

**Lived experience of positional suffering for room attendants at
Rhodes University: Insights for the transformation agenda**

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By

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Abstract

Taking insights from the domestic work literature both locally and internationally, this study explores the lived experiences of room attendants who work as cleaners in the students' residences at Rhodes University. The study focuses on the housekeeping division of Rhodes University. Data was generated from in-depth individual interviews and focus groups with 26 women and 3 men participants (aged between 28 and 60) who work as room attendants, and who were recruited from the residences across the university. The phenomenological approach allowed the participants to articulate in-depth, their experiences of working as room attendants in intimate spaces. This study used a triangulated conceptual framework, which amalgamated the concepts of pain, social space and intersectionality, and exploitation under the umbrella concept of positional suffering. Within a higher education transformation agenda which has marginalised the experiences of unskilled workers at the university, the study seeks to bring insights to the understanding of transformation at Rhodes University through the experiences of the being-in-the-world of room attendants.

Keywords: phenomenology, domestic work, higher education, intersectionality, positional suffering, exploitation

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Introduction

Research on the phenomenon of domestic workers both locally and internationally has shown they are among the most exploited workers in the world. Domestic workers' challenges are as a result of this kind of work being undervalued (see for instance International Labour Organisation, 2011 & 2015). There are various incidents of maltreatment and abuse which domestic workers suffer from, and in many instances these often go unreported because of the private nature of domestic work and the power imbalance that exists between the employer and employee (Messias, 2001; Yeoh & Huang, 1998). The suffering occasioned by domestic work becomes embodied in the domestic workers' bodies (see for instance De Casanova, 2013). Despite advances and gains being made on the legislative front in many countries including South Africa, the lived realities of domestic workers reveal that they are still subjected to exploitation (Du Toit, 2013). In the context of higher education institutions in South Africa, the workers who perform similar tasks to those performed by domestic workers in private households – tasks such as gardening, cleaning and cooking – have been subjected to a practice of outsourcing in many South African public higher education institutions (Luckett and Fogel, 2015). This has been reported to result in serious levels of exploitation for these workers.

In this study the centre of focus is on the Rhodes University housekeeping division, and the research objective is to explore the lived experiences of room attendants who are responsible for cleaning the residences where students live. Rhodes University as a workplace for service staff is a different context to that of many other South African higher education institutions as the workers are insourced, and that has been a practice for a long time. This research thus seeks to draw insights from the domestic work literature in order to explore the experiences of room attendants who also work in intimate spaces in the university residences, and under what can be expected to be a different work context compared to many other universities as the university does not outsource these workers. The study takes place within the context of the findings of the Rhodes University Institutional Culture Staff Survey of 2014, and the mandate from that survey for a more in-depth research approach in order to investigate the lived realities of Grades 1-3 workers. This research also looks at the transformation of higher education discourse in South African public higher education in general, and Rhodes University in particular, and this is done with the objective of arguing for the importance of

looking at the experiences of room attendants as insights which needs to be added to the transformation agenda of the university.

The following chapter provides background to the dynamics and challenges within higher education institutions. The chapter also looks at the domestic work literature and then shifts attention to the context of Rhodes University in order to understand the worker dynamics within the institution. The second chapter provides a conceptual framework, and the aim is to discuss the triangulation of theory: that is the amalgamation of different theoretical approaches (pain, social space and intersectionality, and exploitation) into one overarching concept of positional suffering so as to apprehend the lived experiences of the workers whose occupational status is labelled as unskilled and defined decision making, who are at the bottom of Rhodes University's occupational hierarchy. The third chapter looks at the methods and procedures followed when doing this research, and the key focus is on phenomenology as a research approach. The fourth chapter delves into the lived experience of bodily pain and suffering and the meaning given by the room attendants to this experience. The fifth chapter focuses on lived human relations and draws from intersectionality which is the ubiquitous conceptual approach in domestic work literature, in order to understand what it means for the workers who are black and women in majority to work in intimate spaces such as the residences. The sixth chapter will focus on the lived reality of exploitation, which is the meaning given by room attendants of their perception of low salaries and time deprivation/poverty (see for instance Bardasi and Wodon, 2010). The last chapter will conclude the thesis and its aim will be to highlight the important themes which have emerged from the research, and what those actually mean for higher education transformation at Rhodes University.

1. Background and Context

In 2008, the University of Free State community and the South African public at large witnessed an act of racial victimisation, discrimination, and abuse of university cleaners in the workplace. The four white male students who were as a result of the racist incident referred to as the Reitz four, made a video of the university cleaners kneeling down and eating food which had been urinated upon, and also swallowing a bottle of beer (Mail and Guardian Online, 2008). Subsequent to the incident, the Bloemfontein Magistrate Mziwonke Hinxha, found the Reitz four guilty of *crimen injuria*. The case was settled out of court in 2011. The incident caused public ire and was condemned as it was taken as an execution of the human dignity of the black workers (Mail and Guardian Online, 2008).

Following this incident, the then Minister of Education, Honourable Naledi Pandor, announced a Ministerial Committee on Progress Towards Transformation and Social Cohesion and the Elimination of Discrimination in Public Higher Education Institutions (Soudien Report, 2008). The core objectives of the report were to investigate the phenomenon of discrimination in institutions of higher learning with a specific focus on racism and to make available recommendations so as to purge the scourge of racism and to promote social cohesion (Soudien Report, 2008). The scope however, was also widened to other forms of discrimination on the basis of gender, ethnicity and disability (Soudien Report, 2008). The report comprehensively captures the experiences of academic staff and students with regard to their views on racism and discrimination across South African Universities (Soudien Report, 2008). The report also incorporates three comments from support staff members of the University of Cape Town, the University of Free State and Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (Soudien Report, 2008). The views of the UCT worker as captured by the report were that the support staff at UCT bears the brunt of policies such as outsourcing, as it means that their work status becomes vulnerable and conditions becoming exploitative (Soudien Report, 2008). The data of the Soudien Report was gathered through institutional visits to various Universities across the country. The Committee located this

report within the context of the transformation agenda of higher education in South Africa (Soudien Report, 2008).

The transformation imperative of the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) had been set against the backdrop of the Constitutional imperative of undoing the legacy of apartheid in South Africa. Subsequent to the political breakthrough which ushered in a democratic government, legislative & policy documents such as the White Paper 3 of 1997, National Plan for Higher Education of 2001, White Paper of 2013, had been set so as to deal with the remnants of apartheid in the higher education sector. The main focus areas of this legislation have been to: increase the number of black students, increasing the number of black academics, and to focus on students with disabilities (White Paper 3, 1997; White Paper, 2013). The plans were also to restructure institutions of higher learning, i.e. the mergers between former technikons and universities (White Paper 3, 1997; White Paper, 2013). The objective of restructuring has been aimed at dealing with the bifurcated higher education structure which was inherited from apartheid, which made the historically black institutions inferior in so far as infrastructure and capacity are concerned (National Plan for Higher Education, 2001).

In the academic community the transformation imperative as espoused by the policy documents has been widely captured. The scholarly attention has been on academic staff in relation to the transformation of higher education institutions (Hemson & Singh, 2010; Mapesela & Hay, 2006). Some of the focus has been on the experiences of black women and how they navigate the gender discriminative nature of the institutions of higher learning (Idahosa & Vincent, 2014; Loots, Ts'ephe & Walker, 2016). The imperative of opening the doors of learning to students who were previously excluded has been articulated (see for instance Akojee & Nkomo, 2007; Cele & Menon, 2006); and other scholars have focused on the needs of students with disabilities (Crous, 2004; Howell & Lazarus, 2003). With these transformation policy targets in the background, according to the Vital Stats for the period 2008-2012 published by the Council on Higher Education, (CHE, 2015) the headcount of student enrolments by race for 2012 were 689503 African students, and if we look into headcount enrolment by gender, 573698 were women. Participation rates by race in 2012 comprised 16% African students, and for academic staff it stood at 17753 (CHE, 2013).

Domestic work

The international domestic workers' convention which was convened in Geneva by the governing body known as the International Labour Organisation (ILO), sought to intervene in what has been characterised internationally as exploitative work through setting minimum standards for employers. There are anywhere between 53 to 100 million domestic workers across the globe (ILO, 2011). In the main, women constitute a large percentage, as domestic work constitutes 7.5% of women's total wage employment (ILO, 2011). The policy documents have also encapsulated the key challenges which are faced by the domestic workers whom most of them have a migrant labour status, and these challenges include among others: vulnerability to abuse and slavery, lack of inclusion in the labour protective mechanisms of the respective countries of work, low wages, long hours of work, and severe health problems due to the intensive nature of the workload (ILO, 2011; ILO, 2015). The literature on domestic work on the international landscape has also noted the exploitative nature and the abusive practices employers subject their workers to (Messias, 2001; Yeoh & Huang, 1998; Briones, 2009; Cohen, 1991; De Casanova, 2013; Gill, 1988; Armado, 2003). The domestic workers carry out important tasks in private households and these include cooking, cleaning, laundry, shopping, and caring for children (ILO, 2011).

Shifting attention to the South African context of domestic work, the data cited by the BusinessTech Online (2015) news source indicates that South Africa has in excess of one million domestic workers, and they constitute more than 8% of the total workforce. On the legislative front, the South African domestic workers have been incorporated in the legislation by the Department of Labour, which seeks to give protection to workers. The main labour legislation which covers domestic workers is known as Sectoral Determination 7, and the kind of domestic workers accommodated in the legislation are those which include housekeepers, gardeners, nannies, and domestic drivers (Department of Labour Online, 2015). Sectoral Determination 7 covers aspects of work such as minimum wages, working hours, number of leave days, and termination of rules (Department of Labour Online, 2015). South Africa has also been mentioned in the ILO Domestic Workers Convention policies document (2011) to have ratified the Convention in order to strengthen national laws and regulation to protect domestic workers.

The South African literature on domestic work has also looked at the impacts of extending the arm of the law so that it could cover domestic work. This literature has divergent views in terms of the effects of domestic labour legislation. Some scholars are of the view that the private setting and intimate setting of domestic work has made it difficult for the law to be effectively implemented (du Toit, 2013; Maboyana & Sekaja, 2015; Donald & Mahlatji, 2014; Grossman, 2011; Gobind, du Plessis & Ukpere, 2012; Marais, 2014). According to du Toit (2013:57) “in spite of the South Africa legislation providing domestic workers with core protections required by international law, substantive inequality between domestic workers and their employers continue to exist”. There are also sources from the online media who have expressed their pessimism with the legal protection stating that it has not transformed the nature of domestic work as the workers are still characterised by vulnerability in this sector (Motala, 2010).

The impact of minimum wages and legal protection in general in the domestic work sector has also invited scholars who have looked at it from an economics perspective (Hertz, 2004; Blaauw and Bothma, 2010; Dinkelman and Ranchod, 2010); these scholars through statistical tools (Blaauw and Bothma, 2010) have argued that the introduction of minimum wages in domestic work in South Africa has improved nominal and real wages of domestic workers, thereby improving their purchasing power. Sebola (2014) has challenged the argument by stating that minimum wages are a threat to employment and his findings prove that employment did decline after the legislation of minimum wages.

The existing literature on the South African domestic work phenomenon has sought to give the historical context of the experiences of domestic workers during apartheid years (Gaitskell, Kimble, Maconachie & Unterhalter, 1983; Ginsburg, 1999; Cock, 1989). Gaitskell *et al.* (1983:88) look at how class, race and gender intersected in apartheid South Africa and how these cemented the subjugation of black women to domestic work which is “generally looked upon in society as inferior, servile, low in status and badly paid”. Ginsburg (1999:56) who has also given domestic work a historical context looks at the attitude and prejudices which were prevalent in the 1960s as she argues that “by mid twentieth century a large number of rural female migrants worked as domestics and that they stayed in backyards, and

the fact that there were uncoded house rules so that the domestic worker may know her position in the white employer's household".

The nature of domestic work in South Africa has also invited the attention of different scholars with different areas of focus in the post-apartheid dispensation. Some scholars (Fish, 2006; Kehler, 2001; Ally, 2009; du Toit, 2013) have focused on the persistence of class, gender and race oppression which is experienced by domestic workers in South Africa who are still black and female in their majority. Fish (2006:81) characterises the post-apartheid social institution of domestic work as the "last bastion of apartheid". Another scholar with a different focus area within the South African domestic work literature who has looked at the experiences of Basotho migrant domestic workers in South Africa is Laura Griffin (2011) – her work looks at the difficulties migrant domestic workers from Lesotho experience when it comes to the labour law as she argues that these workers find the labour institutions inaccessible. As I have already mentioned that literature on South African domestic workers has sought to pay attention to the different intricacies of domestic workers' experiences; in that vein Archer (2011) focuses largely on the distinctions drawn by the employers between the food they eat and the quality of food eaten by the domestic worker; Dilata (2008) looks at the intra-racial power dynamics between black domestic employers and workers and the emphasis is on class as the defining characteristic of inequality in this sector; and Urdang (2006) looks at unpaid domestic work in the context of the impact of AIDS and women's responsibilities within the household care economy. The main findings are that South African domestic workers who are largely black and female, still experience vulnerability and being subjected to terrible working conditions and long hours in spite of the labour legislation which has been introduced as a form of protection.

Service staff and the struggle against outsourcing

Public higher education institutions in South Africa hire different staff personnel and it is important to clarify the difference between academic employees and other employees. Any person appointed to teach or to conduct research at a public higher education institution is referred to as an academic employee (Higher Education Act 101, 1997). The service staff who provide support services are any other employees employed by the university, and the

term support services refers to the manual and menial occupations such as cleaning, catering, grounds and building maintenance, security services and transport (van der Walt, Bolsmann, Johnson & Martin, 2002). The latest data available from the Council of Higher Education indicates that for the year 2013, there was in total 6642 members of service staff across South African public higher education institutions (CHE, 2015). Within that number 4380 were permanent staff members and 2662 were temporary workers (CHE, 2015). The proportion of permanent vs temporary service for the year 2013 was 34% and 66% respectively. If one considers the race dynamic of this labour force, out of a total workforce of 6642, 5159 workers were African, 780 were Coloured, 112 were Indian and 585 were white (CHE, 2015). In terms of the gender composition of the service staff for 2013, out of a total of 6642 – 2994 of the workforce were women (CHE, 2013).

Most of the members of service staff across public higher education institutions in South Africa are outsourced. van der Walt *et al.* (2002) traces the origins of outsourcing in South Africa to as early as in 1991 when the then Rand Afrikaans University started with outsourcing. Outsourcing became more ubiquitous across institutions of higher learning in 1999 as Lockett and Fogel (2015:2) argue that “institutions such as UCT embarked on extensive retrenchments and began outsourcing all so called support services. It pioneered the move that other universities soon followed, except Rhodes University”. The struggle to decolonise South African institutions of higher learning which started with the #RhodesMustFall movement at UCT in March 2015 (Lockett and Fogel, 2015), and later in the same year at Wits University the #FeesMustFall movement in October, heralded a moment of the struggle against outsourcing in universities as workers in these institutions joined forces with students to demand that all service staff be insourced (Barry, 2015).

The National Health Education and Allied Workers Union (Nehawu) which is the main union which organises members of service staff across public higher education institutions also joined forces with the students. The Western Cape leadership of Nehawu issued a statement in support of the #RhodesMustFall which also agitated for the practice of outsourcing to be done away with. In that statement of support, Nehawu leadership in the province called upon its members at UCT to be part of the campaign and their central demand was that the UCT employers must in-source the cleaning, security, garden and catering services that are

currently outsourced to exploitative private service providers (Nehawu-Western Cape Secretariat, 2015). The leadership in the province argued that “it was illogical for the institution to divorce its core business from the support services because they are mutually symbiotic” (Nehawu-Western Cape Secretariat, 2015:1).

At the beginning of 2016 in January, Nehawu and the Tshwane University of Technology management reached an agreement on insourcing which resulted in cleaning services, gardening and maintenance services, security services and catering services being insourced (Nehawu-Secretariat, 2016). At Wits University, the Workers Solidarity Committee is comprised of workers and students who organise in solidarity for decent work. The University Workers Charter was crafted in 2015 and it outlined the dangers of outsourcing and among many, the committee mentioned that “outsourced workers enjoy few benefits as they have no medical aid, travel allowances, housing and maternity benefits or pensions” (University Workers’ Charter, 2015:1). The central demands in the charter were the following: “a living wage, a secure job, safe and healthy working conditions, access to education facilities and permanent jobs for all workers” (University Workers’ Charter, 2015:1). The charter was delivered on the 6th of October 2016 to both Wits University and the University of Johannesburg. Since 2015 up until more recently in September 2016, the #FeesMustFall movement has been in the struggle for fee-free higher education in which #OutsourcingMustFall has also been a centre of attention.

Rhodes University Context

Rhodes University is located in the city of Grahamstown, within Makana Municipality, in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa. In 2010, according to Dr Saleem Badat (2011:6) “the institution at the time contributed to about 65% of the town’s Gross Domestic Product”. This effectively means that it is the largest employer in the town that has a gigantic unemployment rate, which in 2012 was said to be 80% (Supernews, 2012). The unemployment rate for Makana Municipality according to the latest data available on StatsSa (2011) was 32,5% during the 2011 census. The following two tables below show the institutional profile of Rhodes University:

Department of Labour Occupational Levels

	Academic	Support staff
Top management		Support staff grades 24 to 28
Senior management		Support staff grades 19 to 23
Professionally Qualified, Experienced Specialists and Middle Management	All academic Staff	Support staff grades 14 to 18
Skilled Technical and academically qualified workers, Jnr. Managers, Supervisors etc		Support staff grades 9 to 13
Semi-skilled and discretionary decision making		Support staff grades 4 to 8
Unskilled and defined decision making		Support staff grades 1 to 3

Table 1: Human Resources-Rhodes University

Institutional profile of the number of designated staff

	Permanent Staff			Permanent and temporary staff		
Department of Labour Categories	Black (African, Coloured, Indian)	Women	Foreign Nationals	Black (African, Coloured, Indian)	Women	Foreign Nationals
1 - Top Management	1 (50%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (50%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
2 - Senior Management	3 (27%)	8 (73%)	0 (0%)	3 (27%)	8 (73%)	0 (0%)
3 - Professionally Qualified	105 (25%)	186 (44%)	43 (10%)	143 (25%)	252 (45%)	66 (12%)
4 - Skilled Technical	144 (56%)	154 (59%)	2 (1%)	178 (57%)	195 (62%)	5 (2%)
5 - Semi-skilled	223 (90%)	145 (58%)	1 (1%)	251 (88%)	166 (58%)	4 (1%)
6 - Unskilled	316 (100%)	176 (56%)	0 (0%)	344 (100%)	184 (53%)	0 (0%)
TOTAL PERMANENT	792 (63%)	669 (53%)	46 (4%)	920 (61%)	805 (53%)	75 (5%)

Table 2: Institutional Employment Equity Profile-Annual Reports and Consolidated Financial Statements, Rhodes University, 31 December 2015.

The centre of focus for this study is on the workers whose occupational status is defined as unskilled and defined decision making, and in the main they belong to the Grades 1-3 category (see Table 1). These include members of staff employed in the gardens and grounds, housekeeping, catering, and central cleaning services. In table 2 it is indicated that there are 316 black workers, and 176 women who are members of Grade 1-3 and employed on a

permanent basis. There are also 28 black workers in this group and 8 women who are employed on a temporary basis. Rhodes University is a highly residential university, and at housekeeping services, which is where the room attendants work, there are 13 housekeepers (supervisors) and 41 service staff (room attendants) across the university's 52 residences (see for instance <https://www.ru.ac.za/residentialoperations/housekeeping/>). A housekeeper and one room attendant per residence is allocated to each residence, and they are responsible for the hygiene in public areas such as the common rooms, passages and bathrooms and also the students' rooms once all the student have vacated their rooms (see for instance <https://www.ru.ac.za/residentialoperations/housekeeping/>).

In terms of the institutional culture of the university, Badat (2011) notes that the university has an institutional structure of race, class, and gender which is still alive in the present. Historically speaking Greyling (2007:23) notes that "since its establishment as an academic institution in 1904, the university was linked in name to colonialism and imperialism", and this it owes to it being named after a British arch imperialist Cecil John Rhodes. During the 100 year anniversary of the institution in 2004, academics who once studied at Rhodes during the apartheid years submitted their reflections of the past of the institution which were published in the *African Sociological Review* journal. In terms of racist incidents which emerged during apartheid Greyling, (2007) and; Hendricks & Vale (2004) noted how the NUSAS black delegates were barred from living in the student accommodation on campus. Steve Biko was one of the delegates and he discovered that "apartheid was alive and kicking" at Rhodes University (Hendricks & Vale, 2004:1). These scholars have highlighted various incidents in the history of the institution whereby black students were racially discriminated against (see for instance Greyling, 2007).

Continuing with this scholarly undertaking of documenting the legacies of the past, and their continued presence in the present at Rhodes University, Vincent (2005) looks at the remnants of apartheid in so far as lived-interpersonal relationships are concerned, and how this past continues to compartmentalise spaces and relations among students along racial lines. Satchwell (2005) looked at the experience of being white in the residential arena of the institution during her student days in the 1970s. Satchwell (2005:171) argues that "the few black people we met at Rhodes were domestic staff in their purple and white uniforms in the

halls of residence and, whose names frequently unremembered, were addressed generically as sisi. Arriving at Rhodes did not disturb our comfort zones to any great extent. We had nannies at home and now we had sisi in Res”.

