalitarian principles which disrupt and bring into question previous knowledges of domestic labour as an exclusively gendered and racial practice. Rebecca utilises these principles to frame domestic work as an occupation available to people of any racial category and gender:

“In New Zealand, everybody is doing everything, and no one is looking down on someone. No one is saying: ‘Oh you’re a domestic worker’ or ‘You’re an electrician—okay, no don’t mingle with him.’ No, if I say, ‘I deliver the mail every day’ or ‘I’m a domestic worker’—which in South Africa is below your standard—here if you say that to someone, they will say, ‘Oh good on you, mate.’” (Rebecca)

Rebecca positions electricians or mail deliverers as ‘lower class’ in South Africa but regarded by Aotearoa/New Zealanders as praiseworthy. By contrast, in Aotearoa/New Zealand it is normal to treat a domestic worker or a postal worker the same as someone working a ‘higher class’ job. Rebecca’s positioning

of employment as a domestic worker as beneath a White person in South Africa but not in Aotearoa/New Zealand suggests an egalitarian ethos less constrained by hierarchical judgements.

However, other participants perceived hierarchies in Aotearoa/New Zealand too:

Researcher: “How do you think people view domestic workers, or cleaners, or anyone in the service here?”

Harry: “I would say like there’s a little bit of still... looking down on them? Not quite, but just classing them a bit lower, you know?”

The subtle framing of “not quite” suggests Harry thinks hierarchical relations of power exist in Aotearoa/New Zealand but less blatantly. These subtleties suggest an experience of different structures of power in Aotearoa/New Zealand, as mechanisms of racial and gendered subjection are not socially acceptable and, instead, people are positioned within a hierarchy of occupational class.

The participants also commented on the difference in gendered domestic work within households. Katherine, for instance, expanded on patriarchal structures of power in Aotearoa/New Zealand within the domestic space:

“The people we know here... it seems that the men are a lot more willing to be involved with whatever chores need to get done. I find a very different dynamic here in New Zealand, you know; people have grown up doing a lot of things themselves rather than in South Africa [where] you’ve got other people who can do a lot of things for them.” (Katherine)

Katherine positions men as self-sufficient in Aotearoa/New Zealand and more willing to be involved in household chores. In Aotearoa/New Zealand, the power of the White household to justify male entitlement and expectancy is disrupted. The male ‘willingness’ as embedded in upbringing suggests an ideology of independence and self-sufficiency within Aotearoa/New Zealand households, contradicting the previously normalised entitlement of South African masculinity and suggesting a more equal distribution of domestic responsibility. Annie’s account of the treatment of domestic workers in Aotearoa/New Zealand further disrupts previous understandings of domestic labour:

“In New Zealand they treat domestic workers like normal people doing just a job.” (Annie)

Annie’s positioning of a domestic worker as a “normal” person presumes the treatment of domestic workers in South Africa could now be considered abnormal in contrast. Knowledge of domesticity as rooted in a less easily identifiable hierarchy means domestic work need not be considered a job reserved only for Black women, nor a justification for racial subservience. Through this discourse, the authority of Whiteness to determine domestic servitude as a positioning conducive to a ‘less-than-human Other’ is disrupted, perhaps because the politics that sustain the ability of the household space to grant this subjectivity are not constituted solely by racial and gendered ideology in Aotearoa/New Zealand. The previous beliefs defining normality and legitimising the treatment of people have shifted in this new context.

The now-visibility of a taken-for-granted domestic employment that rests on Black oppression and White domination is difficult to negotiate within the construction of a ‘relatively fair’ Aotearoa/New Zealand. Inconsistencies in social class and gendered positionings in Aotearoa/New Zealand are presented through nuanced constructions of a hierarchy that is less explicit. How participants negotiate the changed views following emigration is further explored through the fourth discourse.

Lifting the veil

This last discourse accounts for how the exposure of White entitlement to Black domestic labour is negotiated within what is perceived to be a fairer society. A previously justifiable domestic arrangement in South Africa becomes confronting through comparison with a culture that places a different emphasis on domestic work. This discourse enables questioning of racism and the justification of the treatment of domestic workers in South Africa, with a ‘more equal’ construction of Aotearoa/New Zealand as the catalyst. Harry accounts for his awareness of previous institutional knowledge following emigration:

“I suppose coming to New Zealand has really highlighted that [privilege] for me. It’s really challenged me and my...ah, I just suppose the institutionalism racism stuff that has been ingrained in every part of [South African] society—you know, that really challenged me.”
(Harry)

The indoctrination of social beliefs that Harry once considered normal highlights how deeply entrenched racism can be (Foucault, 1982). Harry admits to being challenged by coming to Aotearoa/New Zealand where his previous conceptions of race are, perhaps, incompatible with life in his new country. Brandon similarly explains this emigration-related change: “My eyes also opened up in the sense of what we did to people.” The expression “my eyes opened up” signifies they were closed in the past, as the normality of Whiteness shielded oppressive acts from view. Now, the ability to enact superiority through the power of Whiteness is challenged. The relations of power sustaining White superiority over Black maids in South Africa become more visible in Aotearoa/New Zealand, and, as Stuart says, the South African power relations are difficult to negotiate as a White person in a new space:

“Race is so embedded; you’re constantly within yourself faced with this paradox, particularly if you’re a liberal open-minded person. You try and see people for what they are, and I do that all the time, but then within you there’s constantly, let’s call it a racist demon, that appears at times and you’ve got to constantly adjust your vision of this.” (Stuart)

Stuart positions himself as trying to live within a culture he perceives to be fairer, modifying his previous conceptions of race. Despite positioning himself as liberal and open-minded, the “demon” of his historical indoctrination appears and an apartheid Whiteness, which requires relentless surveillance, rears its head.