Shepi Mati is another scholar within the academic community of Rhodes University who contributed to the literature published on the 100th anniversary of the institution. Mati laments the lack of appreciation and recognition of workers in the heritage of the institution, when in fact the hands of the working class had built the university:

Where are the chronicles of black workers who built this university, brick by brick? Where are the records of the women who cleaned these hostels and cooked food in these dining hall? Where are the stories of those who maintained these landscapes and gardens. (Shepi Mati, 2005:207-208)

The Office of Equity and Institutional Culture at Rhodes University also conducted an Institutional Culture Survey (2014) which was aimed at ascertaining the views of both academic and support staff on seven themes: equity and fairness, transformation, management, rewards and recognition, social environment and infrastructure, and general satisfaction. According to the RUICS (2014:10) “The survey had a response rate 56% – as out of the 1731 staff members eligible to complete the survey, 973 did so, which compares well with similar surveys conducted at other institutions”. In relation to themes such as equity and fairness, transformation, and rewards & recognition, the research revealed that there were stark differences in levels of satisfaction between academic and support staff, with members of support staff (Grades 1-5) showing high levels of dissatisfaction (RUICS, 2014). The methods employed included the survey itself and open ended questions. On the theme of equity and fairness, in which respondents were questioned about whether they feel that they are generally treated with respect at Rhodes University (RU); the response of academic staff was 76 per cent positive in comparison to the 36 per cent expressed by the support staff on their view on equity and fairness (RUICS 2014). The survey also included some open ended questions at the end of each theme, and here are some of the comments from members of support staff:

Racism has not ended here; white people are still racist, especially towards black people. A white male once told me, after washing their cups, that I should hold the cups with their handles, and not have my finger come

anywhere near the inside of the cup. And I had just washed the cups; he was despising my finger because I am black. (RUICS, 2014:44)

Members of the support staff in the survey also expressed their views on the workload they deal with during their working day:

RU has completely sucked out our energy/labour. Our limbs are broken, and we are not offered anything. We get sick, and RU chucks us out. What we do is beyond our capabilities. (RUICS 2014:45)

Nehawu is the main union which organises the members of Grade 1-3, and now they also organise workers up to Grade 17. In the wake of the #RhodesMustFall movement which also reached the shores of Rhodes University in March 2015, Nehawu joined forces with students and a handful of black academics to challenge the status quo in the institution.



Source: Daily Maverick 2015.

The struggle to decolonise Rhodes University was consistently joined by Nehawu last year, and in one of the statements they wrote in solidarity with the Black Student Movement (BSM), they argued that “there is a persistent huge wage gap between the white staff members (in general) and those of the workers (especially black persons who almost exclusively occupy Grades 1-5) resembles a colonialist and capitalist wages system which seeks to only exploit the workers” (Nehawu-RU Branch, 2015:1).

This research therefore seeks to gain insights from the lived experiences of room attendants in the housekeeping division of Rhodes University. The rationale behind this is to explore the experiences of workers who look after intimate spaces where students live, and in doing that insights are taken from the vast domestic work literature which has focused on the experiences of domestic workers but in the private household setting. The study is also motivated by the statement encapsulated in the Institutional Culture Survey (2014:4) which says “the survey results need to be complemented by further research which can better get at the nuances in relation to how staff members experience working at the institution”.

2. Conceptual framework

Positional suffering

Patrick Suskind's play *The Double Bass* presents an especially striking image of how painfully the social world may be experienced by people who, like the bass player in the orchestra, occupy an inferior, obscure position in a prestigious and privileged universe. The experience is no doubt all the more painful when the universe in which they participate is just enough to feel their relatively low standing is higher in social space overall. This positional suffering, experienced from inside the microcosm, will appear, as the saying goes, entirely relative, meaning completely unreal, if we take the point of view of the macrocosm and compare it to the 'real' suffering of ordinary poverty. (Pierre Bourdieu, 1999:4)

Bourdieu's concept of positional suffering seeks to understand and reveal the social world as experienced by different social groups in society in general, and those who constitute the lowest stratum in society in particular. This point is captured by Ferguson who writes the translators preface in the text when she states that Bourdieu's work carries over the everyday lives of ordinary people into an understanding of the social world in which they live (Bourdieu, 1999). Pierre Bourdieu's concept of "positional suffering" goes a long way in trying to reveal that it is those people at the bottom of the occupational hierarchy who get to experience the worst kind of treatment in the workplace and other societal spaces (Bourdieu, 1999:4). The book's chapters offer experiences of men and women told to Bourdieu and other scholars and co-researchers in the book such as Alain Accardo, Gabrielle Balazs, Loic J.D. Wacquant and many others. The ubiquity of suffering by those occupying low positions in society reported in the book, shows that in different social spaces agents who lack capital often experience brutal forms of exploitation. In this text, Bourdieu looks at the microcosms whereby the agents occupy low positions in terms of rankings and he argues that the experience becomes more painful when agents in a universe feel relatively low in standings. Looking at the context of Jonquil Street in France, he looks at the workers who are residing in the area who are mainly of foreign origin, from Algeria, and because of the restructurings in the steel industry they have become unemployed (Bourdieu, 1999). For example, participants such as Monsieur Amezziare, who are underpaid and the status of their work is precarious (Bourdieu, 1999). In the present study I follow a similar methodology, deploying Bourdieu's concept of positional suffering to understand the structure of experience presented to me by my participants.

There exists a symbiotic relationship in phenomenologically oriented research, by that I mean the methods and conceptual framework section are interrelated. This overarching concept of positional suffering will seek to reflect on the verbatim structures of experience given by participants. The theoretical amalgam of the different concepts to be discussed below is as a result of the inductive nature of this research, as the structures of experience of participants dictated which theoretical concepts will be of use so as to do justice to the meaning and understanding of the life-world of the participants in this study. This triangulation of theory (see for instance Denzin, 1978) is based on the inductive nature of conceptual formulation in qualitative research. According to Averill (2015:7) “Individual concepts are meaningfully linked by propositional statements in a theory or model, such as the concepts of health, health promotion, stress, and prevention being linked conceptually in a model for health promotion”. Therefore the concept of positional suffering is used in this research as an overarching theoretical concept which has dimensions along the lines of lived body and lived space. The concept of positional suffering seeks to understand what it is for the people who occupy low positions in ranking, to experience the world with others who are above them.

2.1 Pain, its experiential dimensions and occupational epidemiology

Kinesthetic sensations form an essential part of the constitution of our spatiality, occurring as a result of – and continuously impacted by – our physical experience and our conscious and unconscious interpretation of that experience. This fundamental phenomenological view arises from within the conviction that bodily consciousness is our primordial, underlying awareness of existence; and is known through the intentionality inherent in our systems of perception. From within a vast field of inter corporeality, our perceiving bodies ‘appropriate’ finite aspects which become objects of our consciousness, and this we do as a result of our particular disposition within the ‘embrace’ of the material world. Consciousness is understood as a process of making meaning of one’s existence, and the body is seen as the nexus, or gestalt, within which that meaning making happens. (Kaylo, 2003:2)

The quote above goes a long way in helping to understand the experience of pain as being two-dimensional: that is, pain as a physical and psychological experience. Vetlesen (2009:53), in making sense of the physical aspect of pain takes the words of philosopher Merleau-Ponty as a point of departure when he argues that “my body is not only an

experience among many. It is the yardstick of everything, the reference point for all the world's dimensions". The lived body is able to grasp the physical stimulus of pain which emerges from an environment through sensory organs. It is normal in the lives of human beings to be exposed to the feeling of pain, as it is also an important part of the human condition (Vetlesen, 2009). As a feeling in the human body, it is through the kinesthetic sensation that a person is able to localize the pain in the body, in other words the painfulness becomes located in one of the limbs (Vetlesen, 2009). As a physical sensation, pain can be an acute or a chronic condition. In a situation of a normal injury for example, the sensation is that of acute pain as it is merely alerting the body of the pain but the pain does not last for the longer period. It is the chronic nature of pain which causes a serious suffering for the human body as Vetlesen (2009:52) posits that "people with a particularly painful illness (especially of chronic nature) can, however, experience something similar, in the sense that life is reduced to pain, and that a life that only is in pain, restless, and hopeless pain, involves a completely different form of existence than that previously known – and taken for granted – by a healthy person".

However, the phenomenological quality of the pain experience should not be reduced to a body and mind dualism, and Vetlesen (2009:52) makes an important intervention in this regard, when he argues that "much would seem to indicate that the division between physical and psychic pain does more damage than good for an understanding of what pain is; although the division is so ingrained". Therefore the central interest of an understanding of pain should be at understanding the totality of the experience, because pain as an experience is imbued with meaning. Kaylo (2003:1) in trying to make sense of the body in phenomenology mentions the concept of "intentionality" which was introduced by the philosopher Edmund Husserl. The gist of the concept is that "objects present themselves to consciousness, and the process of intentionality is when the mind reaches out to physical stimuli so as to interpret the feeling into a meaningful experience" (Kaylo, 2003:1). In this process, the making sense of the physical stimuli is through neural impulses which are sent to the brain. It is through the organizing of the information by the brain that the sensory nature of pain is translated into a meaningful experience. A good example of a relationship between the physical and the psychic nature of pain is that of an axe-blow to the leg which is given by Vetlesen. The physical pain inflicted does not just end at the level of being a sensation because it becomes imbued with a meaning (Vetlesen, 2009). As an emotional

experience, pain can be attributed a positive or a negative meaning (Vetlesen, 2009). A good example of a positive meaning of pain is that of sporting activity as the athlete will look at pain that comes as a result of a workout as good pain, because it is consequential to having undergone a rewarding form of physical exercise (Freund, Meredith & McGuire, 2003). The negative emotion of pain would be caused by something like an axe-blow in the example given by Vetlesen, and if such a pain becomes long lasting in the body, then it will become undesirable for the person experiencing it (Vetlesen, 2009).

It is the chronic nature of pain that Vetlesen (2009:52) talks about as having a “sovereign power” and because it is an unwanted feeling in the body it becomes an enemy. This kind of pain in its totality, psychic and physical, becomes a form of life deprivation (Vetlesen, 2009). As an emotional experience, the chronic pain felt in the body makes someone’s life-world to feel small. According to Vetlesen (2009:29) “for when pain, now exclusively a seat of all that causes pain restricts my existence in the world, I lose the experience of being of equal value with and fully intelligible to other people; From now on it is, on the one hand, me and my pain, and on the other, all the rest, those without pain”. Therefore the life-world of a person in pain is devastating more especially when that person compares themselves to everyone else in their surrounding who is not experiencing pain.

The sociological work of Freund *et al.* (2003) helps to make clearer the intentionality aspect of the pain experience. This is because the examination of pain is now broadened to look at the societal factors that might induce the feeling of pain. According to Freund *et al.* (2003:3) “a person’s life chances are neither deterministic fate nor a purely accidental, random result. Rather, a person’s chances for illness and successful recovery are very much of the result of specifiable social arrangements, which are in turn products of human volition and indeed deliberate policy choices made by identifiable groups and individuals”. This sociological insight to an understanding of illness makes it clear that the human body is influenced by factors in society. The human body therefore suffers as a result of the environmental arrangements which might be dangerous to it. The point being made here is that the occurrence of illness does not happen as a result of magical forces (Freund *et al.* 2003).

According to Freund *et al.* (2003:11) “Social epidemiology is the study of distribution of patterns of health and illness in human population and of the social factors that shape them”. To gain a deeper understanding of social epidemiology, it is important to also note the stratification of society into different classes. Someone’s socioeconomic status also determines the quality of their health (Freund *et al.* 2003). When looking into society in general, it will be certain social arrangements and practices that contribute to a healthy body. In other words the social circumstances determine the healthy or sick condition of our bodies (Freund *et al.* 2003). Social epidemiology as a concept assists in identifying those human social arrangements which need to be altered in order to improve the health status of people (Freund *et al.*, 2003).

To make sense of the experience of pain in a workplace context, the concept of social epidemiology is adopted and transformed into occupational epidemiology. According to Freund *et al.* (2003:68) “workplace accidents differ from occupational diseases: in the former, the exposure to the source is sudden, and the damage as well as its cause is readily apparent. By contrast, the cause of work-related diseases is not always apparent, and the effect may be gradual; Accidents are thus discrete, clearly identifiable events that happen suddenly but involve a multitude of causal factors; High risk work of low status often puts workers lives in serious danger of being injured”. To operationalize the concept of social epidemiology in occupational health psychology means that one must be open to the impact of work – related factors on the psychological and physical health of workers. Occupational epidemiology is then a detection of environmental health risks such as work related injuries, which might be caused by overload and the manner in which they could be ameliorated. It is not only the physical suffering that is inflicted by environmental hazards, as some scholars in Occupational Health Psychology (see for instance Kelloway, 2011), have also pointed to the psychosocial stressors such as the working demands, working hours and patterns, which also have an influence on workers’ levels of health and well-being.

According to Kelloway (2011:60) “a considerable amount of research has been conducted to investigate the impact which demands from work have on health and well-being, and there is consistent evidence that excessive work demands are deleterious, in terms of both personal and organization outcomes”. To this effect, the literature on domestic work is replete with

cases of workers suffering as a result of the hazardous nature of this work, and the work of scholars in domestic work (see for instance De Casanova, 2013; Ahonen, Lopez-Jacob, Vasquez, Porthé, Gil-Gonzalez, García, Ruiz-Frutos, Benach & Benavides, 2006) have studied closely the lived experiences of domestic workers in relation to the physically demanding nature of the work they do. Gimlin (2007) looks at the body of a domestic worker as something which is being written on through the suffering and scars inflicted by the nature of domestic work. De Casanova (2003) looking at the experiences of domestic workers in urban Ecuador made a finding among others, that, the nature of their physically taxing work had negative impacts on the workers' bodies. Bezuidenhout & Fakier (2006) investigated closely a life of an outsourced cleaner at Wits University and the findings were that, the workload was having a deleterious impact on her body. In the same vein, Ahonen *et al.* (2006) examined the lived experiences of domestic workers in Spain, and as a result of the drudgery nature of their work, they experienced serious health impacts as a result of being exposed to environmental, ergonomic, and psychosocial hazards. The occupational ill health of domestic workers lead to an untold suffering, as the diseases they suffer from are chronic in nature. The essence of their experience of pain as domestic workers is captured by Todes (2001:60) when he posits that "in excruciating pain I do not merely have a pain out there in some body area; I am myself in pain; In this case, the pain is so overwhelming that it racks and pains my whole body... The pain in which I am, is my losing of myself in my losing of my world by my losing of my body". The totality of the experience of pain in an occupational context of domestic work is shown through the process of domestic workers identifying the source of their bodily pain and the meaning it has for their being-in-the-world.

2.2 Social space and intersectionality

One part of the problem, then is to identify forms of socio-spatial exclusion as they are experienced and articulated by the subject groups. These groups, however, may be seen as both dominant and subordinate, depending on the way in which they are categorised. Both men and women may experience exclusion as members of an oppressed minority group, for example, but men may dominant in their relationship with women in a minority culture. (Sibley, 1995:x)

David Sibley when exploring the phenomenon of socio-spatial exclusion draws from an interdisciplinary approach (feminist theory, human geography, sociology) to make sense of

the power dynamics when it comes to social space, and seeks to understand which bodies are considered as normal when occupying certain spaces and to also determine the deviant ones. Sibley (1995) notes the compartmentalisation of space and how this is given impetus by the power dynamics, as those without power are relegated to undesirable environments. Sibley (1995) observes this phenomenon by also giving a historical account of the nineteenth century capitalism and how power allows certain groups to exclude others in the context of urban geography. Nirmal Puwar (2004) also observes this phenomenon of socio spatial exclusion and she comes to a conclusion that social spaces are not a *tabula rasa*. There are normal bodies which are accorded the right to access privileged spaces. Other bodies that are accorded an inferior status are thus excluded from certain spaces and Puwar (2004:8) alludes to this point when she argues that “some bodies are deemed as having the right to belong, while others are marked out as trespassers, who are, in accordance with how both spaces and bodies are imagined, circumscribed as being out of place; Not being the somatic norm, they are space invaders”.

Socio spatial exclusion is defined, according to Sibley (1995), by the ideology of racism that marks people according to phenotypical qualities such as one’s skin colour. The segregation of space by colour is also used by the powerful to signify those who are superior from the inferior (Sibley, 1995; Puwar, 2004). These practices emerged from colonialism and they gave birth to rules which served to separate black from white. This Manichean¹ thinking results in a situation where “black is used to routinely describe dirt which, in turn, is associated with shame and disease” (Sibley, 1995:22). This treating of black people as inferior is signified by the making of whiteness as a symbol of “purity”, and the contact between black and white becomes prohibited as that which is black is considered to be polluting the sacred space occupied by white people (Sibley, 1995:24). According to Sibley (1995:23) “in a colonial context, black and white represent a whole set of social characteristics and power relations”. This segregation of bodies in social space is also marked by poverty as working class people are labelled as “deviant and threatening” and thus the demarcation of space becomes the consequence to protect the affluent from being disrupted by the poor (Sibley, 1995:55).

¹ The concept of ‘Manichean thinking’ has been borrowed from Frantz Fanon, in his book *The Wretched of the Earth* which was published in 1963. The inclusion of the concept in this context is to illustrate the racist and colonial designation of subjecting black lives into a status of inferior conditions. Fanon uses this concept in page 42 of his book to explain the degrading human conditions the native is subjected to by the colonizer.

The concept of intersectionality goes a long way in helping to understand the manifestation of treating other people as space invaders, more especially in the context of black women. According to Cooper (2015:1) “coined by Kimberle Crenshaw in 1989, the term intersectionality has become the key analytic framework through which feminist scholars in various fields talk about the structural identities of race, class, gender, and sexuality”. The emergence of intersectionality as an analytical frame in order to make sense of the lived experiences of black women was that, the “single-axis” framework of looking at these experiences through the gender lens alone was not adequate for understanding the plight of black women in the United States of America (Cooper, 2015:1). The analytic frame of intersectionality thus acknowledges the convergence of race, gender, and class oppression, and that any intervention in the oppression experienced by black women had to take this interlocking nature of oppression seriously if it is to change the lived realities of marginalised women of colour (Cooper, 2015; Collins, 2002). This multidimensionality of women’s oppression has been acknowledged by another important feminist thinker, Patricia Collins (2002:vii) when she posits that “race, class, gender, sexuality, age, and ethnicity among others constitute major forms of oppression in the United States”. The concept of intersectionality in relation to the notion of socio spatial exclusion being defined by power dynamics prevalent in society helps to understand the lived experiences of black women working in low status occupations.

It is safe to say that there is now a conceptual universe of intersectionality theory. Yeoh & Huang (1999) investigated the lived realities of migrant domestic workers working in Singapore. These women were from the Philipphines, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, and other countries in Asia (Yeoh & Huang, 1999). Their lived experience of being in public spaces in Singapore was that of occupying spaces at the margins, as Yeoh and Huang (1999:1) posit that “their marginalisation in the Singaporean society was compounded by intersecting relations pertaining to gender, race, class and citizenship”. In the South African context during apartheid the work of scholars such as Cock, 1989; Hickson & Strous, 1993; Ginsburg, 2011; Bhattacharya, Sukuman & Mani, n.d.; has looked at how the intersecting nature of gender, class, and race relegated the black women who were live-in domestic workers in white households to inferior accommodation, and strict rules on what they can and

cannot do, and also compartmentalising the space. An example of this compartmentalisation of space is encapsulated in Bhattacharya et al (n.d.:14) when investigating the living conditions of live-in domestic workers in Chennai, they argue that “they were not allowed to use the toilets, and they either had to use public toilets or wait until they got back home; They were also not allowed to touch certain objects in the house, or walk through certain areas considered holy”. Bodies of domestic workers through their being made to wear uniforms, become key in this process of compartmentalising space, for example, all of which serve to discipline the body and reinforce in their minds their status as cleaners (Naidu, 2009).

2.3 Exploitation characterised by low salaries, time poverty and immobility

This book has attempted to show that domestic workers are largely trapped workers. As black women they are trapped in a vulnerable and powerless situation within which they are subject to oppression and exploitation. Their exploitation is evidenced by deprivation of their family life, of reasonable working hours, of time to pursue social and leisure interests of their own choosing. (Cock, 1989:149)

Jacklyn Cock in her study of domestic workers in Grahamstown in the late 1970s discovered that the workers’ perception, of their work situation was that characterised by an experience of exploitation. Cock (1989) uses the concept of exploitation as an umbrella concept to describe the low wages and long hours of work which defined the domestic work sector. Another phenomenon which was expressed by domestic workers in Cock’s study is that of being deprived of family and social time, or what Bardasi and Wodon (2010:45) refer to as “time poverty”. According to Bardasi and Wodon (2010:45) “time poverty is thus understood as the lack of enough time for rest and leisure after accounting for the time that has to be spent working, whether in the labour market, doing domestic work, or performing other activities such as fetching water and wood”. This factor of time poverty, together with low wages and long working hours is what Cock characterises as the exploitative nature of domestic work.

James Scott (1975:489) posits that “at the core of the notion of exploitation is the idea that some individuals, groups, or classes benefit unjustly or unfairly from the labour of, or at the expense of, others”. The exploited peoples thus have a perception of inequitable distribution of efforts and rewards, and in their view there ought to be a standard of distributive equity so as to ameliorate the suffering (Scott, 1975). Scott (1975) also brings to light the notion of an

a priori understanding when it comes to observing the peoples' subjective feelings about exploitation. According to Scott (1975:489) "for those within the Marxist tradition, for example, the labour theory of value supplies the conceptual basis for evaluating the level of exploitation; we hardly need to subscribe to the labour theory of value, however, to see exploitation as an objective relationship that allows us to distinguish between less and more exploitative situation situations". The phenomenological quality of Scott's point of departure when it comes to understanding exploitation lies at the fact that we must begin by moving away from deductive concepts in order to grasp the meanings of those who feel exploited. The analytical goal of a concept of exploitation must be about doing justice to the perceptions of the exploited people. The key to doing that is to move away from a predetermined understanding of the phenomenon, and approach the experience of exploitation inductively.

In the domestic work context, the status of domestic workers has been mentioned to be that of being underpaid, and part of the reasons include lack of formal education, and also the patriarchal values dominant in society which put forth an understanding of domestic work as undervalued because it is done by women and the fact that it is the traditional role that is supposed to be performed by women (Oelz and Rani, 2015). In the context of South African domestic workers, the low wages and long hours defining the nature of domestic work date back to the apartheid era (Ally, 2011). These characteristics of the nature of domestic are also echoed in Collins (2000:56); in her remarks about the history of domestic work in America, when she posits that "domestic work constituted the other primary occupation for black women's wage labour...such work was low paid and exposed black girls and women to the constant threat of sexual harassment".

The interpretive task of this study is to understand the lived experiences of room attendants at Rhodes University, and the concept of positional suffering by Bourdieu is key to making sense of the suffering experienced by people who occupy low positions, as it is the case with room attendants. The first dimension of this experience will be analytically looked at through the concept of pain and occupational epidemiology. This concept will be deployed to understand the effects of workplace arrangements on the bodies of room attendants. The second dimension of the experience of suffering is that of lived interpersonal relations between the room attendants and other people such as line managers, supervisors and

students in the residential space. The concepts of social space and intersectionality will be deployed in this regard in order to grasp the meaning of the lived reality of human relations for room attendants. The third dimension of the experience of suffering is that of exploitation which is characterised by low salaries, time poverty, and class immobility. The concept of exploitation will be used to unpack the what-it-is-like for room attendants to earn the amount they earn as a salary and also other lived realities pertaining to hours of work and upward mobility or lack thereof.

3. Methods, procedures and techniques

The human science approach recognises that our privileged access to meanings is not by way of numbers but rather through perception, cognition, and language. In so far as everyday human activity can be shown to be continuously informed and shaped by how we understand others and ourselves and by meanings of the situations we find ourselves in, this is a most significant point. It indicates that the way for psychology to comprehend human behaviour and experience as it is actually lived in everyday social settings is to begin by soliciting descriptive accounts of our actual experiences in such setting. (Von Eckartsberg, 1998:4)

At the heart of qualitative social science is the need to understand people's experiences as experienced from their everyday natural settings (Creswell, 2007). With that understanding of the imperative of qualitative research, this study employs phenomenology as an approach so as to gain deeper understanding of "life-worlds" of the participants (Van Manen, 2015:7). The phenomenological approach to conducting qualitative research is strongly centred upon a notion of understanding and describing the lived experience as experienced at first hand by the person in a situation. Philosophers such as Husserl, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty looked to phenomenology as a useful approach for gaining insights into what people are experiencing. Their aim was to understand how the world appears in people's consciousness as Von Eckartsberg (1998:8) argues – "acts of consciousness such as perceiving, willing, thinking, remembering, and anticipating, are our modalities of self-world relationship. They give us access to our world and that of others by reflecting on the content (i.e., its meaning or the what) that we thus encounter and also by reflecting on the process (i.e., the how)". The main theme that emerges from accounts of philosophers such as Husserl and the likes of Merleau-Ponty is that, phenomenology is about understanding the essence of human experience from the point of view of the person experiencing the phenomenon.

Phenomenology aims at gaining a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experiences. Phenomenology asks, "what is this or that kind of experience like"? It differs from almost every other science in that it attempts to gain insightful descriptions of the way we experience the world pre-reflectively, without taxonomising, classifying, or abstracting it. (Van Manen, 2015:9)

Once the access has been gained to the mental universe of the person experiencing the phenomenon, the key task in the phenomenological inquiry is to describe that experience, and

the aim is to give a clear description of the participants' experience without contaminating that description with the researcher's prior understandings of the phenomenon (Von Eckartsburg, 1998; Van Manen, 2015; Creswell, 2006). This process involves what in phenomenology is known as bracketing and Von Eckartsburg (1998:5) articulates it when he says "Husserl's methodology was to begin with the phenomenological reduction or epoche, which involved the attempt to put all of one's assumptions about the matter being studied into abeyance, to bracket them". This step of bracketing is important in qualitative research so that a richer description of what the participants are experiencing in common can be presented as the "universal essence" (see for instance, Creswell 2007:58)

In professions such as education, nursing, psychiatry, counselling and psychology, phenomenological research has also gained importance as it helps to make understand how human beings experience their life-worlds (Van Manen, 2015). Some scholars within the domestic work literature (see for instance Marais & van Wyk, 2015; Ahonen *et al.* 2006; Zungu, 2009) have used this approach to gain insight into the deeper meaning of what it is like for the participants in their research, to work as domestic workers. Guided by the insights from these scholars, my research sought to explore the lived meaning for participants of being a cleaner of student residences in Rhodes University.

Van Manen (2015) stretches the understanding of the phenomenological approach by looking at four lifeworld existentials as guides to reflection. The main objective is that of exploring the lived world as experienced in everyday situations and relations, and Van Manen (2015:101) argues that "the four existentials are: lived space (spatiality), lived body (corporeality), lived time (temporality), and lived human relation (relationality or communality)". These are dimensions to human experience and through using them as guides to reflection, the aim is not only to gain access to human consciousness but also to describe the inside of such an experience through taking seriously "the feelings, the mood and the emotions" of a person or the group of people being studied (Van Manen, 2015:101)

3.1 Participants

Hence, when it comes to selecting the subjects for phenomenological research, the question that the researcher has to ask: Do you have the experience that I am looking for? (Englander, 2012:19)

The participants were 29 women and men between the ages of 28 to 60 years old at the time of the study, who were working as room attendants in the housekeeping division of Rhodes University, in the university's residences. The 29 participants recruited for this study form part of the total of 41 members of service staff who work across the university's 52 residences. Within this 29, 3 participants were black men and 26 participants were black women. Out of the 29 participants, the 2 oldest workers in this group started working in the institution as room attendants from the period 1980-1989. The other 10 participants also indicated to have started working in the institution from the period 1990-1999, and the rest of the 17 participants stated that they started working from the period 2000-2013. Almost all participants started by working as temporary workers and then 3 years later or more one would become employed on a permanent basis. Only one participant mentioned to have been a temporary worker since 1999 until the time of the study.

This study is based on the interpretive paradigm of qualitative research. Important to qualitative research is the notion of valuing the importance of participants' accounts of the phenomena they experience. Therefore it is absolutely imperative that the focus is on people's understandings and interpretations of their social environments (Creswell, 2007). The nature of the working environment for residence room attendants at Rhodes University is different from the context of domestic workers who work in a private household setting, and it was important to put into abeyance all the pre-understandings of the nature of domestic work when approaching the context of cleaning in the university residences. The key focus of this study was to gain insights from the lived experiences of room attendants who are responsible for the hygiene in the residence spaces such as the common rooms, passages and bathrooms, and during the holidays also the students' rooms once all the students have vacated their rooms. In pursuit of the concreteness in the data this study employed purposive sampling in order to gain understanding from the room attendants of what it is like to do the kind of work they do. According to Watson (2009:48) "Purposeful sampling is common in

qualitative research; the researcher selects individuals and sites that can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and the central phenomenon of the study; the ideal participants are those who know the information required, [and] are willing to participate”. The purposive sampling technique helps to get the experiences of a common group of people and it enables the researcher to make sense of what is the universal essence of experience among those participants selected for the study (Smith and Osborn, 2007; Flick, 2013; Watson, 2009; Creswell, 2007).

3.2 Data collection

Phenomenological, human scientific researchers tend to choose the interview due to their interest in the meaning of a phenomenon as it is lived by other subjects. (Englander, 2012:14)

The research data was collected by means of unstructured in-depth individual interviews and focus groups. There were 18 interviews conducted, and out of that, 11 were in-depth individual interviews, and 7 were participants in focus group interviews. This process was followed up with observations of the Nehawu joint general meetings where the room attendants are also a constituency. This triangulation of methods (see for instance Denzin, 1978) was aimed at gaining deeper insight into the participants’ context of work and their articulations of their experience as workers. The individual and focus group interviews took place in the residence where the participants work, and the duration of the interviews varied from 30 mins to 110 minutes. Guest, MacQueen & Namey (2011:11) note that “most qualitative researchers work with transcribed data generated from in-depth interviews and focus groups that are typically 1 to 2 hours long”. The central objective of using this format of interviewing was to gain insight into the meaning of the subjective experiences of participants, to access and be able to describe their lifeworlds in rich detail (Creswell, 2007).

In my practice as an interviewer, the main question I asked the participants was what their experience of working is, as room attendants in the residence since the day they started working, and the interview would then proceed with very few interjections from me as a researcher. This procedure was aimed at gaining understanding of the phenomenon from the

participants' lived experience point of view so as to know the meaning of that experience (Englander, 2012; Creswell, 2007). According to Given (2008:868) "In qualitative research, data collection typically occurs to the point of saturation...essentially, this means that researchers continue interviews to the point where little new information is shared by participants". Therefore data collection continued until such a time that the interviews were not yielding any new insights as participants continued to report the same experiences.

3.3 Method of analysis

Thematic analysis is primarily a descriptive strategy that facilitates the search for patterns of experience within a qualitative data set; the product of thematic analysis is a description of those patterns and the overarching design that unites them. (Given, 2008:868)

Thematic analysis was used as the method of analysis as it is effective when it comes to understanding and identifying the emerging patterns out of participants' experiences. One of the central tenets of analysing data in thematic analysis is the phenomenological interpretative undertaking of exploring the ways in which participants are making sense of their lifeworlds, and the key focus being on the meanings of particular experiences (Smith and Osborn, 2007; Creswell, 2007). As the phenomenological approach seeks to understand the meanings which participants make of their experiences, thematic analysis also involves the process of determining the themes of experiential structures that make up that particular experience (Van Manen, 2015). Creswell (2007:58) also alludes to this process of determining the themes when he posits that "The inquirer then collects data from persons who have experienced the phenomenon, and develops a composite description of the essence of the experience for all of the individuals. This description consists of what they experienced and how they experienced it". The interpretive task of qualitative research that uses thematic analysis involves the categorisation of patterns of commonality across all participants as reflected in the interview transcripts. The key task is to identify repeated themes, statements, and words from the life-texts or interview transcripts (Given, 2008). Given (2008:868) makes this example to elaborate this point: "anger, being upset, feeling frustrated or mad may be used for various participants, but all refer essentially to the same overarching constructs".

The first important step after having recorded the interviews is to have them transcribed into life-texts in order to be interpreted. The rich data obtained through this research allowed me as the researcher to immerse myself in it so as to gain deeper insights, and also to be able to understand what is entailed in the meaning-making process of participants. This process of trying to understand the meanings embedded in the life-texts of participants is referred to as a “double-hermeneutic” by Smith and Osborn (2007:53) and they define it “as involving firstly, the participants trying to make sense of their world; and secondly, the researcher trying to make sense of the participants trying to make sense of their world”. Coding becomes key in this process as it is the early sense making of the data. Averill (2015:4) defines coding as the “smallest distinct units of meaning that one begins to find by synthesising the raw data into distinct conceptual units”. In the initial stages of coding I used the verbatim words and statements of the participants. The main aim was to develop segments during this initial process of coding and I continued to look for the words that captured the essence of the segment that generated that particular word or statement (see for instance Given, 2008).

Table 3: Themes and categories

Pain and its experiential dimensions	The experience of being in social space and concept of intersectionality	Exploitation
Musculoskeletal pain experience	Feeling undervalued and maltreated by management	The experience of lack of upward mobility
Dermatological and respiratory problems	Feeling oppressed by wardens, hall wardens, and hall secretaries	The experience of being impoverished
Lack of empathy from management	The experience of institutional racism and other forms of racial discrimination	The experience of time deprivation
	Feeling disrespected by students, guests and line manager	

After the first cycle coding, I then embarked upon the second cycle, which Averill (2015) refers to as cleaning the data. In this cycle, there was much noticing of commonly coded segments of text throughout the interview transcripts, and these were then collapsed and categorised into a commonly coded label (see for instance Averill, 2015). This process involved synthesising all similar words and statements and integrating them within one overarching theme. The aim of separating portions of data from their original context was to then retrieve and inspect them together under that sub-theme which served as an umbrella concept. The second cycle of coding is important for thematic analyses as it is a phase where the researcher moves beyond counting explicit words or phrases and focuses on identifying and describing both implicit and explicit ideas within the data (Guest *et al.*, 2011). In this vein, Averill (2015:5) makes this example “a segment coded as not enough money to pay for meds in one interview might be similar to the segment too many expenses to buy my meds coded in another interview. The researcher may decide to code both of these as not enough money for meds”. Scholars such as (Vaismondi, Turumen & Bondas, 2013; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006; Buetow, 2010) have employed the thematic analysis to analyse their qualitative data. Manual coding was employed in the process of analysing the data throughout.

The second cycle of coding involved the formulation of themes which were descriptive of the participants’ experiences of working as room attendants. This process was underpinned by the phenomenological undertaking of making meaning of the lived experiences of participants in this study. As I have already stated in the conceptual framework chapter that there is symbiotic relationship in a phenomenological oriented research between concepts for analysing and interpreting the data, and methodology chapter – once the themes were identified I then moved inductively from themes to useful concepts which can be used as tools of analysis to gain meaning of participants’ experiences. This can be referred to as the phenomenological interpretative task of making sense of participants’ trying to make sense of their lifeworld as cleaners in residences. Therefore the inductive process of moving from themes to interpretation involved the process of identifying the relevant literature with the conceptual tools that will help to describe the experiences as told by participants.

3.4 Ethical considerations

Gaining access to sites and individuals also involves several steps... Regardless of the approach to inquiry, permissions need to be sought from a human subjects view board, a process in which campus committees review research studies for their potential harmful impact on and risk to participants. (Creswell, 2007:123)

Prior to me embarking on the data collection process, I first sought the permission to conduct the research from the Rhodes University Ethics Committee (RUEC), and the ethics clearance was subsequently granted by the Committee (see appendix 1). As the participants in this study are members of Nehawu, it was important to also seek the permission of the leadership of the union before doing the interviews. The permission was granted and the letter of confirmation was issued by the Fulltime shop steward of Nehawu-Rhodes University branch (see appendix 2). These steps of seeking ethical clearances and confirmation letters form an integral part of doing qualitative research, as this kind of research deals primarily with the interaction between researchers and the people they study. According to Mack, Woodsong, Macqueen, Guest and Namey (2005:8) “Whenever we conduct research on people, the well-being of research participants must be our top priority; the principle is that no harm must be suffered by the participants because of the research”. In addition to seeking the clearance from the RUEC and Nehawu, a consent form was also presented to each participant and I thoroughly took the participants through the points encapsulated in the consent form (see appendix 3). It included *inter alia*: the central purpose of the study and the procedures to be used in data collection; comments about protecting the confidentiality of the respondents; and also the signature of the participant as well as that of myself as the researcher (see for instance Creswell, 2007).

Phenomenological research is also defined by a research culture of putting into abeyance the researcher’s pre-understandings of the phenomenon they seek to study. In this regard, it was also important that I acknowledge my positionality as the researcher in relation to the subject-matter of the study. I am a child of a former domestic worker and therefore I had pre-existing insight into the life of someone who works as a domestic worker in a private household setting. I tried by all means to ‘bracket’ this information so as to not lead the participants into

an already predetermined conclusion of what I might expect them to say. This bracketing culture was maintained across all the 18 interviews.

4. “My body is in pain”: the lived experience of occupational ill-health

A phenomenological approach in the health sciences will ask: what is the essence of the experience of being diagnosed, being sick, being a patient, being dependent, being hospitalized, and recovery and so on? Phenomenology recognizes that illness, or being ill, for example, is not only a physical phenomenon in an objective sense: Illness is also a lived experience of the subjective embodied feeling self. (Foreword by Jeffrey McCurry in ed. De Chesnay, 2014:xiii)

To explicate the experience of pain requires a phenomenological approach, as noted by McCurry in the above quote (ed. De Chesnay, 2014); phenomenology goes a long way in laying bare the essence of experiences of certain phenomenon. Van Hooft (2003), in his analysis of pain regards the latter as having three dimensions-: (a) the unpleasantness of pain; (b) pain is an experience; and (c) pain is felt in the body. These three dimensions of pain cannot be understood as being mutually exclusive because through the phenomenological approach, they become a holistic lived experience of pain. The three dimensions stated by van Hooft nonetheless, need to be unpacked so as to give a rich description of the avenues of pain as experienced in the lives of room attendants at Rhodes University.

4.1 Pain is felt through the body: the ‘sensory experience’

My body is not only an experience among many. It is the yardstick of everything, the reference point for all the world’s dimensions. (Maurice Merleau Ponty cited *Philosophy of pain* text by Vetlesen, 2009)

The body is central to the understanding of how pain is directly felt in the person’s internal organs. Van Hooft (2003:185) notes that the body is in its peace in the absence of pain, in a state of “bodily equanimity”, in other words, one is not necessarily preoccupied with the experience of how the body feels as there is no pressing pain. It is pain, which draws the attention to the body, and there is heightened bodily consciousness once the pain becomes inflicted on the body (Van Hooft, 2003; Freund *et al.* 2003). As Merleau-Ponty (in Vetlesen, 2009) notes, the body is the yardstick of everything, in trying to grasp the bodily experiences of room attendants at Rhodes University, I draw on Gimlin (2007) who notes the role of the body in paid work. The lived body at work is being written on through performing workplace

duties (Gimlin, 2007; De Casanova, 2013). It is through its character as something which is being written on, or what de Casanova (2013) calls bodily inscription, that the body is the location for the sensory experience of pain.

The nature of domestic work is that which is characterised by physically demanding tasks (see De Casanova, 2013; Ahonen *et al.* 2006) such as cleaning showers and carrying heavy objects. The room attendants at Rhodes University also perform the same tasks in the institution's intimate spaces (student residences). To perform such physically demanding work activities, the body becomes key to being able to do the tasks. Merleau-Ponty's quote above is paramount in trying to grapple with the lived realities of room attendants. Their bodies in the context of housekeeping work become the 'yardstick of everything'. The workplace experience when it comes to it becoming a bodily experience is characterised by a suffering which is induced by physical pain. The room attendants point to their work activities being the source of pain, and they provide the rich descriptions of such an experience:

My body is in pain. When I say to you I have arthritis I mean my body is in serious pain because I struggle to lift heavy objects. When I go home I throw myself on the bed because my back has to lie down. It is as if many people are sitting on top of your back. My husband always asks me as to why I like to lie on my back. I tell it is because my back is feeling very sore. The doctor suggested that I stop bending downwards when I am working. However, I have to clean these showers and if you want to make sure they are spotless, you have to go down and make sure the tiles are spotless. When I stand up after I have to lean with my back backwards because if I stand straight, the pain starts all over again. It feels really sore and I take my medication. I do not think it is good for someone who has high blood pressure and is also old, to be overworked as we are doing here. You must see me when I am climbing these stairs, I struggle to go up. The knees are also starting to give up now because I have arthritis but I am still working this kind of work. If I had a child who was working I would leave this place immediately. When I say to you we are overworked like donkeys I mean that exactly. We are human beings and not animals. Even if we are cleaners but that does not necessarily mean we must be overworked to a point where we cannot even lift objects with our arms. When I am lying with my back it feels better than standing up. If I dare try to stand up it gets really sore. (Interview, Ziyanda)

Participants such as Ziyanda have mentioned the work of room attendants at Rhodes University housekeeping department to be a physically demanding phenomenon. Scholarly

work, which has been written on domestic work and the negative effects it has on workers' bodies, does give insights to the lived experiences of domestic workers. However, to arrive to the context of room attendants who work in the housekeeping division at Rhodes, this insight of domestic work has to be stretched so that it encapsulates the experiences of workers who perform similar tasks to those done by domestic workers in private household settings. In De Casanova's (2003) research conducted in urban Ecuador about the experiences of domestic workers, one of her main findings is that domestic work has negative impacts on the workers' bodies. In the same vein, Bezuidenhout & Fakier (2006) also made startling findings about the negative effects, which is caused by the intensification of the workload on Maria's body, who performed the same tasks as those done by room attendants at Rhodes University. The exploratory and descriptive work of Ahonen *et al.* (2006:2) also looks at the lived experiences of women immigrant workers in Spain vis-à-vis the nature of household service work, and the categories that came up from looking at these experiences, which were experienced because of the health impacts, were "exposure to environmental, ergonomic, and psychosocial hazards". The descriptions of room attendants at Rhodes of the bodily experience of pain must also be understood from the perspective of the workplace arrangement.

Ziyanda's words clearly describe her experience of living in pain. It is a subjective account about her lived experience of being in pain, and as a physical feeling of hurt from inside her body, she also points at the objects that make her body a toiling site. The importance of a phenomenological insight when it comes to making sense of Ziyanda's experience of being in pain, and that of many other participants who mentioned the negative effects of the workload on their bodies; lies in the ability of these narratives of bodily experiences to be able to inform the person observing of whether Ziyanda is experiencing her body to be functioning well enough, and also whether she feels that her life is experienced as meaningful (Averill, 2014).

The experience of pain as a result of the workload for room attendants has in effect, a strong presence in the workers' bodies. The strong sensation of pain is ubiquitous in the narratives of participants as their description of pain is also based on what inner parts of their bodies experience the pain. Kleinman, Brodwin, Good & Good (1992:39) make a critical point, when they state that "We act in the world through our bodies, our bodies are the subject of our

actions”. As a sensory experience, pain is felt through the various bodily organs, and this is something which is clearly reflected in some of the participants’ descriptions of how they are experiencing the pain, and where they are experiencing the pain:

I keep my arms hanging in the air at night while I am lying in bed with my back. You see if I keep this arm hanging in the air while lying in bed, I must keep this other one straight and listen to this one because it is in pain. I turn downwards so that I can give this other arm here some time. I can feel something coming down the arm when I keep it in the air. I even wake up and my hands are swollen. Look here do you see my hands? This is because of working with water. If I can go to the doctor, I am sure the doctor will say it is arthritis because my hands are breathing. (Interview, Irene)

The feeling of pain as felt by Irene in her arms causes a huge discomfort and it leads to her being preoccupied with her arms even when she has left the workplace. Van Hooft (2003) notes that pain is not a spiritual thing but that it is actually felt through the bodily organs such as the arms, as is the case with Irene. The reasons for this feeling, Irene notes, are as a result of working with water as she suspects she may have arthritis. To be in pain, as Scarry (1985) notes is actually a life-destroying phenomenon. For other room attendants it has resulted into severe damages on their limbs:

Working with water is very dangerous. You see this hand it is giving me problems. I have arthritis and my fingers just bend for themselves because of working with water. I have arthritis and my fingers just bend for themselves because of working with water. It feels very painful every time I try to handle an object that we use for cleaning. At home I am a mother and I must prepare food and sometimes wash dishes. With these, how are my hands supposed to be effective? The worst part is that your workload does not get light just because you are sick. I really hope things can change for the better here. Just imagine having fingers that are damaged because of working with water. By the time I retire, I am definitely sure they will even be worse than this. My hands are really sore especially when I am cleaning the showers because I have to scrub. (Interview, Nongenile)

Van Hooft (2003) expands on the notion of pain being sensory by stating that when our bodily parts are not in physical pain, we do not immediately become aware of them. Nongenile is aware of the pain suffered by her limbs because serious pain is felt and it also causes her fingers to bend on their own. The work done by room attendants at the housekeeping division at Rhodes is wholly carried out through using parts of the body such as arms and legs.