Overall, lifting the veil is a discourse through which a conflict of beliefs is experienced following emigration, and having been complicit in a racist system is confronting. The invisible Whiteness and gendered domestic work discourses are contrasted with constructions of a society that do not allow for justifications of domestic work as reserved solely for Black women. The institutionalised ideologies that enabled such justifications are questioned and difficult to reconcile in a country where domestic labour relations are less rigidly structured. White privilege is renegotiated and previous entitlements to Black domesticity are disrupted as constructions of Aotearoa/New Zealand ideologies expose a deeply entrenched indoctrination.

Discussion

Deconstruction of the four discourses of invisible Whiteness, gendered domestic work, more equal, and lifting the veil raises the significance of renegotiating the White self in Aotearoa/New Zealand through the lens of domestic work. A major significance of the findings is that becoming embedded within a new culture following emigration can be a catalyst for reflection, comparison and challenge of previous beliefs.

Whiteness as a form of power that created and sustained blindness to a participation in the exploitation of Black domestic workers in South Africa is exposed through new ways of understanding social roles. Navigating what participants constructed to be a more equal space than the apartheid-entrenched one of their pasts enables a questioning of previously taken-for-granted practices and beliefs. An egalitarian construction of Aotearoa/New Zealand, although rooted in myth (Kahu et al., 2022), enables South Africans to renegotiate Whiteness as a subjectivity that can be enacted without entitlement. Internalised gendered subjectivities are confronted alongside race in Aotearoa/New Zealand through domesticity. Although much research into Whiteness in South Africa has focused on race and power (Green et al., 2007; Griffiths & Prozesky, 2010; Steyn, 2001), the discourse of gendered domestic work suggests gendered lines of division intersect with racial categories (Crenshaw, 2017) to elevate the White South African woman's social and economic positioning. To view the household as an institution encompasses rules and boundaries that allow its functioning, with women deemed suited to its maintenance (Cock, 1987; Jansen, 2011). This discourse speaks to gendered subordination and points to a larger, 'master' story of Whiteness that relied on racism to sustain its patriarchal authority. The White woman was then also subjected by the patriarchal and economic demands of Whiteness in South Africa, as she took responsibility for the household chores while participating in the 'productive' economy. If she wanted to do both, invisible Whiteness enabled her entitlement to cheap Black household labour as normative and necessary, and gendered domestic work sustained the assumption this labour be female. These discourses of Whiteness, gender, and race are unsettled by the construction of Aotearoa/New Zealand as fairer and more equal than South Africa. In Aotearoa/New Zealand, men are positioned as more willing to help with household chores. The justification for full-time domestic employment is thus not as strong, relinquishing the full burden of household responsibility from women. Men in South Africa then become positioned as entitled by comparison, again suggesting that a different context allows reflection on previously 'common-sense' discourse.

The renegotiation of subjectivities brings the institution of the household as a site of knowledge production into focus. If the Foucauldian view of power and knowledge as interconnected is adopted, then the argument is this: the macro political powers governing the household have changed following emigration and its connection to the cultural socio-political landscape of South Africa is disrupted. In a context where it was difficult to imagine household life any other way, the subjectivities of White employer and Black maid were accepted and justified (Griffiths & Prozesky, 2010). These relations of power are no longer functioning following relocation to Aotearoa/New Zealand where constructions of a fairer and more equal society enable new ways of living beyond the strictures of sharply defined racial hierarchies. This difference is confronting as it highlights the extent to which the ideology of the "racist demon" continues to live on. The White South African migrant can no longer enact the previous narrative of Whiteness if "everyone in New Zealand is just doing everything" for themselves without Black maids. The entitlement to a Black maid being synonymous with White identity and cultural practice therefore diminishes the power of the White subject if the Black maid no longer sustains the hierarchy (Green et al., 2007). The White South African is thus tasked not only with renegotiating their taken-for-granted privilege, but also the idea that perhaps their previously invisible power of Whiteness functioned only through the disempowerment of the Black servant. Being a White New Zealander, therefore, becomes different to being a White South African because the justification of Black maids as a mechanism for sustaining White privilege is neither appropriate nor accepted through the counter-narratives migrants draw on to situate labour relations in Aotearoa/New Zealand. The sense of self that rested on racial hierarchy then becomes exposed and needs to be confronted.

Not only do these discourses shed light on one of the most profound psychological readjustments for migrant White South Africans (Steyn, 2001), but they plant the seeds for further research into South

Africans outside of South Africa. The findings of this study are limited to a small, local population, but Whiteness in the context of domestic labour should continue to be explored with a wider scope. The reflection by some participants suggest that even ingrained, systemic and deeply complex historical discourses can be exposed and renegotiated. This has major implications not only for White South Africans but also for colonial preconceptions and beliefs of ‘other’ spaces and people. The legacy of connections that bind all individuals and countries together does not simply come to an end after colonisation or emigration (Said, 1994). Discourses construct reality and knowledge of the world and self (Foucault, 1982). As South Africans continue to emigrate, catching new social constructions in the act will provide further insight into how migrants renegotiate identities amidst conflicting social norms. Apartheid’s most brutal legacy was assigning all South Africans an identity premised almost entirely on vectors of race, gender and social class. Yet, just as human beings make their own history through discourse, so too can they create space for new counter-narratives (Said, 1994).

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