However, without the hands or the arms being in pain, Nongenile's attention would not be fixated in her hands:

Let any part of our body be in pain, however, and our attention is likely to be drawn to it. Rather than an anonymous aspect of our agency in the world, that part of our body will now be an object of our concern. (Van Hooft, 2003)

Nongenile's fingers start to be a matter of concern for her because of the persistence of arthritis as experienced through her hands. This part of her body now becomes the locus of hurt and it is in sense that pain is also said to be sensory. What the above descriptions made by participants on pain being sensory highlight, is also the fact that sustained experience of pain exists because of the chronic nature of the illness. Freund *et al.* (2013) look at the difference between chronic pain and acute pain:

Chronic illness and pain in particular force the sufferer to come to new terms with the experience of time. Sometimes a life-threatening acute illness or a serious accident has such impact, but an acute condition is by-definition-temporary. Chronic illness, by contrast, often leads to a radical reassessment, in light of changed and yet changing capacities of one's self in relationship to one's past and future. (Freund *et al.* 2003:149)

Most of the accounts made by participants highlight the fact that most of them suffer from illness such as arthritis, because of working with water, climbing the stairs and scrubbing the showers. This kind of work results into an ongoing, degenerative experience of chronic illness. Even though Freund *et al.* (2003:151) characterise it as "non-fatal chronic illness", it is an experience of excruciating pain for room attendants. Their pain does not go away, and it continues to haunt them until bed-time. For some of the participants, the locus of pain was not in a single place in their bodies:

I struggled to walk because of these shoes. When I sit down I take them off so that my feet can breathe. We are told that if you fall and get injured, and it happens that you are not wearing protective clothing you will not be assisted by the institution. The shoes and my knee problem make it very difficult for me. (Interview, Nongenile)

For Nongenile, the chronic pain which is felt in her hands and on her knees is then amplified by another experience of pain which is experienced in her feet. The shoes are supposed to protect her from workplace dangers, but they are a source of danger and thus aggravating the overall experience of chronic pain in her body. Nongenile is not the only participant to experience the simultaneous suffering of chronic pain. Irene, who also experienced hand problems, also mentioned the musculoskeletal pain experienced by her back:

Oh my child! For me is worse because I must be massaged every day. You see today, I arrived and I started by cleaning the showers. After cleaning the showers, at night I keep my arms in the air by the bedside. My back, it is like the bones are coming together. That is how hard it is, after your day of work you cannot touch anything. (Interview, Irene)

4.2 Pain as an unpleasant ‘emotional experience’

In Van Hooft’s definition of pain as a three dimensional aspect, the unpleasantness of pain and the fact that pain is an experience are grouped under one theme: pain is an emotional experience. The experience of pain does not only cease at a point of it being felt through the internal organs of the body. Indeed, the somatic nature of the pain is also important, but it should not be viewed as an isolated phenomenon to how the participants experience pain emotionally. It is also the meaning they give to their lived experience of pain which gives one access to their psychological side of this experience. The emotional dimension of pain is important as it also determines whether the participants are feeling positive, or negative as a result of the pain experience. The experience of pain has been acknowledged as both a negative and a positive feeling (see for instance Vetlesen, 2004). However, in the context of chronic pain, it can be understood as a feeling which destroys the world of the person experiencing it (see Vetlesen, 2004; Freund *et al.* 2003; Scarry, 1985; Fanon, 1967). Scarry (1985) looks at the experience of pain which is experienced by the prisoners and inflicted by the torturer. It is definitely a “life-destroying” experience of pain and one in which the prisoner’s life-world becomes shattered (Scarry, 1985:29). This example of a torturer and prisoner is paramount to understand the participants’ remarks about the workplace, and the fact that because of the work they do their bodies are in pain:

This distance from the taxi stop strains me. There is no way that I can work for 7 years in the residence up the hill, whereas there are people who work

in the residences down campus. I made that request because I do not have legs, and it is very far from here. My knees feel very sore. If you notice I walk slowly because if I walk too fast, they get very sore by the time I sit down. My young daughter at home always offers herself to massage these knees. They get better once she has massaged them but then I come to this prison again and my knees start to suffer all over again. At least if I can be moved to the residence down campus and also get a lighter job, I think things would be better. (Interview, Jomo)

In Jomo's description of the pain experienced in his knee, he mentions the fact that there is some relief when he gets home once he gets massaged. However, the workplace then returns him to a state of pain. For Jomo, the experience of being in the workplace is tantamount to that of prison. There is an important point which he makes that is similar to how the prisoner experiences the pain inflicted by the torturer. For Jomo, the knee problem which gets amplified by the walking distance he has to cover from where the taxi drops him, to his residence of work, marks the notion of the workplace being a torturous space for him and the feeling he has towards the workplace is a negative one. It stimulates a negative emotion as Jomo does not want the experience of pain in his knees.

The Rhodes University housekeeping division also poses serious environmental hazards for room attendants. Their work is not only about touching water and climbing the stairs, but it also involves using chemicals. There are existing revelations from the domestic work literature with regards to how domestic workers experienced working with chemicals (Arif, Hughes & Delclos, 2008; Ahonen et al, 2006; Medina-Ramon, Zock, Kogevinas, Sunyer & Anto, 2003; Ramon, Zock, Kogevinas, Sunyer, Basagana, Schwartz, Burge, Moore & Anto, 2006; De Casanova, 2013; Bezuidenhout & Fakier 2006). Their work shows clearly that the exposure to chemicals has serious health implications for the workers who work with chemical products. The room attendants at Rhodes also raised serious concerns about working with chemicals, and the adverse impacts this is having on their health and well-being:

I still have asthma by the way. After using the chemicals for that period I had breathing problems. At night when I am asleep I would cough more often and also in the mornings. Even now my breathing is not that good because the chemicals are strong. That is why I say it is important for the

supervisor to listen to us when we recommend that they give us better chemicals. (Interview, Nandisa)

Similar findings with regards to respiratory problems due to the usage of chemicals were also made by Ahonen *et al.* (2006), and they particularly note how their participants suffered as a result of working with toxic products such as bleach and ammonia. For Nandisa, the respiratory problem is caused by the hazardous chemicals she works with. The fact that the coughing haunts her even at night clearly shows that it is a negative experience, as it deprives her of sleep. The research conducted on the experiences of domestic work, particularly that incorporating experiences of working with toxic products such as chemicals, also reveals that domestic workers have suffered serious dermatological problems, because of using these chemicals. The room attendants have expressed their experiences in the same vein:

If you look at my lips carefully they are chapped because of the chemicals. It started to irritate me and I went to see the doctor because of that. The doctor called it cheilitis and suggested that I apply a lip balm such as Zambuk regularly. But I also received medication for that. The supervisor knows what these chemicals are doing to my lips but I work nonetheless. My lips started peeling off and if you notice the lower lip has some red spots. It does not feel painful or anything but it is irritating to see my skin peeling off. It is not only the lips that suffer from these chemicals but my chest as well. I thought I had asthma but then the doctor said I do not have it yet but it is just breathing problems. But I cough at night and I struggle to sleep sometimes. When I am coughing the chest is in pain. (Interview, Zenande)

In the case of Zenande and other room attendants who have shared their experience of suffering because of the toxic chemicals, it is the workplace factors that negatively affect their life. To other participants, the negative impacts of the chemicals were felt through the hands:

It did not feel painful but then I was worried about my skin which was peeling off. The only thing I felt was that my hands were very itchy. So I would scratch them and that is what led to the peeling. I was very concerned because my hands were never like that before and all of a sudden I used a chemical and now they were peeling off. (Focus group Interview, Anna)

Even though the participants here expressed their bodily experiences as not painful, it was still of great concern to them that their bodies were being damaged in such a way. Freund *et al.* (2003) also note that working class people in terms of their occupation lack power to effect changes in their workplace arrangements, and as a result the negative impacts of dilapidated working conditions will continue to afflict them. In the context of room attendants at Rhodes, it is not only the chemicals and illnesses such as high blood pressure and arthritis that workers suffer from. The terrible work conditions have also meant some workers have had to undergo surgical operations. Also, the workload has been said to amplify the pain in instances where a room attendant has undergone an operation:

I started having the surgical operations when I moved to this hall where I work now. I started having cist and I went to have a surgical operation for that. When I came back from that, because of the intense workload I also started having hernia and the doctor said it is because I have overworked myself. The doctor said it is because I lifted heavy objects without having allowed the area where I had a surgical operation for a cist to heal properly. So I went for another operation because of that hernia. When I came back I did not even have a single casual to assist me. Whereas, the doctor's letter said I must only take light duties. When I tell my supervisor she said "there are no light duties at Rhodes", without even telling the manager about that. When we asked them they said if you had an operation you must have a casual when you come back. That depends on the supervisor to report to the manager that you just came back from having an operation. You are expected to scrub showers whilst you have just had an operation. (Focus group Interview, Zethu)

The participant stated that the wounds have started to heal, but that the pain was still persistent.

They have healed now but when I work very hard obviously I will be in pain. When I came back from the sick leave because of these operations they did not lighten the workload. Now just imagine someone with operations doing all this work. When I get home I must lie in bed and just relax because my body is sore when I get there. I do feel pain when I leave this place but my operations have started to heal now. (Focus group Interview, Zethu)

The continued exposure to intense workload for Zethu and other participants, who have suffered illnesses of various sorts, is a clear indication of the fact that their health conditions will not start to change until the hazardous workplace environment with an unbearable workload, starts to change. These statements by participants speak to the urgent need for the workplace to undergo fundamental transformation, so that the lives of the workers can improve and cease to be a health risk to them. It is also clear from the narratives of room attendants that their health condition started to deteriorate as a result of the workplace.

Vetlesen (2009:51) argues that “when I claim that the way in which we have pain as human beings is via feeling pain, via the full sensing of it, that means that the feeling of pain cannot be separated from the conscious understanding (cognition) of pain. The principal characteristic of pain is precisely the feeling of something causing pain”. The meanings and the interpretations made by room attendants are vital in understanding this notion of positional suffering. The lived experiences of room attendants must also be viewed from an angle which seeks to understand how they make sense of their experience of pain. Some of the narratives of room attendants made clear how they felt in a prestigious space such as Rhodes University:

I am dead already and how are we supposed to work in our houses. I have high blood pressure and arthritis so I am suffering. We work hard and we do not even get casuals to come and assist us. That is why we die here because you work like a donkey. We are slaves here and we are the ones who keep the standard of this institution high. (Interview, Ziyanda)

Ziyanda uses a metaphor “like a donkey” to characterise the slavery which she experiences as a room attendant. The metaphors in a study that seeks to grasp the lived experiences of participants are of importance. Kleinman *et al.* (1992:77) note that “the talk of people filled with pain is filled with vivid metaphors”. The comparison of her workplace experience to a donkey, speaks volumes about how Ziyanda perceives herself as a room attendant in the institution. Ziyanda employs the metaphor to give a vivid picture of the exploitative nature of the work she and others are doing as room attendants. In De Casanova’s work which also looked extensively at the negative consequences of domestic work on workers’ bodies, she also noted the dominance of metaphors when workers are describing their toil and suffering. Kirmayer (1992:325) notes the importance of metaphors in describing an experience when he argues that “...metaphors are tools of working with experience. A metaphor expresses

something that the body knows how to do, a way of working with or transforming a concept". There is a deeply embedded meaning of how the workplace is a toiling site according to Ziyanda in her account of being made to work like a donkey.

One feature of social structure is how it is stratified. People can be stratified or ranked according to such dimensions as class, ethnicity, age, and gender. Socioeconomic status, or social class, is often measured by income, occupation, or wealth. A person's social location in socioeconomic stratification influences how much power the individual has to manage his or her body and an external environment. Other determinants of power affect health. The particular position of power we occupy in our family, and our gender, race, and ethnicity. (Freund *et al.* 2003:5)

As people of lower class (on Grades 1-3 as cleaners), room attendants' positional suffering in the occupational hierarchy is also as a result of their positions within the overall occupational order. They feel that their work is undervalued by the management and as result their experience of being in the workplace is that which is marked by serious suffering, which continues unabated. The lived experience in their world of the workplace can thus be characterized as a negative one, and this is what marks the holistic experience of pain being emotional, and it can be shown by amalgamating the two concepts of pain as a sensory and as an emotional experience, which then make the overall experience of room attendants at Rhodes an experience of positional suffering. This is reflected in the meanings they give to their experiences of pain through the body. These are understood to be as a result of them occupying low positions in the institutional and social hierarchy.

4.3 Occupational Epidemiology

Sickness does not just happen. Rather, discernible patterns are evident in the distribution and frequency of sickness, injury and death in human populations. Social epidemiology is the study of the distribution of patterns of health and illness in human populations and of the social factors that shape them. (Berkman and Kawachi, 2000 cited in Freund, *et al.* 2003:11)

Scholars who have deliberated on social epidemiology make a clear argument about the fact that health and illness in society are determined by how that society works (Freund *et al.* 2003; Honjo, 2004). In a context of an industrial factory for example, the machines workers use for production and the factory environment in general, can go a long way in terms of

determining their health status. When we talk of the workplace, it is important that one avoid generalisations and talk concretely about epidemiology in relation to the workplace arrangements. The concept of occupational epidemiology becomes important in the context of understanding the ills of the workplace which is Rhodes, for room attendants. The concept of occupational epidemiology has been applied by Artazcoz, Borrell, Cortes, Aguir, & Cascant (2007) when looking at work related inequalities in health. They specifically employ it to reveal women's occupational health as a result of workplace arrangements, and also to look at ergonomic and psychosocial hazards at work. (Freund *et al.* 2003) also notes that the ailing body does not come as a result of magical forces, but through deliberate social arrangements. In the context of an occupation which destroys the workers' bodies, it is important to lay bare the occupational practices which contribute to the destruction of the bodies of room attendants. If the environment is understood to be unhealthy, it could have a direct bearing on the quality of life of workers. De Casanova (2003) also noted how the physically demanding nature of domestic work has negative effects on the quality of health of domestic workers in the urban surroundings of Ecuador. In the context of room attendants working in the housekeeping division at Rhodes University, their quality of health is also subject to their working conditions:

We really work hard here at Rhodes, more especially the room attendants. The showers, it is possible for one person to work with 22 showers. I do not have arms here, as room attendants we do not have arms and my legs are burning as I am speaking to you because of climbing the stairs. You forget something on the bottom floor and you go down to get it and you do that over and over again. The showers really destroy us above everything else and I think they should pay attention to this thing of showers. (Interview, Nongcwele)

The physical toil which the domestic workers go through in the workplace has also been addressed by Ahonen *et al.* (2006:16) in their research on cleaners' lives as they note that "Among all participants there was consensus that the physical nature of household work was exhausting...Those whose main responsibilities included cleaning discussed musculoskeletal strain associated with the repetitive and fast upper body motions used in scrubbing, ironing, and mopping, as well as strain on their backs". The daily work routine of a room attendant at housekeeping is characterised by a very heavy workload for a day's work. The workplace arrangement in terms of the tasks requires that in most residences a single worker performs the tasks which ideally would be done by 2 or 3 workers, depending on the number of floors for that particular residence as Nongenile notes that "Now a person performs a task which

used to be done by 3 people in a single residence”. Participants thus commented on a heavy workload. Given this reduction in a number of workers per residence, and also taking into cognisance De Casanova (2003) in her analysis of the physically demanding nature of domestic work; it then comes as no shock that the workers’ bodies will go through immense suffering as a result of their workload:

This work is exhausting more especially when we are cleaning the showers. That is our biggest challenge here, that of showers and these stairs, because if I go to the doctor I am told that I have arthritis. The doctor says it is because of intense workload. For instance, I once went to the doctor and the doctor told me I must not bend to reach for objects on the floor because I have a waist area that is sore. But there is no chance for that because we are cleaning showers. I love my work and I want to make sure that it is always clean here. (Interview, Nongcwele)

But the workload is very intense as my residence starts from room 1 to 84. There are four floors and there is also the common room. The floor is huge and sometimes you must clean the entire floor. (Focus group Interview, Siphesihle)

What Nongcwele and Siphesihle are illustrating above is the physically demanding nature of their work. The troubles that Nongcwele is experiencing in her waistline are not as a result of magical forces, but they are caused by the workplace arrangements. Looking at their experiences from occupational epidemiological perspective, it becomes clear that their health conditions are driven into a deteriorating status because of the workplace conditions which are sucking the physical labour out of the bodies of room attendants. The occupational epidemiology of the housekeeping division at Rhodes thus reveals the necessity of changing the workplace arrangement so that the room attendants can cease to suffer from such levels of pain and illness.

4.4 Lack of empathy from University management

In the clinical setting, it will also be their bodily state. The cries and groans, the flinches, the writhings, and the bodily contortions that express pain will all be gestures of appeal. They are all modes of supplication. They are not just symptoms or malady. They are also personally expressive gestures that

open up the interpersonal space into which the clinician enters as rescuer. Moreover, the patients report of their pain, whether formalised into a symptomatology or not, will be more useful diagnostic information. They will be appeals for help that arise from the deepest need of the other and appeal to the deepest ethical levels of the clinician. However, it is expressed and whether or not it causes suffering in milder cases, pain is a direct appeal from the depths of otherness of the patient to the depths of the otherness of the humanity. (Van Hooft, 2003:261)

The workplace arrangements which are clearly defined in social epidemiology to be the root cause of all illness and pain must be fundamentally transformed if the exploitative conditions the room attendants work under are to be successfully alleviated. Van Hooft (2003) draws from the theoretical work of Emmanuel Levinas when he discusses the notion of understanding the mystery of the other. The other's subjectivity is difficult to apprehend if one does not immerse themselves in the pain and suffering of the other (Van Hooft, 2003). In an attempt to further expand Levinas' concept, Van Hooft (2003) uses an analogy of clinician and patient to kind of highlight the importance of grasping the pain of the sufferer by the clinician:

For the clinician to open up a communicative channel to such a self-absorbed subjectivity requires a form of rapport which is different from that established by everyday language. The objective and intersubjective world which language establishes and refers to is no longer available to the patient in severe pain. Thus a new form of intersubjectivity needs to be established, one grounded in empathy. (Van Hooft, 2003:259)

Frantz Fanon (1969) also looked at the failure of medical practitioners in France to properly understand the illness and pain suffered by the North African patient. The first thesis made by Fanon on the theme of the North African syndrome:

That the behaviour of the North African often causes a medical staff to have misgivings as to the reality of his illness. (Fanon, 1969:4).

As with the argument made by van Hooft about the lack of apprehension by the clinician of the patient's suffering, Fanon makes an intervention in this respect, by stating in his second thesis that the North African when being diagnosed by the medical practitioner enters in an

already pre-existing framework (Fanon, 1969). This is a kind of framework which only looks at the room attendants as mere cleaners, and not as equals in terms of them being human beings on the same level as their manager:

Our manager wants her word to be final, and she does not care about what you think because she is the manager here. (Interview, Zola)

In his third thesis that Fanon makes in relation to the condition of the North African in colonial France, Fanon proposes that medical practitioners have a 'situational diagnosis' of the patient's problem. This means that it is not enough for the clinician to know what Fanon refers to as the 'somatic constitution' of the patient, but that the clinician must also know the 'dangers that threaten him' (Fanon, 1969:10). In Van Hooft's terms, to establish what he refers to as intersubjective rapport, the clinician must take seriously the shared experience of the patient. To achieve Fanon's situational diagnosis in which the clinician is fully aware of the dangers that cause the patient to suffer, Van Hooft's intersubjective rapport is absolutely necessary because at a distance from the patients' world, it is impossible to make a successful diagnosis of their situation.

Taking Van Hooft's and Fanon's analogies and applying them to the context of Rhodes' housekeeping department as a workplace for room attendants, we could refer to the room attendants as patients and the management responsible for the employment conditions as clinicians. Using such an analogy would mean that the management of Rhodes University ought to be, or should listen to the pain and suffering of the room attendants. It will be through making a 'situational diagnosis' and establishing 'intersubjective rapport' that management would be able to come to a proper diagnosis of the workers' conditions. However, the voices of room attendants tell a different story of the Rhodes University management:

We work but we are not happy with our work. I blame the management; in fact, I blame the entire system of Rhodes University for the way we work here. Because they say we are the pillars of this institution but they do not treat us like that. They treat us as if we are desperate for this work; yes, we

are desperate but they should be able to show us how important we are to them. (Focus group Interview, Fezeka)

Treating room attendants as people who are desperate for work and therefore making them feel inadequate in the presence of management at Rhodes has also been mentioned as another issue by room attendants:

Well it is not nice working here because of the ill treatment we receive from the manager. Even when we are called to meetings we do not get to discuss things with management, they get to tell us the way forward, more especially our manager. She does not have a proper way of talking to us and her word is final. She wants things to go her way. She treats us like we are her little children. We are grownups for heaven sake. This manager does not have respect for her workers. I feel belittled and undermined every time I come to the meetings. (Interview, Zola)

It is such struggles that the room attendants have to go through with management. They feel they are not being taken seriously enough and this goes a long way in terms of preserving the *status quo* in the workplace. Despite the room attendants having visited doctors so that there could be alleviation of their pain, the reports they brought from the doctors are not enough to convince the management that the workplace is destroying their health. It is not because they are not enough, but it is the point of view from which the management is listening to their problems, as Van Hooft also makes an important point:

If I relate to an employee just as a functional item in my enterprise, or if I relate to my patient just as a problem to be solved, then my comportment is unethical. (Van Hooft, 2003:259)

Van Hooft's quote above clearly shows that there are ethical implications from the side of the management of Rhodes University, with regards to the toiling the room attendants are experiencing. The occupational epidemiological evidence warrants that there must be action to address the plight of the room attendants. The occupational epidemiology of the workplace at Rhodes shows that the chronic illnesses and the surgical operations which the room

attendants are suffering from, are as a result of the workplace hazards. The housekeeping division at Rhodes has also been of great concern to some of the doctors whom the participants have visited in the past because of their illness:

Sometimes even if you go to visit the doctor, the doctor will ask you “where do you work”? And you say I work at Rhodes. The doctor will then ask “at which department”? and you say “at housekeeping”. The doctor will tell you that you are in serious danger, because of the chemicals you use to begin with, are very dangerous to your body. For instance, I wear spectacles as the vision of my other eye is blurrier than the other. The doctor said the eye has been affected by the chemical and thus it is severely damaged. (Focus group Interview, Sarah)

Through them reporting their visits to the doctors, and the persistence of their suffering because of the chemicals and the work which could be generally described as sucking their physical energies; the room attendants have tried to assist in establishing what causes their suffering in the workplace. The ignorance of the management to the grief and pain of room attendants has resulted in deaths even taking place within the housekeeping division:

What is happening now is that people die here in housekeeping. Three of our colleagues who have passed away had an infection on their lungs. These chemicals affect the lungs. I also went to the doctor in 2012, and he made it clear that my lungs have been affected by something. It is these chemicals because as you cough, you also inhale the chemical in the process. The chemicals are indeed hazardous. (Focus group interview, Sarah)

Conclusion

The anecdotes of room attendants with regards to their lived experience of pain show a need for a transformation of the workplace environment to occur. Most of the accounts of dermatological, respiratory, and other kinds of chronic illness which the room attendants suffer from are persistent in the bodies because of the status quo in the work environment. Many room attendants who indicated that they suffer from chronic illness mentioned that their bodies suffer as a result of working with water, intense workload and often working alone in big residences. This condition of occupational ill health requires empathy from the

management to hear the cry of room attendants. The phenomenon of pain is ubiquitous in the domestic work setting as a result of the workload in such occupations that is unbearable. The remedy to the suffering of room attendants is to arrest the *status quo* and make sure that the workplace conditions are transformed for the better. To do this, management needs to be more willing to see the world through the eyes – or rather to be willing to come to an understanding of what the bodies feel of those who perform these tasks.

5. Bodies in physical places: an intersectional experience of not being the somatic norm

Apartheid and colonialism left South African society scattered with powerful institutions whose history and residual character is colonial and 'white' in very deeply embedded ways. The historically white universities are among these. There is little documentation or acknowledgement of the extent to which black students entering this institutional milieu in all its elements – human, architectural, pedagogies, social – frequently find the experience deeply painful, dislocating, disruptive, unsettling, angering, confusing and difficult. (Vincent 2005:112)

In the previous chapter, I looked at the lived experiences of room attendants in relation to the physical aspects of the workplace. This experience is the one characterised by bodily pain and serious suffering because of the workload and other general workplace conditions, such as the hazardous chemicals and excessive use of water during the working hours. The centre of focus in that chapter was on the physical bodies of room attendants, and how as a result of the workplace arrangements they encounter, their bodies become deformed, painful and diseased. This chapter will shift the focus to the lived experiences of room attendants arising from the social relations in the physical places in which they do their work. Domestic work is characterised by its intimate nature, as domestic workers look after the most intimate locations of human life such as bedrooms and bathrooms when performing tasks such as housekeeping (Zungu, 2009). The nature of domestic work is that the worker works in private and intimate spaces where they render familial services such as cleaning the bathrooms, the bedrooms and the living rooms. In this chapter I discuss how the room attendants at Rhodes University experience working in locations where students, managers, house wardens, and other people who form an integral part of the residence system live their daily lives. Informed by Bourdieu's notion of 'social space', and through stretching that with Nirmal Puwar's and David Sibley's framings of social space, the chapter discusses the lived experiences of room attendants of the social relations that both inform and are informed by material, physical place.

What happens when those bodies not expected to occupy certain places do so? And most specifically, what happens when women and racialized minorities take up 'privileged' positions which have not been 'reserved' for them, for which, they are not, in short, the somatic norm? What are the terms of coexistence? (Nirmal Puwar, 2004:1)

One part of the problem, then is to identify forms of socio-spatial exclusion as they are experienced and articulated by the subject groups. These groups, however, may be seen as both dominant and subordinate, depending on the way in which they are categorised. (David Sibley, 1995:x)

The theoretical tool of space offered by both Sibley and Puwar will be used in tandem with Bourdieu's notion of social space, as their work seeks to zoom in on the experiences of those who occupy inferior positions as defined by particular social settings, and thus might have a lived experience of exclusion in such spaces. Puwar's *Space Invaders* together with David Sibley's *Geographies of Exclusion*, go to the depths of the exclusionary nature of privileged spaces which are designed for certain people or to accommodate certain bodies. However, when it comes to understanding the lived experiences of room attendants, the theoretical arguments made by the two books need to be slightly stretched so as to have a clear grasp of the nature of social relations between room attendants, and other people such as students and their superiors. The main focus for the analysis in these texts is on people previously excluded from privileged spaces such as parliament (see for instance Puwar, 2004), and in an urban geography such as malls and other exquisite spaces in cities (see for instance Sibley, 1995). The theoretical underpinning of the notion of space thus needs to be slightly stretched when one is looking at the nature of room attendants working at Rhodes University residences. This is why the discussion and background on the nature of domestic work is paramount, so that the work of these scholars can be used to describe the lived experiences of being in a privileged space like a university and occupying a low position in that space.

5.1 'Interlocking' forms of oppression as experienced by room attendants

...Conquered natives were settled into townships from which were drawn pools of unskilled labourers to work as domestics, cleaners, gardeners, sanitation workers, construction gangs, and so forth. (Masekela & Cheers, 2004:5)

The colonial and apartheid era in South Africa was organised in such a way that black people were mainly there to provide menial labour (Luckhardt & Wall, 1980). As Hugh Masekela's quotes suggests, most of them worked either in the mines or in the back yards as domestic workers of white people (see Ginsburg *et al.* 2001 and Cock, 1989). This phenomenon was

more acute for black women as their oppression was not only experienced along the lines of class and race, but also along the lines of gender. This experience of the “interlocking nature of oppression” is made clear by Kimberle Crenshaw (1989:141) when she argues that “because the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism, any analysis that does not take intersectionality into account cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which women are subordinated”. Crenshaw refers to the myopia of looking at the suffering experienced by women as single-axis. The dominance of women as labourers in domestic work continues to be a reality in the context of room attendants at the housekeeping division at Rhodes as is demonstrated by the fact that in the present study out of 29 participants, 26 of them were women and only three were men. Unlike the conventional domestic work relationship, which plays itself out in the private sphere, relations between those who perform domestic work on campus and other actors are multiple rather than being limited to the relationship between a “maid and the madam”². There are multiple other actors to whom the room attendant is subordinate in terms of social standing. These include managers, students, hall secretaries, house wardens, hall wardens, and sub wardens as Neliswa describes:

Another thing I do not like about Rhodes is the Wardens, Hall Wardens, and Secretary who are oppressing us. Even before you get oppressed by the manager, you find that these people pressurise us the most. We are old enough to see when you as students are being influenced by someone else. We were not happy when we first arrived here because there were complaints from students. As you see us now, the students here sometimes write lengthy reports complaining about us not working and that the place is dirty. At that time, they are being influenced by someone else. If you manage to know the students who wrote complaint, the warden can charge you because you are not allowed to talk about a student who wrote the complaint to other students. Sometimes when students hear that there is a written complaint from one of them, some do come to us because you as students are different. (Focus group interview, Neliswa)

It is thus important to give attention to each of the social relations that the room attendants have with one of several agents who also co-exist with them in the university residential space, but who, however, because of their social standing in these relationships are in a relatively powerful position compared to that of the room attendant. In addition, in the

² This is a terminology employed by Jacklyn Cock in her book titled *Maids & Madams: Domestic workers under apartheid*. Cock uses this terminology to describe the relationship that exists between the black women domestic workers (maids) and white women employers (madams) in her study during apartheid.

process of paying attention to these social relations, it is important to look at the description given by the room attendants themselves of how they experience interactions along race and class lines. The most common interaction that exists in the residential space is among the room attendants and the students. One employee provides the history of this social interaction between room attendants and students:

As years go by, I even notice students that some of them did not use to greet us in the past. I would take time to greet the student and have a chat with them. In this dispensation there is no longer a dichotomy between black and white, all students are the same now. They are free and they seem happy unlike in the past where there was racism. They are all the same. When I was working here during apartheid years there were only white students. So we were also afraid in what we did. Now we feel free but then not everything will be stopped at once. When I say not everything will be stopped at once I mean, these students come from various background. Maybe some of them where they come from, the family is not clear on us being united so you even see with his tendencies. So you as a parent you try to change him. Some of them might be conservative in character but when they come here they come across someone like myself and they start to open up and feel free among other students. (Interview, Nongenile)

Striking here is how Nongenile situates herself as a parent with the responsibility to change the white student who might be coming from a conservative family and thus still reflect the attitudes of the past towards black people. Cock (1989:3) looks at the socialisation of white children into racism during apartheid: “many white South African children are socialised into the dominant ideological and learn the attitudes and styles of racial domination from relationships with servants, especially nannies”. In 2015, Rhodes University witnessed a campaign which was targeted at dealing with the racism which students had alleged continued to exist within the institution. One of the issues brought up in the campaign was the treatment of cleaning staff by privileged students whose behaviour demeans and dehumanises those who must clean up after them. This unequal relationship of intimacy is central to the way in which domestic labour has been theorised.



Source: Victoria John, 2015. *Mail and Guardian Online*

The residential space in relation to Bourdieu's notion of people, who occupy inferior positions, can be said to give lot of privileges to students. The students in such settings are seen as consumers and thus the room attendant's responsibility is to take care of these spaces and clean areas such as the ablution rooms, the common rooms and corridors. It is important to look closely at this relationship and also how room attendants have experiences of racism in their encounters with the students. In these encounters the body and its smells, emanations and fluids emerge as central.

Even their girlfriends when they are here they use the bathroom where I also change my clothes. You see, it is because we do not have a restroom. So it is such cases and after that you see him refusing to greet you. In most cases it is the white students who tend to do that. They have a serious problem. (Focus group interview, Grace)

We also get challenges from students because sometimes they see the dustbin in front of them, but they leave papers and rubbish on the floor. If she goes to the ablution room, they leave toilet paper there and they do not flush the toilets. You see such things when it comes to students. Even on the following day they do the same thing and you must clean it. Sometimes they pour urine inside the dustbin and it smells. So I asked myself how is it possible that some would pour urine in the dustbin? You clean it, the following week the same thing happens again. So these students that we work for have such tendencies. They make things difficult for us. (Interview, Irene)

This experience of racism expressed by the room attendants can also be seen to be echoed in the findings of the Rhodes University Institutional Culture Staff Survey of 2014. The survey canvassed the views of staff members on seven themes: equity and fairness, transformation, management, rewards and recognition, social environment and infrastructure, and general satisfaction (RUICS 2014). This survey was also aimed at getting the experiences of staff at Rhodes in relation to the workplace and its culture. One of its key findings on the theme of racism was that “many black staff members indicated that they feel RU continues to privilege white people, and some staff members even spoke of crude racism such as not being allowed to use the same bathroom as managers” (RUICS, 2014:44). At housekeeping, the room attendants have also expressed that they experience racism not only from white students, but also from hall secretaries and hall wardens:

Sometimes there are bogus complaints as it is clear that the student does not have evidence for what they are saying. When that hall warden left, things started to get better, and I do not know how to say this, but she had ‘apartheid’ as all of us here are black workers. She had apartheid, and even the Secretary also has apartheid. I do not know whether to call them boers, but then they have a segregationist mentality. (Focus group interview, Neliswa)

In her book titled *At Home With Apartheid* (2011), Rebecca Ginsburg explicates the role of racism and how it affects the experience of the domestic worker. In the context of room attendants, their selection of words such as “apartheid” and “segregationist mentality” point to how they experience their encounters with people such as hall secretaries and wardens. Their lived reality as it pertains to the phenomenon of racism also pointed to other departments which were not necessarily part of housekeeping; and more broadly, the room attendants pointed to what one might refer to as institutional racism in the sense that their narrative was also directed at the management at large:

We also have a white management here who do not understand the pain we go through as black people. Have you ever seen a white person cleaning in this institution? You will never see them. It is us black people who are cleaners. (Interview, Zenande)

There is racism here and I do not go well with racism. Yesterday, I was cleaning in that residence over there and they were doing walkabouts. Lucky enough I was there on that day. The results were back and they

picked up many wrongs. I went to my housekeeper and told her I want an appointment with the inspector. She came here yesterday and she said to my other colleague 100%, with good, good, very good! She looked around the entire residence and it was clean. I told my supervisor that if they look at the colour of my skin, whether I am white or black; I am not scared of exercising my right, because I was going to tell her it is because I am a 'brown bread'. You give a lot of points to the white bread. (Interview, Irene)

At grounds and gardens there is a white person who works there whose contract does not expire, whereas for other workers, their contract do expire. They do the same duties but because others are black, their contracts do not get renewed. It is because he is white. (Interview, Nandisa)

It is because our managers are white and we are black that they are inconsiderate of our plight. (Interview, Jomo)

The statements made by both Jomo and Zenande point to the management as part of the racist *status quo* in which the room attendants find themselves. Their lived experience as far as racism is concerned, is according to their view, also exacerbated by an unresponsive management because it does not apprehend their pain as black workers. Irene's statement and using metaphors such as "white bread" and "brown bread" was as a result of a coloured female room attendant in the residence across from where Irene was working. In Irene's view, the reason as to why she was not given the full points was because she was black; as she points out that "there is racism here". It is an interesting phenomenon that Irene felt that the inspector preferred to acknowledge the work of the coloured female room attendant, and not hers. In this study, there was only one coloured female room attendant who participated, and the majority of the participants were black African women. Responding to the question of how she experienced working in Rhodes residences, she said:

I have always felt welcomed and my relationships with my colleagues and supervisors are healthy. At central cleaning and here things are different between those two places. Here in the residences you do not get a certain time to do a certain thing. I am happy here. (Interview, Annita)

We are really suffering and this place is not good, and you find that people who were here before us never experienced these things because they were coloured. Now that all of us are black, we are suffering under the hands of a black supervisor. (Focus group interview, Sylvia)

Annita's experience juxtaposed with the rest of the room attendants who are black and female shows a stark difference. Annita's experience is that of satisfaction, whereas the majority of black room attendants expressed their experience as that of "suffering". It is important not to lose sight of the intra-racial oppression which exists in this context as Sylvia is also affirming the statements of other room attendants who mentioned that they are also suffering under the hands of a black supervisor.

Some of the room attendants also pointed to the fact that they have similar encounters with black supervisors, and this implies an intra-racial relationship:

Just imagine now that I am under the supervision of a black person, and I am cleaning showers, she then comes and stand on top of me to observe what I am doing and how I am doing it. (Focus group interview, Sylvia)

We are treated very badly by both whites and blacks, with blacks I am referring to the supervisors. (Focus group interview, Arthur)

There is ubiquity of the white employer and the black domestic worker in the literature on domestic work. However, the work of Xoliswa Dilata (2008) looks at the intra-racial power dynamics between black domestic employers and workers and the emphasis is on class as the defining characteristic of inequality in this sector. The literature on domestic work has to be stretched when it comes to understanding clearly the nature of oppression for black female room attendants at Rhodes University. This is because in the private household setting, the relationship is between the domestic worker and the white employers, and with the rise of the black middle class (see Dilata, 2008) it is a phenomenon which also exist among black people. The literature in domestic work characterises this relationship to be an unequal one, whereby the worker is in a powerless and vulnerable position.

This multifacetedness of the social relations between room attendants and other agents within the university residential system also extends to sub-wardens, who are also students. This relationship between the room attendant and the sub-warden also proves the unequal relations which exist between the room attendants and other actors within the residential space:

The sub wardens are responsible for checking the rooms once the guests have left during the festival. When they do that, they take the very same things which were left behind by the guests. The secretary, who is also a

conference warden at that time, tells the sub warden at the time to take everything. They even collect slices of bread. (Focus group interview, Neliswa).

For instance in one of the rooms during June, I entered the room of a guest and afterward I met someone on the passage. The person said please mother go to that room over there, as I left something for you. When I got there, there was a note appreciating the cleanliness of the room and it mentioned that R200 was attached to it. The sub warden entered the room first and took the money and left the note. Those are items which were left behind by the guests. And it happens that you meet the sub warden on the passage and you see that she is embarrassed as her hands are also filled by other items which were left behind. (Focus group interview, Sylvia)

Room attendants also raised concerns about being asked to clean the house of the hall wardens. In their understanding, and in terms of their job profile, they are hired to look after the residence space of the students, and this now becomes extended to the wardens as well.

They do not care about us as cleaners as they say that if you are a cleaner you must clean everywhere. You see where I work in my residence there is a warden there and he has a child. I even take care of the baby's napkins and I am even scared to complain as they might say this is your work. Those napkins are supposed to be taken by her 'nanny'. If you start to talk you become a nonsensical person. I am afraid to speak even if you see there is something wrong because they might come after me for speaking out. You are always in a state of fear. (Focus group interview, Fiona)

In an article he wrote for the South African Civil Society Information Service (SACSI) in 2010, titled *Domestic Workers in South Africa: Its modern day slavery*, Mohamed Motala looks closely at the bullying experienced by domestic workers in the Western Cape as bosses even asked them to wash their dogs and do a whole lot of other tasks. Because of the powerless position which is informed by their vulnerability, they could not say no to the bosses. Fiona's situation is similar to that in the sense she feels it is degrading to be cleaning napkins of babies of wardens as that is not captured within her job profile. However because of the unequal relations between Fiona and the warden, she still has to do it as she also states that she fears the consequences if she does not do it.

The interaction also exists between the room attendants and guests who come to the university residences during the National Arts Festival (NAF)³. However, a different arrangement to the normal residential system takes place when the guests are in the residences. They operate like they are ‘hotels’. The behaviour of the guests during the festival period causes suffering as guests during the festival do not show respect to the room attendants:

During the festival things happen. Guests leave things such as condoms lying around on the floor. Those people are old for doing such things and we must clean up after their mess. Or, if they were drinking you can see things which were done deliberately, such as pouring alcohol and you must clean that. (Interview, Nandisa)

When the students are here we do not enter their rooms and clean but for the guests, we must enter the rooms and work, doing room service. Furthermore, the students here do not even get towels, but for these festival guests there are towels. You must always make sure the towels are washed and in preparation for tomorrow you make sure that the clean towels are ready for use by the guests. We wash showers every day during the festival. (Interview, Irene)

The pervasiveness of this disrespect coming from the guests is also amplified by the disrespect managers have towards the room attendants:

The manager treats us as if we are her little children in meetings. We are grown-ups for heaven sake. This manager does not have respect for her workers. I feel very belittled and undermined every time I go to the meetings. (Interview, Zola)

They say we must clock out for that clock is for us uneducated people. You clock for going to the Human Resources office. Every time you go somewhere you clock. (Focus group interview, Grace)

This situation of being forced to clock in and out, is understood by the room attendants to be as a result of being uneducated and therefore being discriminated on the basis of their class and occupational status. Looking on the five face of oppression, Iris Young (1990:56) deliberates on one of these five faces which is “powerlessness”, when she argues that “the

³ The Grahamstown National Arts Festival attracts over 50000 people each year (see <https://www.sleeping-out.co.za/events/grahamstown-national-arts-festival/3#anchor>). It normally lasts for 11 days and it starts on the end of June. During this period, Rhodes University opens up some of its residences to provide accommodation for some of the guests. The residences are turned into B&Bs and some into Hotels.

powerless have little or no work autonomy, exercise little creativity or judgement in their work”. This powerlessness will feature very frequently in the following discussions as the context of domestic work is replete with cases of domestic workers having less autonomy, and thereby defined by these interlocking forms of oppression, are in a powerless position.

5.2 Bodily boundaries: residential rules and the invisibilisation of room attendants

Social spaces are not blank and open for anybody to occupy. There is a connection between bodies and space, which is built, repeated and contested over time. While all can, in theory, enter, it is certain types of bodies that are tacitly designated as being the ‘natural’ occupants of specific positions. Some bodies are deemed as having the right to belong, while others are marked out as trespassers, who are in accordance with how both spaces and bodies are imagined (politically, historically, and conceptually), circumscribed as being ‘out of place’. Not being the somatic norm, they are space invaders. (Nirmal Puwar, 2004:8)

The above discussion on intersectionality and the interlocking forms of oppression which are faced by room attendants is a necessary foregrounding for this discussion which is centred around ‘bodily boundaries’. Elizabeth Grosz (1995:35) argues that “Bodies speak, without necessarily talking because they become coded with and as signs. They speak social codes”. The residential space predominantly includes students and the room attendants as people who are responsible for the cleaning and generally looking after such spaces or what room attendants would refer to as housekeeping. In the context of live-in domestic work during apartheid in white private households, Ginsburg (1999, 2011) notes that the daily tasks which had to be performed by domestic workers included dusting, vacuuming all carpeted areas, making beds, cleaning the bathrooms, mopping the entry ways and generally tidying and rearranging. For room attendants, their tasks include the very same tasks as those of domestic workers in private households, but the difference is that the social setting includes students and not a single madam as per the case with the private household. In such a context, the students become the somatic norm from a class point of view in terms of using the facilities in the residences such as the common rooms where the television and other entertainment accessories are located. The uniform that room attendants are made to wear serves to mark them as not being the somatic norm as it inscribes their positioning in the residence, and thus also serves to set the demarcation between what can be used and not used by them. The

residential space and the utilities within it are specifically designated for the use of students. The expressions of some room attendants indicated that in many instances, when they wanted to ask something like asking for a day off at work, such things had to be run via the students first:

This other time we once asked the students whether they would be fine with us having to take just one day off during the week so that we can be able to go to town and pay our debts... Most of the staff members here do not come to work on public holidays. We also asked for the public holidays to get some time off. Even on that thing they said they will first ask the students, and the students said we can come to work but work for half-a-day. The students are still asking as to why we work during public holidays... This other time we were caught by the deputy sitting in the students' common room. We are not allowed to sit there because the common room is for students, everything here is for students. (Interview, Ziyanda)

Therefore, many facilities within the residential system are for the strict use of the students. The room attendants embody their race and their class as in the context of domestic workers in private household settings. The work of Rebecca Ginsburg (2011) and the work of Cock (1989) reveal that there are certain house rules within the private household setting that control the movement of the domestic worker. This demarcation of borders comes through the living space of room attendants as some of them stated that they did not even have a place to sit and enjoy their lunch during lunchtime because they did not have their own rest rooms, specifically made for them:

You see even now we do not have a rest room but I do not want to dwell much on that as if I want to put our supervisor in hot water. We have been asking for this restroom for this rest room for a long time. You see now we are feeling cold, as you can see the weather, but we do not have a place of our own to enjoy lunch. We have to go to the residence across the street for lunch, at the students bar and it is very cold there. We are not even allowed to sit there but because we do not have a rest room what else can we do? (Interview, Ziyanda)

We do not have rest rooms in some of the residences, wherein other residences workers do have them. So we do not have a place to eat during lunchtime. If they really cared about us they were going to speed up the process of making rest rooms for us. (Interview, Nandisa)

The experience of not having restrooms as spaces of their own which Nandisa and Ziyanda are alluding to is also captured in the domestic work literature. In the private household

settings during apartheid and post-apartheid, domestic workers were relegated to inferior spaces within the household where they worked and the living conditions in such spaces were in most cases not good (see for instance 2007; Cock, 1989; Ginsburg, 2011; Bhattacharya, Sukumar, & Mani, 2016).

The accommodation provided for residential domestic workers is frequently squalid, or bare and cramped, especially in comparison with the standard of furnishings in the employers' living quarters. The way in which residential homes are often built with servants' quarters at the back, frequently, with a separate entrance, creates separate social universes for the two groups. (Cock, 1989:35)

The lack of addressing the issue of restrooms with speed appears to be a lack of care from the management to Nandisa. During winter, Ziyanda also stresses the fact that they resort to sitting in the students' common room and they are also not allowed to sit there. In such a space, they become subjected to cold. This notion of not being allowed to be in certain spaces also takes the discussion to another ubiquitous phenomenon in domestic work, which Ginsburg (2011:139) calls "house rules". The residential space becomes a compartmentalised space through rules which prohibit the room attendants from living in certain spaces, or even using certain objects. For Puwar (2004:153) "Thus different bodies belonging to other places are in one sense out of place as they are space invaders". Not being the somatic norm in the residential space, room attendants as people who occupy inferior positions are thus excluded from certain spaces which are only considered for the use of students.

They also say we are not allowed to warm our food with residence microwaves, as they say they are not for us but for students. They can make you sign a warning for using the equipment that is for students use only. We cannot even sit in the common room. If you are tired you have to go and sit in the ablution room and not in the common room. When I was working at Hilltop residence the manager saw me sitting in the common room, and I had to go and explain myself as to why I was sitting there. I went through trouble because of that. (Focus group interview, Fiona)

There are students who are aware of the fact that we do not have a permission to sit in the common room. If they find us there they report you. We once sat in the common room and watched Muvhango in one of the residences where we work. The white students saw us and they reported us. We saw an email which was peppered by the complaints of students, basically saying that they could not watch television because the mothers who work as room attendants were watching it. So we ended up having to stop watching the television. (Focus group interview, Zethu)

Do you know that we are not even allowed to bath in your showers in these residences? We do not have a right to do that and you will get into trouble for doing so. Even if you as students are not here we are not allowed to bath in the showers. You can only bath here in our rest rooms. Even when you bath you must do so during your lunchtime, that is from 1pm-2pm. This shower is utilised by us and the kitchen staff. The manager herself also says we are not allowed to use the showers in the residences. Those showers are strictly for the use of students. They cannot even find you opening the fridge to put your water there. They will ask “what do you want in that fridge”? They accuse you of theft if anything is missing from the fridge (Focus group interview, Zethu)

We are not even allowed to put our washing inside the washing machines. You see this uniform has dirty spots because while I was eating I dropped pieces of food on my chest. I can lose my job for using the washing machine. You see the mother who is not here; she was suspended for a month. She was on the brink of being fired and she ended up having to stay in the township for a month without a pay, just because she used the washing machine. She was fortunate to not get fired completely as the students stood up for her? Just imagine we are here every day and tell me when do we get the chance to do our laundry? (Interview, Fiona)

These narratives of room attendants on being barred from using certain facilities within the residences reveal the nature of the relationship which exists in this space. The contravention of these rules has resulted in room attendants either getting warnings or being suspended as with the case with Fiona. Taking the notion of intersectionality into account, Ginsburg (2011:139) gives an in depth analysis of this compartmentalised space when she argues that “house rules divided white house into two coexisting, though intermingling, spheres, one of domesticity (white sphere) and the other of labour (the African space). The African sphere was not a separate room or collection of rooms. However, as much as if walls had been erected, house rules relegated domestic workers to a different social zone within the shared physical space of the house”. In the context of the residences which are the work spaces for room attendants at Rhodes, the walls are erected through not being allowed to use microwaves and being made to sign warnings when using them. In the instance of being caught watching television, room attendants make mention of the fact that it is the white students who saw them and reported the incident, claiming that “they could not watch television because the mothers who work as room attendants were watching it”. Nirmal Puwar (2001, 2004) makes it clear through her concept of the somatic norm that those who do not count as normative bodies, are thus not allowed in proximity to the normative body. In this instance white students experienced discomfort as they saw the room attendants sitting

down and watching television. This uncomfortable encounter or what Nirmal Puwar calls “dissonance” for the white students when seeing room attendants watching TV is further explained by Puwar (2004:54) when she argues that “the dissonance caused by the arrival of women and racialized minorities in privileged occupational spaces unleashes shock and surprise. Their entry causes disorientation and terror. The threat they are seen to pose amplifies their presence. As space invaders they represent a potential organisational terror. They are thus visible bodies that by their mere presence, invite suspicion and surveillance. This kind of treatment experienced by room attendants speaks to a deeply entrenched racism, and it is both racialized and classed when historicised within the South African context of domestic work.

The domestic work literature makes it clear that the notion of rules within the private household setting does not only end with being prohibited from occupying certain spaces or being barred from using certain facilities. Rules extend to the rationing of food, or in the case of room attendants, being completely barred from using the food (Bourdillon, 2006; Dilata, 2008; Cock, 1989; Archer, 2011).

There is food that is cooked in the dining halls but the food gets thrown away if there is some left. You students have paid for those plates why do you not fight against that? That food is sold to farmers and the money comes to Rhodes. When you are done eating you can say “I am going to wrap up my plate and give it to the mother who works in my residence”. We get hungry here and you find that the food does not get finished by students. (Interview, Nongcwele)

I even remember this other time I was chatting about the festival with this other mother, and she was so shocked when I was telling her that we are only allowed to drink things such as tea during the graduation period. She was here for graduation. It was only last year that we were given coffee and sugar. Otherwise, for the period before that we did not get anything. A member of the kitchen staff cannot even give you a slice of bread. If they do that they will be fired and lose their jobs. That is not even negotiable. (Focus group interview, Grace)

The politics of food when it comes to the domestic work setting and use of utensils is clearly captured by Bhattacharya et.al (n.d.:14) in their in-depth analysis of domestic workers in Chennai, India, when they postulate that “they were not allowed to use the utensils of the household for their eating or drinking, and in many cases were given separate, low quality utensils, and mostly leftovers and stale food. They were in most instances not even allowed to

draw water from the one used by the employers at home, and were required to use water from the kitchen taps that were not considered potable for the family members”. The inferiorisation of room attendants is not only limited to being deprived of food from the dining hall for example, but in their lack of choice over the uniform they get to wear.

The main problem here is that the management does not ask for our approval or recommendation when it comes to uniform. It is not only the shoes but the uniform itself because these clothes are too warm and in summer we sweat a lot. (Interview, Nongenile)

Nongenile’s narrative is also captured in De Casanova’s (2013) notions of embodiment of inequality for domestic workers through the uniforms they get to wear. Through this concept of embodiment of inequality, De Casanova also looks at how the wearing of uniform for domestic workers in urban Ecuador also marks the unequal relations between them and their employers (De Casanova, 2013). According to De Casanova (2013:574) “Interviewees also discussed embodied inequality in dress and physical appearance. Domestic workers admitted that there were clothes or items that they aspired to purchase”. One of the participants in De Casanova’s study stated that “they [employers] treat you according to how you look” (De Casanova, 2013:574). Within the context of domestic work in South Africa, Archer (2011) focuses largely on the distinctions drawn by the employers between the food they eat and the quality of food eaten by the domestic worker. It is clear that Nongenile is uncomfortable with the uniform, but because of powerlessness she cannot change that. She has no say in how her body is dressed on a daily basis and the bodily discomfort she experiences as a result of this decision being in the hands of others who do not experience what she experiences in her own body when it is clothed in this way.

The source of oppression for room attendants is not only limited to students or line managers, but there are other actors within the residential system who play a part in the perpetuation of their oppression. As their narratives have indicated, supervisors do play a role in entrenching the system of rules which the room attendants find as excluding them.

Now they are strict even when students want to give us something as a gift. They require them to write a note with their name and say ‘I, as this student, give mother so and so these items’. There requirements are made by the housekeepers. Our housekeepers are not the same. If a student gives

you something, the housekeeper wants to know which room is that student. She cannot even see you talking to a student as her attitude changes. Even when she finds us talking to students she gets angry at you, and I will carry on talking to the student and not mind her. (Focus group interview, Zethu)

This reality for room attendants has been explored by Michael Bourdillon (2006) in his study of child domestic workers in Zimbabwe. According to Bourdillon (2006:71) “A 17-year-old girl complained that the employer did not want her to talk with the children of the house. Some employers discourage their children from any familiarity with child workers. Some child workers complained that they were not allowed to watch television or sit on a sofa in the lounge. One commented that if she drank from a cup that the employers used, it would be thrown away”. These realities faced by the young domestic workers in Zimbabwe, also prove to be the case for room attendants at Rhodes. The narratives of room attendants reveal more the power dynamics which exist between them and their supervisors.

You see if she calls us to her office she gets to eat in front of us. We cannot even whisper among each other. She will shout and say “I am talking and this is my office...if someone comes here they must listen to me”. Why does she eat in front of us in the first place? (Focus group interview, Fiona)

This other time it was pay day and we came back late and we went to take stuff from her office. We brought some bread and drinks with us and when we started eating in her office, she said “never eat in my office again, you are not allowed to eat here. You can bring tea but not eat anything here”. (Focus group interview, Zethu)

The phenomenological insight which can be gained from this lived reality can be determined from the feelings of room attendants through making meaning of their experiences in such situations. When asked how they felt about this, participants spoke of these experiences adding up to a sense of not belonging:

I feel like I do not belong here. It is a reminder that I am person of low status and I cannot touch anything here because it does not belong to me. It feels like bad to be honest. (Focus group interview, Zethu)

Zethu's expression reveals that she feels out of place even though she works within the residential workspace. Her statement has both race and class connotations in the sense that she is not the somatic norm. She describes this feeling as a result of her being of a lower

status, and this is also informed by her being black. Motsei (1990:7) argues that “it is therefore apparent that despite their position as ‘insiders’ in the private realm of the domestic world of the white families they serve, domestic workers remain ‘outsiders’ – their exclusion being based on the racial prejudices which they suffer in South African society”. This analysis could also be stretched to the context of room attendants at Rhodes, as they have made it clear that their exclusion is based on them not being the somatic norm, a status which is defined by their gender, class and race. David Sibley (1995:8) also expands this notion of the rules and assists immensely in understanding why this happens when he argues that “maintaining the purity of the self, defending the boundaries of the inner body, can be seen as a never ending battle against residues – excrement, dead skin, sweat, and so on, and it is a battle that has wider existential significance”. Therefore the deep implications for the rules which set boundaries around the room attendant are that the room attendants feel as unwanted and excluded from the space. Not being the somatic norm, they are considered as that which imperfects the perfect order of the residential system and its facilities.

According to Ginsburg (2011:14) “one way to think about house rules is in terms of invisibility, a condition that workers in the Northern suburbs shared with other domestic workers, the world over. House rules supported whites efforts to ignore the everyday, routine activities of household workers by demanding that they comport themselves so as to avoid drawing whites’ attention... Africans were also expected to be invisible in the front exterior at the house”. This insight given by Ginsburg has a bearing on the lived experiences of room attendants. By being prohibited from entering certain spaces and from using certain facilities, they are made invisible. This invisibility is further revealed by how the supervisor, students and manager relate to them:

For example when I am busy cleaning the bathroom you are not supposed to enter, and there is even a sign that cautions you to not enter for the floor is still wet. So I see other students jumping over the sign and I tell them what the sign says. After that they do not greet me. But after some time you will see him loosening up and start greeting you again. (Focus group interview, Grace)

The manager told me “if you are a cleaner then you are a cleaner period”. There is no other thing for you. Her superior added to what she was saying “if you are in grade 1 you will remain in grade 1, and you will die in grade 1”. I am just telling you what these white managers tell us here. (Focus group interview, Zethu)

The official from Human Resources Division disrespected us in our meeting last week and said we talk rubbish. We are undermined here. (Interview, Ziyanda)

5.3 Surveillance through inspection: “walkabouts make us feel as if we are children”

Not only do these bodies that are out of place have to work harder to convince people that they are capable, but they also almost have to be crystal clear perfect in their job performances, as any imperfections are easily picked up and amplified. Being under super-surveillance, or to borrow Goldberg’s phrase ‘super/vision’, there is a sense in which black men and women are constantly under spotlight, as they are seen to represent a potential hazard. Existing under the pressures of a microscopic spotlight of racialized and gendered optics, the slightest mistakes are likely to be noticed, even exaggerated, and then taken as evidence of authority being misplaced. (Nirmal Puwar, 2004:61)

The context to which Puwar’s quote above is referring to is a context where black people have been previously excluded from holding positions of power, and thus when they do get them because of the notion of diversifying, they are under constant surveillance so as to not make mistakes. The assumption as alluded to by Puwar is that they are a potential hazard. The context of domestic work is thus different from that kind of a setting because domestic workers do not hold any position of power in the private household setting and yet they are also faced with the phenomenon of surveillance. Bhattacharya *et al.* (n.d.:14) help to concretise this analysis of surveillance with the situation of domestic workers, as they argue that “excessive supervision by female employers was, according to many, a constant source of harassment. The continuous demand for perfection in their tasks, often with their employer watching closely while domestic workers go about their work was by itself extremely stressful. The room attendants make mention of the inspection which are called ‘walkabouts’. It is an inspection which is done quarterly, and the inspector comes to check whether the residence is clean. Room attendants expressed their feelings with regards to walkabouts:

Each term there are walkabouts here and inspectors do not even tell us when they are coming. You see those glass doors; I must make time to clean them because they are so dirty. When it is time for the walkabouts you dedicate yourself to make sure that it is clean. The inspectors come and if they find dust they will fail you. (Interview, Ziyanda)

They should also stop these walkabouts because students can complain if their residences are dirty. These walkabouts make us appear as if we are children. The inspector does not even say anything during the walkabouts; she just carries her tablet and just looks around. (Interview, Zenande)

When I first arrived here walkabouts were only done once. But since this new manager came in, they do walkabouts every quarter. She is chasing after us all the time, busy sending people to come and check us. As the inspector enters the door, she just touches the glass before she even enters the building and when she enters the building, she looks for dust on chairs and on other places. They always look for the high dusting; they climb on chairs and check for dust on top of the fridge. Meanwhile as room attendants we are not allowed to climb, but inspectors can climb. (Interview, Nongcwele)

Zenande's experience of the walkabouts are that of being a child as she feels that the inspector does not even see her in the process of checking the cleanliness of the area. As a result of the many changes which were introduced by the manager, including the walkabouts, room attendants expressed they are unhappy because of such things as walkabouts.

Things are no longer the same because people are not happy here at work. If they can see me sitting here they will make me sign a written warning without even asking the reasons for me to sit here. (Interview, Jomo)

Also these walkabouts give us a lot of stress because you work under pressure. You do not work with freedom because you are pressurised and you do not know what the inspectors will see. The inspectors can climb up on a chair and show you dust which is on the ceiling. The rules do not permit us to climb when we are trying to reach for the surface area on the ceiling. But when they are doing these walkabouts they can climb on a chair. (Interview, Sylvia)

One of the scholars who looked more in-depth on this phenomenon of surveillance as it happens within the private household setting, is Rebecca Ginsburg. She argues that "women complained about and resented the implied lack of respect for their expertise that employer micromanagement implied. 'The supervision is killing me', said one. They felt they often knew better than their madams how things should be done, but even experienced workers found they had little say over what tasks they would perform, their order, or how they would perform. Lucy's employer used to run her fingers along the furniture, checking for dust: 'You didn't dust here. Come here. Look'. Such behaviour frustrated: 'I was getting furious. I was even saying: 'Don't go after me. Why can't you sit down and let me do my job and after that you can come check' (Ginsburg, 2011:77). This is a narrative of one of the participants in

Ginsburg's study. Sylvia's narrative also makes it clear that these walkabouts frustrate her and make her extremely uncomfortable. It makes it clear that domestic workers lack autonomy and control over their work. Room attendants at Rhodes have raised these issues of walkabouts, and a host of others to the manager. However, as domestic work literature suggests (see Cock, 1989; Motsei, 1990), the paternalistic relationship between the madam and the maid means there are unequal relations between the two people. Therefore dependence on the madam for survival, leads to the domestic worker accepting their position as created by the conditions surrounding them. When the room attendants have tried to bring these issues up, things just get worse from the side of manager.

When I try to raise these issues the treatment of the manager towards me becomes harsher. Therefore, I choose to keep quiet. She chases after me to see what I am getting up to. You will not be aware of it as someone who does not know these things. If you know the feeling of having someone spying on you, even when you go to the ablution room to relieve yourself, you will hear someone shouting your name. (Interview, Jomo)

The supervisors also have their role in maintaining the surveillance and making sure that the room attendant always feels checked. The surveillance also extends to the financial aspect when the room attendants are given vouchers at the end of the year to go and have a little function for themselves.

Even the Christmas vouchers they give to us at the end of the year, we normally have a braai with those R65 and they demand that we bring slips back. These R65 are not enough and in most cases we add our own money to enjoy ourselves. The R35 we normally add must not appear on the slip. With the R65 you cannot buy certain things, and you only allowed to buy alcohol. So even though that money is a gift, you are still dictated as to how you can use it. Whereas we do not get to ask them what they do with their money. We are also expected to take pictures of what we were doing as members of staff. (Focus group interview, Amanda)

I blame the new manager for everything that has changed for the worst here. Even our supervisors are used by the manager, they are all filthy. Yesterday, when we got back from that meeting about the issue of job profiles, our supervisor was leaning on the wall just to look for her staff. She was trying to make sure that we clock. (Interview, Zola)

The room attendants clearly expressed their feelings towards this kind of treatment:

It is as if you are in prison here and once you leave this place you start to breathe. When it is time to leave, you leave in a hurry because you want to offload the weight from your head. (Interview, Jomo)

There is not a place where people are abused more than this one. We are abused here. Rhodes is oppressing us more especially ourselves as room attendants. The manager told me ‘if you are a cleaner then you are a cleaner period’. There is no other thing for you. Her superior added to what she was saying “if you are in grade 1 you will remain in grade 1, and you will die in grade 1”. I am just telling you what these white managers tell us here. (Interview, Nongcwele)

Conclusion

The notion of social space by Bourdieu helps to illuminate the experiences of those who are positioned in lower standings or occupations within the social space. This concept was used in tandem with both Puwar and Sibley’s concepts relating to physical place. For the context of room attendants, their intersectional experience of being women, black and of a lower class also translated into their experiences when it comes to the social relations between them, and other agents within the university residential space. The discussion on the interlocking forms of oppression for room attendants clearly shows the dominance of racism. Their experience vis-à-vis the boundaries demarcated by those who are superior to them also clearly show that as a result of that, room attendants felt like ‘space invaders’. This also implied the unprecedented levels of disrespect which Ginsburg refers to as invisibility. This is a feeling of someone who is an insider but in terms of their actual experiences, they feel as though they are outsiders. The discussion on surveillance also pointed to the fact that room attendants lack autonomy over their work.

When looking at the debate on transformation of universities and its imperatives, Hlatshwayo (2014) makes a compelling argument that there has not been much pronounced debate about the role of workers – especially vulnerable workers such as cleaners – in the struggle for transforming university education. The narratives of room attendants here should be taken as insights which should inform the transformation agenda at Rhodes. Taking the literature on domestic workers into serious consideration, the narratives of room attendants indicate that

there is a presence of the past in the present. These experiences should therefore be taken as necessary insights for transformation in the institution.

6. “We earn cent here”: the lived experience of exploitation

If the analytical goal of a theory of exploitation is to tell us something about the perceptions of the exploited, about their sense of exploitation, their notion of justice, their anger-we must begin, not with an abstract normative standard, but with values of real actors. Such an approach requires that we start phenomenologically, at the bottom, ask what the peasants or workers definition of the situation is. When a peasant considers 20 percent of his harvest a reasonable rent and 40 percent unjust, we must ask how he arrives at this judgement, i.e., what criterion of fairness he uses. On this basis, it should be possible to construct the operational moral economy of a subordinate class. (James Scott 1975:491)

In the two preceding chapters the focus has been on the insights given by room attendants in relation to their experiences of the workload and how it results in bodily suffering. The focus has also been on the experience of being in unequal social relations with people such as students and supervisors in intimate spaces like residences. Van Manen (2015:101) refers to these experiences as “basic things about our life-world which include in his analysis lived body and lived human relation”. With regards to the lived body, the first chapter delved into the issue of how the workplace arrangements and the workload that the room attendants in the university residences have to carry is a direct cause of bodily pain. This was described by the room attendants. The second chapter moved the focus and looked into the experience of human relations, and here the centre of attention was on how the participants experience being in the same social space with students, supervisors and line managers – all of whom see themselves as being superior to them. In both of these chapters, the approach has been to draw insights from domestic work literature so as to gain a rich understanding of the descriptive accounts of the participants in this study. This third chapter will shift its scope of analysis and zoom into what the participants described as being ‘exploited’ through low salaries which results in economic strains in their personal lives, time poverty and the conditions of immobility or lacking occupational upward mobility. This chapter will employ Jacklyn Cock’s work which looked into the experiences of African women domestic workers during apartheid in South Africa. Most relevant is the analytical concept of exploitation in her exploration of aspects of workers’ lives such as low wages, time deprivation, and immobility. Her research, even though conducted in the Eastern Cape area of South Africa in 1978 and 1979, has a theoretical and an analytical applicability to domestic work in post-apartheid

South Africa as the institution of domestic work still reflects some of the remnants of colonial oppression and apartheid.

The phenomenon of low pay and long working hours in the domestic work sphere has been of interest to both policy makers internationally (ILO, 2011; ILO, 2015), and to scholars (Dilata 2008, Cock, 1989; Rani & Oelz, 2015; King, 2007; Clarke, 2002). This condition is also what service staff workers in institutions of higher learning in South Africa are faced with. Members of service staff in universities include the workers who are employed to perform the menial and manual services such as cleaning, catering, grounds and building maintenance, security services and transport (van der Walt et al, 2002). These workers in most of the South African universities have been involved in the struggle against outsourcing (Barry, 2015; Luckett and Fogel, 2015). For example, in the University of Witwatersrand and the University of Johannesburg, the workers mobilised and drafted a workers charter which articulated that workers demand a living wage. The issue of wages is thus of great importance in the domestic work sector in private households, and also for the workers who are performing the same tasks in institutions of higher learning in South Africa.

BusinessTech Online (2015) news source indicates that South Africa has in excess of one million domestic workers, and they constitute more than 8% of the total workforce. Domestic work in South Africa during colonialism and apartheid was always a sector which employed many African women due to segregationist policies which made black labour cheap (Luckhardt and Wall, 1980). The institution of domestic work, because of the gendered division of labour has been dominated by women as it is taken as innate that women ought to be doing unpaid domestic tasks (Naidu, 2009; Oelz and Rani, 2015). Ally (2011:2) helps us to understand the gravity of the oppression which was experienced by domestic workers during apartheid when she posits that “working sometimes excessively long hours for often terribly low wages as live-in servants, black domestic workers serving white families came to represent an iconic image of apartheid’s racial logics. ‘I was like a slave to that family. I was their black slave,’ Hazel summarised poignantly in one of a series of narrations of her life history to me”. What also characterised this sector during apartheid was the lack of legal protection which ensured that there was easy access to oppressive and exploitative measures meted out against black female domestic workers by white employers.

The democratic era in South Africa which was ushered in in 1994 brought legislative victories for the domestic workers as they were also included in the Basic Conditions of Employment Act and they received protection in the form of minimum wages, working conditions that meet certain minimum requirements and other protective labour mechanisms (Marais, 2014). The presence of the past in the present when it comes to the domestic workers who work in private households still haunts these workers as their work is still undermined, and in some cases employers do not comply with the provisions in the law which seek to protect domestic workers (Marais, 2014). Domestic work literature gives us rich insights into understanding the experiences of those workers who perform the so called ‘non-core’ services in institutions of higher learning, and these tasks include: among others, catering, cleaning, grounds and building maintenance, security and transport services (van der Walt *et al.* 2002). Fogel & Luckett (2015) assert that black workers in institutions such as UCT have always been exploited and subjected to drudgery. The outsourcing of the non-core services resulted in low pay for the workers. Bezuidenhout & Fakier (2006:476) had already shed some light on the brutal experiences of outsourced workers when they studied the life of Mama Maria as they argue that “any money entering the household is spent on food, rent, electricity, transport and children’s school fees. The lack of support in their homes and their low wages deprive these women of the possibility of hiring services, which would lighten the load of reproduction”.

When Iris Young talks about the notion of oppression she reflects on the conditions of the groups which use the concept to articulate their experience, the groups include among others women, Blacks, Chicanos, Puerto Ricans and other Spanish-speaking Americans, American Indians, Jews, lesbians, gay men, Arabs, Asians, old people, working class people and the physically disabled. (Young, 1990:40)

The use of the concept oppression as clearly stated by Young is often used by the subordinate and marginalised groups in society. The domestic workers in different contexts whether it is migrant domestic workers abroad from parts of the world who go and seek for employment in the developed world, also use this concept to articulate their suffering. Here in South Africa, domestic workers as shown in Cock’s study have also used the concept to describe their lived experiences in relation to oppressive wage structures and working conditions.

Whilst this is a particular site, understanding the lives of these people gives us an insight into the nature of being working class in the traditional areas of Britain. The task is to highlight the key experiences and to focus on what

is characteristic in them: that is, to focus upon what makes those experiences possible. (Charlesworth, 2000:6)

The key focus of this chapter is to look at the perceptions of room attendants regarding their lived experience as far as the remuneration aspect of their work is concerned. The task is to understand the sense of exploitation as experienced by this group of workers from their own words. The interpretive task carried through this chapter also takes seriously the findings of the Institutional Culture Staff Survey of 2014, which on the theme of ‘rewards and recognition’ argued that “Grades 1-5 staff members showed the greatest dissatisfaction on this theme...An unacceptably high number of staff feel unrewarded and unrecognised at the institution” (RUICS 2014:3).

6.1 ‘The cent that we earn only covers debt and clothing’: the phenomenon of low salaries

Poverty is a common denominator in the lives of domestic workers. It not only refers to a personal lack of financial means, but extends to a general state of impoverishment as a sectoral trademark. One can thus speak of a pathology of poverty which is brought about by domestic workers’ everyday realities, extending into a dire need to survive. These everyday realities constitute a collective hardship brought about by the domestic workers’ circumstances. Hardships include aspects such as the cost of living, the death of a parent or primary caregiver, becoming a child-headed household, being the sole breadwinner, being a single parent, or unemployment, to mention just a few. (Marais and van Wyk, 2015:3)

The theme of low wages is dominant in Jacklyn Cock’s work which sought to explore the working lives of domestic work during apartheid. The institution of domestic work is characterised as a low paying job to many domestic workers (Dilata, 2008; Oelz and Rani, 2015; Cock, 1989; Griffin, 2011; Naidu, 2009; Albright, 2010; Clarke, 2002). This is attributed to a number of reasons but chief among them is the fact that domestic workers’ tasks are undervalued (Gaitskell *et al.* 1983; Naidu 2009). The genesis of this problem is in the gendered division of labour at the household level where patriarchal values have always dominated and dictated that women must perform tasks which are caring and also reproduce others. This arrangement has long transcended the level of the household:

Domestic work especially, was perceived as particularly undervalued because it had traditionally been treated as women's unpaid duty in marriage which then extended outside of marriage when many 'unskilled' women entered the workforce and were obliged to take on cleaning work in private homes and organisational institutions, schools, universities, factories, and indeed the nook and crannies of many economic institutions, all of which needed the services of cleaners. (Naidu, 2009:129)

The status of being recognised as unskilled workers has serious implications for workers who work as cleaners, gardeners, and members of kitchen staff in organisations such as universities as Naidoo has already alluded to. This is because these workers perform tasks that women have traditionally shouldered in the home without pay, such as cleaning, cooking, shopping, laundry, as well as caring for children, the elderly, disabled and other household members in need of care (Oelz and Rani, 2015). These implications are felt deeply when it comes to the remuneration for the work that cleaners do. In the context of Rhodes University which is the workplace of the room attendants in this study, the Office of Institutional Culture and Equity conducted a survey which was aimed at canvassing the views of both academic and support staff on how they felt about their employment conditions in relation to aspects of work such as rewards and recognition, and a couple of other themes (see RUICS, 2014). The theme that has much resonance for this specific chapter from the survey is that of 'rewards and recognition', as it has to do with how staff members felt about issues such as job promotion and salaries. Members of support staff participated in the study and there were clear discrepancies between academic and support staff on this theme. Cleaners in the residences form part of the support staff category as they belong to the Grade 1 occupational group which is made of unskilled and defined decision making. The survey had an open ended section so as to allow staff members to voice their views when it comes to how they experienced rewards, and on the question of salaries, this is what a Grade 1-5 member of support staff had to say:

Oh no! I do not wish to talk about salaries. On pay day you go home with R200 only. Just tell me, what am I going to do with a family that is expecting money from you. (RUICS, 2014:83)

This survey focused on the overall members of support staff, particularly those who are in Grade 1-5 in relation to the statement made by the worker above. In the same vein as the RUICS of 2014 revealed that the expressions of workers in relation to rewards and

recognition were negative, the participants in this study also expressed their feeling in relation to how much they are earning in the institution:

Our struggle is that of not being paid well by Rhodes University for the work that we do, because we do not even see where the R5000 goes because we have a lot of deductions. We have Unemployment Insurance Fund as there is nothing you can do without making loans. (Interview, Anna)

There is a lot of work I have to do because as a senior room attendant, when the supervisor is absent for a day or two, I must stand in for them. I take that responsibility, and even when the supervisor is around, I do have extra tasks to help with such as changing linen. If the supervisor is busy with requisitions, I am sometimes required to help the supervisor. We work very hard here in the bedrooms. I cannot say I am happy. I am happy because I am employed but it is the conditions in which we work under that make things difficult for we do not earn. If I can tell you about my salary it is R7100, but I received R4200 after deductions. With the amount of responsibility we have for doing this work, that is how much we earn, small as it is. There are many deductions, but then we work as Mam Anna has already mentioned. (Interview, Sylvia)

The two participants above are not in the same occupational ranking as Mam Anna is a room attendant, and the at the time was on Grade 1, and Sylvia a senior room attendant on Grade 4, hence the wage discrepancy. However, it is clear even with Sylvia in the region that she is earning that the deductions make it difficult for her.

The situation depicted by Sylvia and Anna is telling of the debt trap which the room attendants find themselves in as a result of what they refer to as low salaries. In the case of outsourced workers in the University of Johannesburg, Hlatshwayo (2014:3) makes an important intervention in relation to the experiences of room attendants above when he asserts that “Surely, very low wages earned by cleaners impose an economic constraint on workers as they end up being heavily indebted to loan sharks in a context of rising food, transport and basic needs and prices”. After the National Arts festival of 2016, the room attendants asked to share more of their experiences with regards to salaries and other rewards related issues. They indicated that their salary has slightly increased as compared to that of last year:

Our salary is now R6100 because they have taken us to Grade 2. The increase is from R5900 and every year we get an increase of R200. We get our R6100 but because of too many deductions we take home a very small amount because we have debts. There are deductions for medical aid which are big. Some of us we do not want this medical aid and we are forced to take it. In this R6100, I am responsible for paying school fees for my children and there are deductions for provident fund and other things, and you find that you leave here with R200 or less. So you are forced to make loans to be able to buy necessary things. They should increase our salaries to R10000 just like the workers have been promised in the University of Pretoria. We want to see a strike here so that our issues can be resolved. The students will help us fight this battle. Even if it unpaid we do not mind as long as this oppression and suffering will end. (Interview, Irene)

What Irene tells in her story is the fact that despite the R200 rises in salaries for 2016, their net salaries are still at a bare minimum. The case of University of Pretoria (UP) workers which Irene is alluding to was the agreement reached between UP management and workers in relation to the dismantling of outsourcing as the workers believed it robbed them of employment benefits and left them vulnerable in the face of job insecurity (Makhubu, 2016). According to Makhubu (2016:1) “general workers in UP shut down the university as first year students tried to register. A list of demands was the subject of tough negotiations at the commission on outsourcing. Among these was the start of the absorption of workers in February, which will see salaries rise to R5500 for the absorbed workers. The provision of full benefits for workers and an increase in salaries across the board would see the R5500 steadily increase to R10000 when all contract ended in 2018”. These are the benefits to workers at UP which Irene is alluding to and looking at her own context and that of her colleagues, she is clear on the need for salaries to rise as this would provide financial relief in her life.

While the amount of R6100 might sound like a good income as it surpasses the wages earned by domestic workers in private households, the room attendants interviewed for this study were not satisfied with their salaries and felt that their quality of life was not what they would hope for.

I have been working here for 11 years but I do not have a house neither do I own a car, but I am responsible for paying the school fees for my children. The cent that you earn from this institution only covers things such as debt and clothing. We also need the money for the transport you know. (Interview, Sylvia)

I do not have a personal transport and I will not be having one anytime soon because I work for my children, for their future. I cannot buy a car whilst my children are starving because the money we earn here is just for buying groceries and it is finished. On Monday you do not even have a cent. (Interview, Jomo)

The room attendants used words such as “earning cent” or “earning peanuts” repeatedly to describe what it means to them to be receiving such salaries with all the family burdens they have. In her study of over three decades ago, Cock (1989) made similar observations in relation to how the domestic workers in Grahamstown during apartheid felt about the wages they were earning. In her analysis, Cock also discovered that the wages of domestic workers were ‘abysmally low’ and argued that this was because they were black and women in the main, and this happened despite the fact that the work they do was socially reproductive as it reproduced the lives of their madams and their madams’ children. The words of my own participants echoed those in Cock’s study (1989:19): “you work very hard and earn very little”... “Its hard work, very little money and makes you tired”.

Most have a sense of being exploited, which hinges on what they consider to be their low wages, and lack of appreciation by their employers. Regardless of their perception of their employers’ financial circumstances, all the domestic workers in the depth sample thought they should be paid more. Domestic workers gave their reasons: ‘I have been working for these people for a long time (nineteen years) but I am still earning R22 a month (about £ 7.30). But I am working for rich people. My master is a teacher at Rhodes, my madam teaches at DSG. (Cock, 1989, 87-88)

The participants in Cock’s study felt that they ought to be paid more than what they were currently earning, and this is the same sentiment which the room attendants in my study shared. The characterisation of their salaries as small by the room attendants, was recently vindicated by research conducted by the Pietermaritzburg Agency for Community Social Action (PACSA), which is a faith-based social justice and development NGO that has been in operation since 1979. Their work and practice seeks to enhance human dignity and they are convinced as an organisation, that those who carry the brunt of the problem must be part of the solution (PACSA Online, 2016). In their recently published economic data, they showed how black households are sinking into poverty as wages fail to help them develop resilience

(Peyper, 2016). The table below uses a basket of essential household requirements to give a better indication of what the minimum wages should at least be set at:

May 2016
Affordability tables

Income and expenditure for households of various socio-economic scenarios May 2016.

Household socio-economic scenarios	Household A	Household B	Household C	Household D	Household E	Household F	Household G
Total household income	R 1 500.00	R 1 800.00	R 2 362.00	R 3 200.00	R 4 500.00	R 6 000.00	R 8 000.00
Number of household members	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
MINUS MINIMUM NUTRITIONAL food basket	R 3 115.26	R 3 115.26	R 3 115.26	R 3 115.26	R 3 115.26	R 3 115.26	R 3 115.26
Monies left over AFTER FOOD to buy some essential household requirements*	R -1 615.26	R -1 315.26	R -753.26	R 84.74	R 1 384.74	R 2 884.74	R 4 884.74
MINUS Burial insurance	R 200.00	R 200.00	R 200.00	R 200.00	R 200.00	R 200.00	R 200.00
MINUS Electricity and water	R 589.95	R 589.95	R 589.95	R 589.95	R 589.95	R 589.95	R 589.95
MINUS Transport	R 660.00	R 660.00	R 660.00	R 660.00	R 660.00	R 660.00	R 660.00
MINUS Education	R 500.00	R 500.00	R 500.00	R 500.00	R 500.00	R 500.00	R 500.00
MINUS Communication and media	R 150.00	R 150.00	R 150.00	R 150.00	R 150.00	R 150.00	R 150.00
MINUS Clothing and footwear	R 416.66	R 416.66	R 416.66	R 416.66	R 416.66	R 416.66	R 416.66
MINUS Domestic & household hygiene items	R 560.15	R 560.15	R 560.15	R 560.15	R 560.15	R 560.15	R 560.15
MINUS Cultural obligations	R 350.00	R 350.00	R 350.00	R 350.00	R 350.00	R 350.00	R 350.00
Monies left over AFTER FOOD & SOME ESSENTIAL HOUSEHOLD REQUIREMENTS secured	R -5 042.02	R -4 742.02	R -4 180.02	R -3 342.02	R -2 042.02	R -542.02	R 1 457.98

* Please note expenditures in Table above exclude monies for debt repayments, health care, rent, emergencies, amongst others.

Table 4 –Source: fin24 Online from <http://www.fin24.com/Economy/minimum-wage-of-r8-000-decent-says-social-body-20160722>

In this table household incomes are listed according to different income brackets from R1500 to R8000 are listed. The table also includes the number of family dependents per household on that income. The figures for Household F, are of most relevance for the context of the salaries of room attendants at Rhodes University as the monthly salaries of room attendants amount to R6100 before deductions. The table also includes the minimum nutritional food basket of R3115.26 for Household G. This is consistent with what the room attendants told me when it comes to food spending as they mentioned that the lion's share of their salaries goes to buying groceries. The table also includes other essential household requirements such as electricity and water, transport, education and clothing and footwear. After all the expenses have been paid for, the money left over for someone who is in the income region of R6000 is only R-542.02 which is a negative balance. This was precisely what the room attendants mentioned when they told me how out of their salaries, they are left with nothing and their demand for an increase in salary thus needs to be understood in this light. As indicated by the research conducted by PACSA on this table, the prospects only start to look better for someone who earns R8000 as they get to be left with R1457.98 – although, critically, health,

debt repayment and emergencies are not included in the calculation. According to Peyper (2016:1) “PACSA imagines the national minimum wage as an intervention to deal with historical racial inequities in wage levels, righting the disconnect between the wage earner and cost to support his/her family, and ensuring all South Africans – employed or not – are able to live at a level of dignity.

In determined value of wages-in addition to productivity, we should be looking at how families are being supported; number of wage earners, income levels, family sizes and the costs of goods and services. If employment levels are very high then it means that wage levels can be lower because households have lots of sources of income. If employment levels are very low then it means that wage levels must be higher because households have limited sources of income (Business Tech Online, 2016:1).

Given the dependency ratio of 52,9% (StatsSA Census, 2011) and the high rate of unemployment of 80% in 2012 (Supernews, 2012) in the eastern part of Grahamstown which is made up of the townships, the room attendants’ salaries are often the sole source of income for their families. Earning an income to secure a livelihood for themselves and their families is the central concern and motivation for room attendants. The room attendants were also concerned about allocating a considerable portion of their salaries to the education of their children. In a study conducted by Clarke (2002:163) in the Caribbean, she made a finding that “although the rest of the workers in her study were earning above the minimum wage and up to \$3000 per week, they were experiencing economic problems related to the cost of living. Those with children of school age found the school related costs burdensome, especially in the light of the fact that only few reported receiving any help from the father of their children”. The suffering expressed by the domestic workers in Clarke’s study is also similar to what room attendants experienced with regards to their earnings and burden which comes with having to take care of their families:

Since I was hired permanently in 2006 I cannot tell you what I do exactly with my money. Because I come to work with nothing and out of that we get deductions from our salary. So in my hands, just imagine a mother old as myself is left with R2000. I have many kids there at home because I also look after my brothers’ children. I lost my brothers and sisters so then I had a responsibility of looking after their children. Not even a single person there at home is getting a social grant. Just imagine I am responsible for all those children. They went to school and I brought them up by myself. I was struggling and with that R2000 I had to take home as a salary I would pay for my debts in the township. I normally buy groceries and pay my debts,

and when we run out of electricity I would go and borrow money to buy electricity. So I live with a R2000 and it is for paying debts, buying groceries, and other basic necessities. (Interview, Fiona)

There is no money here because we do not have money whilst we got paid last week Friday. It might appear as if we do other things with the money but we do serious things. My husband is unemployed, so are my children. So the lion share of the salary goes to groceries and other rent expenses (Interview, Ziyanda).

The amount of R6100 is what the room attendants earn during the normal working days in the academic calendar. They also mentioned that they work during the Arts Festival as the university makes its residences available to the guests who come for the entertainment during that time period. The room attendants make the point that as compared to their normal working days during the academic calendar when the students are in the residences, the guests who come for the festival make their workload more intense and that the income which they earn during this period does not complement the work they do:

The money we earn here does not complement the work we do in this university. When it is time for the arts festival this place is turned into BnBs, and the work we do then is way over than what we do when the students are around. You work under immense pressure during the festival as you are supposed to control the casuals who are there to assist. We only earn R38 a day during the festival. After the entire festival period we earn a lousy R400. (Interview, Siphesihle)

The R400 that Siphesihle is referring to is an additional amount to what the room attendants employed on a permanent basis earn as a salary during this period. However, despite the fact that it is an additional amount Siphesihle expresses a feeling of dissatisfaction with the amount as she describes it as “lousy”. As Siphesihle argues, the work process gets intensified during the festival. The room attendants’ main issue with the festival is that things were not always like that before the current manager at the time of the festival in the past years:

You see during the festival, in the old days, we used to have this other manager. She made us work during the festival but we had afternoon offs. We were earning good salaries as we started from the end of June. We were satisfied with work and after the festival we had four days of rest, since we did not have time to rest properly and also the students are not back yet. Now with this new manager, she implemented her own changes. We off for two days during the festival and we only earn R400 for the entire festival

period. What do we do during the festival to deserve that amount? We are oppressed here. (Nongcwele)

In comparison to the festival payment arrangements and the present moment, for Nongcwele this is tantamount to oppression. Again, as in the preceding two chapters, the room attendants pointed to their dissatisfaction with the management, as they identify the management as the cause of their suffering during the festival period. Some of the room attendants even indicated the levels of indignity and disrespect which occurs during the festival:

One other thing I have noticed and I have only started working during the festival this year, it is that, when it is not the festival period we work normally. But during the festival we work more because students are not too demanding as the guests who come here for the festival. For instance, for you as students we do not enter your bedrooms and take your linen. You do that for yourselves. But during the festival we have to enter the guests' rooms. These guests even urinate on top of the mattress and you have to deal with that as a cleaner. One cleaner with the assistance of casuals is responsible for the entire building. Sometimes the guests urinate on the buckets and we as cleaners have to take that and clean the buckets. So we work a lot during the festival and it is when they should be paying us decent wages. (Interview, Zenani)

It is quite clear that the working conditions during the festival amount to drudgery and what makes the room attendants really unhappy with that situation is not only the fact that they are subjected to disrespect and being undermined as cleaners by the guests, but also by the fact that they earn very low wages during this time period. The room attendants described their wage conditions during the festival to be more of an acute oppression when comparing the money they received to that of the casuals/contract workers which the university employs during the festival as it is a demanding period:

During the festival, the casuals will boast to us telling us that they bought a household item for cash. And you on the other hand, you do not even know how your money ended. The young people who work as casuals here do not even know the work; we have to show them how the work is done. You show them how things are done and you do not get anything. Even when the festival is over, their R6000s are still coming their way. When it is the festival period you think you will be happy, but no, to such an extent that even if we were to get different jobs elsewhere during the festival, we would accept them. It is better to wait for your normal salary rather than giving yourself false hope, which is that of thinking you will earn a better amount during the festival. Even if we were to stay in the township and do

nothing during the festival, we would try to sell fat cakes so that life can go on, instead of coming here and be exploited by being paid R400. If we can show you our payslips you will be shocked. For all these years we are earning a cent here. (Interview, Sisanda)

Sisanda points to the nature of what she experiences as exploitation, something which rubs salt into an already painful wound. The fact that they earn an additional amount of R400 as permanent workers is experienced as a form of painful exploitation and humiliation by the room attendants. The room attendants also believed that in management's view, it was okay for them to be subjected to such levels of economic oppression:

They say it is because we earn salaries and that is why we get to receive those tips. The casuals do not work and therefore they do not have anything to put on the table for their families to eat, and that is the reason why they give them such a big amount. Therefore, what they are implying is that we should be working for free because we earn salaries during the normal academic calendar. (Interview, Irene)

The room attendants also mentioned the fact that the management referred to the money they were paying them as tips and Irene in particular shared her thoughts on this by saying "How can they tell us we earn tips? Because tips are used in the restaurants. My employer cannot tell me that they are giving me tips, that means something else". The room attendants read this treatment from management as making mockery of their labour and undermining them. This gets worse when they compare their earnings to that of the students who are employed as sub-wardens during the festival period:

We do not get paid for the festival because we earn a lousy R38 a day. There are sub-wardens who are just sitting during the festival as we do some of their work. They earn about R80+ a day. They sit and do nothing as it ends up being us who have to help the guests with their luggage to their rooms. There is a person assigned to do that but they send us whilst we earn peanuts for the festival. (Interview, Sylvia)

Most of the above accounts by the room attendants about the conditions during the festival were shared last year in 2015. The room attendants in 2016 expressed their disgruntlement with regards to the poverty wages they earn during the festival and they demanded that things

should improve. In an interview I did with them after the festival of 2016, they indicated that things changed but it was not as significant a change as they would have liked it to be:

This is what happened before the start of this year's festival. Workers concluded that we should all get the same amount for the festival, meaning all of us must receive R150 a day. The initial proposal from management was that supervisors will earn R111, and as room attendants we will earn R42. So now the workers said this amount which they refer to as a gift must be the same for everyone, which is, we must all earn R150. But what happened is that the report came back saying 'you are all going to get the same amount and all of you are going to receive R53 for a day's labour'. Now listen here, for me it is as if they took from the R111 of the housekeepers' income for a day and distributed that to everyone to make things equal. They are supposed to give all of us at least R100. This is unfair to the housekeepers as well because their workload is too much. The housekeepers did not like this at all but because they have already agreed to this equal pay there was nothing they can do. (Interview, Amanda)

For room attendants, this does not amount to any significant change in terms of their income. The personal experiences shared by room attendants above in relation to salaries, strongly contrasts with the view expressed in the survey conducted by the Office of Institutional Culture which posits that "many members made it clear that feeling recognised and rewarded is not so much a matter of getting a good salary, a promotion or an award, but of feeling appreciated and supported by those around you" (RUICS, 2014:83). It is unclear which specific members of staff between academic and support staff shared these sentiments. However, one thing is certain, the issue of salaries matters the most to the lives of room attendants as they emphasised the oppression they experience from their R6100 during normal working days, and more acutely the R400 they earn in addition to their regular monthly salary. In their understanding, this is inadequate compensation for the additional work and indignities that they face during the National Arts Festival. The above discussion points to room attendants demanding a living wage in which they will not live a life of hand to mouth, but rather dignified lives in which they are able to see the fruits of their labour remuneratively speaking. Their call is for the tables to be turned upside down, more especially during the festival as they described this particular period as robbing them of what is rightly due to them in the form of income.

6.2 “If you are in Grade 1 you will remain and die in Grade 1”: the conditions of immobility

While there is much in the domestic servant’s situation which is suggestive of slavery, this study suggests that domestic servants are most accurately to be viewed as trapped workers. They are trapped in a condition of subjugation and immobility within which they are subject to intensive exploitation. (Cock, 1989:104)

The work of domestic workers is characterised as being of low status and undervalued despite its importance for social reproduction (Oelz and Rani, 2015; Ally, 2011; Naidu, 2009; Cock, 1989). The reasons for this in the literature are mentioned to be the lack of education for domestic workers. In the context of apartheid South Africa, black people were subjected to an inferior Bantu Education system which deprived them of an opportunity to acquire skills. The post-apartheid scenario for domestic workers, more especially those who are older, is that the legacy of apartheid still afflicted them as they are domestic workers because of lack of formal education. According to King (2007:41) “in a sense it could be argued that race for the black working class has meant entrenchment in the bottom sector of the class structure, whereas for the white working class race has allowed them upward mobility in the class structure... All of them which reaffirm Williams’ assertion which has been earlier cited that there is no lower class than being black”. That is the reality many domestic workers find themselves in as there is a low premium attached to their work by their employers (Naidu, 2009). In Cock’s study it is made very clear that domestic workers are trapped in menial domestic labour with a lack of alternatives which is also as a result of a lack of education. Cock’s analysis of the condition of immobility for domestic workers resonates well with the conditions in which the members of support staff find themselves at Rhodes University. The context of Cock’s study is different as it is located within private households, and under the apartheid time period. However, the lived experiences of domestic workers at the time of her writing, and that of cleaners in university spaces in a post-apartheid context still have similarities. In the findings of the Institutional Culture Survey of 2014 in relation to the rewards and recognition theme, there are insights which can give one a picture of what it means to be in Grade 1 at Rhodes University:

In support, many respondents indicated that their impression is that for support staff, there is no real possibility for promotion - they can only be promoted if another position opens and they apply for it. Among many

support staff members there was a sense of despondency about the possibility of promotion and the related question of career development. Several staff members employed at Grade 1 level expressed dissatisfaction in relation to the fact that they had been ‘stuck’ at Grade 1 for ten years or longer. Black staff members felt that racism blocks their advancement in the institution. (RUICS, 2014:82)

The findings of the survey in relation to the possibility of promotion could be said to have foreshadowed the lived experiences of room attendants in so far as being in Grade 1 is concerned. The title to this sub-theme which is “you are in Grade 1 and you will remain in grade 1 until you die” speaks directly to the exploitation experienced by room attendants in the housekeeping division, specifically in relation to being Grade 1. Their Grade is referred to as ‘unskilled and defined decision making’ and the literature on domestic work does include the fact that most of the people who are employed as domestic workers in private household settings often lack formal education (Cock 1989; Marais & van Wyk, 2015). This lack of formal education in the form of matric for some of the room attendants had serious implications when it comes to an experience of being denied an opportunity to go up an occupational level. When it comes to their experiences of being in Grade 1, room attendants articulated as follows:

We are in Grade 1 here. There are people who leave this place after 40 years, they leave with a cent and they are hungry when they leave here. When we tell the manager in meetings that someone is taking a pension now but is still on Grade 1, she says ‘yes, it is because she is uneducated’. In Grade 1 we earn peanuts and the manager says we must go to school. Sometimes the casuals who are here during the festival leave at 12h30 and we remain behind working. We are oppressed here by this manager and she does not have mercy at all. You see this letter; there were meetings where we complained about earning peanuts. The manager said we will be on Grade 1 until we die, and that is what the letter is confirming. (Interview, Nongcwele)

The occupational position of being in Grade 1 also has a direct bearing on the salaries of the room attendants and Nongcwele metaphorically characterises the salary as “peanuts” for someone who is on this Grade 1. The insistence by management on someone to have a matric certificate before they can be upgraded to the above Grades proved to be a heavy burden on the shoulders of room attendants, as it makes it difficult for them to climb up the occupational ladder to the above Grades. This happens against the fact that some room attendants who

were more senior than others in terms of age, have been in the institution for more than 20 years to 30 years, and they mentioned that they had the wealth of experience in terms of knowing the tasks which needed to be done:

Another thing which I ask myself is why I would be denied a position of a housekeeper if I do not have matric or a computer course. I do not have those things because I am old, but I have wealth of experience here and I know exactly the duties of a housekeeper and I can do them. The young people they employ here who have matric have to be taught by us how to do the work. (Interview, Nongenile)

Nongenile has worked in the institution for 33 years and she made it clear that she had the necessary experience to do the work of a room attendant, even that of the supervisor who is the housekeeper. One thing which often puzzled the room attendants during the interviews was why the university asked for Grade 12 certificate for a cleaning post. In their view this was a show of undermining Grade 12. What made things even more worse for the room attendants is that there are workers in their occupational category who are working in the dining halls, and some who are working in the grounds and gardens who have been upgraded to higher Grades, but as room attendants they remain trapped in Grade 1. In other situations the senior room attendants who work with them were also upgraded to higher Grades but things still remained the same for room attendants:

The kitchen staff have had their grades upgraded because the institution says they work during the conferences, whereas for us we are still on Grade 2 and they have not upgraded us whilst we work during the festival. So the logic behind this is that the kitchen staff have had their upgrading because they work during conferences, but we are not being upgraded whilst we also work during the conferences. (Interview, Amanda)

One thing I would like to emphasise again is that we are undervalued here at Rhodes University because they are refusing to upgrade us into better Grades. We are still on Grade 2 but they said in the past they will abolish Grade 1 and 2. We are the only members of staff who are still on Grade 2. But at the grounds and gardens department you start on grade 3 immediately when you are hired. It is only here in the bedrooms that there is still Grade 2. We do not want anything to do with Grades 1 and 2, we must start from Grade 4. (Interview, Irene)

This institution is just trying to make us fight against each other as workers because there is no reason why others would be on Grade 3 and we remain on Grade 2. We are also an engine of this institution when it comes to student life. I say this because we are responsible for cleaning the spaces where the students live. The kitchen staff and housekeeping are one and the

same thing. For them to cook that side they need us here to clean this side and make sure the residences are clean. (Interview, Zenani)

The senior room attendant becomes responsible for doing the tasks of the housekeeper if the housekeeper is absent. The problem is that senior room attendants have received reasonable sums of money and we did not get anything. We do the same job the only difference is that senior room attendants get to do the tasks of the housekeeper. They have been upgraded from Grade 4 to 6 but we are still kept at Grade 2. They received back pays after being upgraded and they received considerable sums of money. When they send out letters to us they still refer to us as Grades 1-5, whilst they are saying that Grade 1 has been abolished. They are referring to us when they say Grade 1 and they are saying we are Grade 2 only by word of mouth. Nothing has changed qualitatively speaking. We are in grade 1 because there is nothing that has improved with taking us from Grade 1 to 2. (Interview, Amanda)

The room attendants clearly feel they are undervalued for their work and that their prospects for advancing are limited. According to Ally (2011:5) “domestic workers crucially make possible the paid work of the men and women they work for, subsidising the full-time incomes of their employers, displacing them from the drudgery of household work and the demands of child care... As domestic workers do the dirty work of cleaning their employers’ toilets, they free them to engage in accumulating other forms of capital, including cultural, while limiting domestic workers’ abilities to engage in these value-added activities themselves”. Most of the undervaluing of the work that domestic workers do is as a result of them being labelled as unproductive labour. According to Gaitskell *et al.* (1983:92) “only wage labour is productive which produces capital. It is clear from this that domestic labour because it is not perceived as contributing material value within the capitalist production process, cannot be conceptualised as productive labour under capitalism irrespective of whether it is performed by the housewife or by the domestic worker. What Gaitskell *et al.* seem to suggest here is that because domestic work does not necessarily produce material things as in the case of workers in an assembly line, then they do not form part of productive labour. This assertion is challenged by a socialist thinker, Mick Brooks, as he believes that productive labour is that kind of labour which is understood as only producing surplus value for the capitalists. In other words, the capitalist employer must be able to make more profit from the labour services of an employee but with less payment going to the employee.

So the nature of the use-value produced and the nature of the work activity is neither here nor there. If I make beds in a capitalist’s mansion, my labour

is unproductive. If I work in a Holiday Inn making beds my labour is productive, since the capitalist sells my services for a profit. If I make my own bed at home, my labour is neither productive nor unproductive since it lies outside the capitalist economy. (Brooks, 2005:2)

Another factor worsening the experience of exploitation for room attendants in relation to this positionality of being in Grade 1, is how the managers play a role in making their working conditions difficult for them by doing what room attendants characterised as ‘favouritism’ when it comes to promotions:

Things are like this now because our manager is destroying together with the people of Human Resources because her husband is something there. The manager...it is myself and the other two colleagues who have the experience for the job. And we wanted to apply so that we can get the post. We used to work like that here, upward mobility was a possible occurrence. Where you were at least you could go up further. Some of the supervisors come from this overall I am wearing now. The new manager stopped all of that. An example is this one I am telling you about. She took a young person from CCS because she likes her and wanted to put her in a good position. (Interview, Amanda)

There was an administrative post which was advertised and one of the requirements was that you must have grade 12 and be computer literate. We applied for the posts and when we arrived at the Senior Common Room we were told that people who are on Grade 1, and people who are not currently working in an office do not stand a chance for the post. But on the advert there was nothing which said if you are not currently working in an office you must not apply. We only heard about that when we got there to write tests. So we ended up not getting the job because the manager gets to select her favourites. And you do have these skills but if she does not like you, you will not get anything and remain on Grade 1. (Interview, Nongcwele)

This favouritism by the manager is reflective of deeply held assumptions about the low status work of room attendants. According to Young (1990:40) “the causes of oppression are embedded in unquestioned norms, habits, and symbols, in the assumptions underlying institutionalised rules and the collective consequences rules”. The deeply held assumptions of white employers in the context of domestic work in private households are also existing in Rhodes University. Young (1990:40) further argues that “in the most general sense, all oppressed people suffer some inhibition of their ability to develop and exercise their capacities and feelings”. These deeply held assumptions by the managers when it comes to the role and importance of room attendants comes from the fact that, in most cases domestic work is viewed as unproductive work and therefore it should be relegated to a lower status.

In 2015 which was the year in which we saw a heightened political activity at Rhodes University, workers in Grades 1-5 also joined forces with the students to seek to fight what they viewed as oppressive employment conditions. In the demands which were submitted by the Black Student Movement on 12 November 2015 to the university management, worker related issues were also included. According to the joint memorandum of demands which included those of the BSM and Nehawu-RU Branch (2015:1) “workers at Rhodes University should be given back their dignity for their selfless service at Rhodes and the university should discontinue operating under the colonial system which currently exists...Mrs Janine Harris, Mrs J Pillay and Dr Ian L’Ange should be investigated for the exploitation of workers...there should be skills and development programs for the workers...Grades 1-2 should be abolished”. These demands captured the sentiments of the room attendants on their articulation of oppression in relation to the conditions of immobility. The management has been stated by the room attendants to be perpetuating a system of oppression and their ultimate demand in this respect is that Grades 1-3 should be abolished.

6.3 ‘We sacrifice our time to be with our families to come work here but we earn peanuts’: the phenomenon of time poverty

What is a working day? What is the length of time during which capital may consume labour-power whose daily value it buys? How far may the working day be extended beyond the working-time necessary for the reproduction of labour-power itself? It has been seen that to these questions capital replies: the working day contains the full 24 hours, with the deduction of the few hours of repose without which labour-power absolutely refuses its services again. Hence it is self-evident that the labourer is nothing else his whole life through, than labour power, that therefore all his disposable time is by nature and law labour time, to be devoted to the self-expansion of capital. Time for education, for intellectual, development, for the fulfilling of social functions and for the social intercourse, for the free play of his bodily and mental activity, even the rest time of Sunday...but in its blind unrestrainable passion, its were-wolf hunger for surplus labour, capital oversteps not only the moral, but even the merely physical bounds of the working day. It usurps the time for growth, development, and healthy maintenance of the body. It steals the time required for consumption of fresh air and sunlight. (Marx, 1992:176)

Arora (2015) and Ringhofer (2015) define the time-poor as those who do not have time to rest or enjoy leisure because of the excessive burden of work. The experience of being time

poor is also ubiquitous in Jacklyn Cock's study of domestic workers in the Eastern Cape conducted in the late 1970s. The phenomenon of long working hours, Cock argues, is indicative of the oppression experienced by domestic workers. The first two dimensions of oppression I have discussed this far are the conditions of immobility, and the phenomenon of low wages. In the context of domestic work these three dimensions of oppression included in Cock's analysis are not mutually exclusive. The low status of domestic workers informs all three experiences of oppression. The room attendants who are the participants in this study also mentioned that they experienced time-poverty as they stated clearly that they also worked on weekends. The university provides residential services to students who are in corporate terms its clients, and the university is in the business of making profits. This is also shown by the availing of its residences for the festival so as to increase its profits. In the process of generating this profit, room attendants who work in the residences feel deprived of the time to fulfil 'social functions and rest time on weekends' as Marx in *Capital Volume 1* clearly asserts. The room attendants articulated their condition when it comes to the experience of being time poor as follows:

This other time we once asked the students whether they will be fine with us having to take just one day off during the week so that we can be able to go to town and pay our debts. We do not get the time to run errands during the weekend because we are at work as we only get to off one weekend in a month. We also asked for public holidays except for the workers' day as we cannot do anything but work on public holidays. Another question which is frequently asked by students is why do we come and work on Sundays. We do not get to attend Sunday services. We only go to Sunday when we get a day off. We do not feel good about that at all. At the same time when we get to our homes we cannot clean because we are exhausted. So it is very difficult to do our own things. When we get to rest we have to do our laundry. These conferences deal us a huge blow because in December you find that there are these conferences and we close on the 15th whereas in January we have to come back early. We work very hard and we earn peanuts here during these conferences. Rhodes generates a lot of money during these conferences because of room attendants. We sacrifice our time and time with our families to come and work here and we earn peanuts. (Interview, Ziyanda).

The hours of work get extended to the weekend for room attendants at Rhodes University. In the domestic work literature it is also stated that domestic workers are subjected to long working hours and even working on weekends (Griffin, 2011; Dilata, 2008; Ally, 2011; Cock, 1989). Ziyanda speaks to how being made to work on weekends deprives her of her

time for divine inspiration as she cannot attend Sunday services. Another factor which makes it worse for Ziyanda is the gendered division of labour in the household, as she is faced with the responsibility of also cleaning in her house after work. In Cock's study for instance, domestic workers raised discomfort with not being able to have time to see their friends, and also the fact that they had to wake up in the early hours of the morning to go to work had severe constraints on their ability to raise their children. Similar to what has been mentioned by Ziyanda, in her study, Cock (1989:127) asserts that "the great majority of employers required their domestic servants to work on public holidays". Some of the room attendants mentioned that this caused a serious suffering on their part as they were unable to do some of their things because of the demanding weekly cycle of work:

Another thing I do not like here, because when I was working at central cleaning I was not working on the weekends so it was possible on Fridays to do your laundry and on Saturdays to go to funerals. But here you only off after 12 days of work. You work for the entire week and even on weekends. Again you work for the following week the entire week and you get to off on that weekend. At least if we can get one day in a week for us to off. Sometimes you want to sort out your things and you cannot do that, you must first ask for permission. Sometimes you have something urgent to deal with. So if they can just consider giving us a day during the week, whilst the offices are still open because on weekends the offices are closed and you cannot sort out your business. (Interview, Nandisa)

Both Cock (1989) and Dilata (2008) in their research focus looked at how the domestic workers in their study experienced the phenomenon of time-poverty, and in both of their works it is clear that domestic workers had serious problems with the lack of time to off. Looking at the case of Pinkie who is a 45 year old live-in domestic worker, Dilata (2008:80) paints a clear picture of the phenomenon of being time-poor when she posits that "Pinkie has a good relationship with her employers but the only problem she has with her employers is that they refuse to give her time off. She stated that she works from Monday to Sunday, and when her employers feel like being considerate they let her work until Saturday 12 o'clock and have the Sunday off". This is a similar context to that expressed by Nandisa and Ziyanda above as they struggled to be able to do their own things because they are made to work from Monday to Sunday and only in the following week do they get to have a time-off. What aggravates this unhappy feeling of being time poor is the lack of remuneration for the room attendants even though they do come and work on weekends:

One thing that I think they should prioritise is that they should give us time to off, and how they do that I do not know. Sometimes you want to do your own things in town and you cannot because of work. If you have a family problem you must take from your annual leave days. I think we do not get paid for working on weekends. I say this because we earn the same amount as someone who works at the central cleaning services (CCS), and at CCS they do not come to work on weekends. We earn the same salary. The kitchen staff does get paid for working on weekends, and they also get money for transport. Our main question as workers is that why the treatment is not the same for all of us while we work under the same umbrella? (Interview, Zenani)

The remedy to the situation of being time-poor for room attendants is believed to be in allowing the room attendants to have their weekends and not come to work, as this deprives them of the time to not only attend important social gatherings in the communities, but also much needed time with their communities.

Conclusion

The analytical insights from Cock's study which was based in the Eastern Cape with domestic workers in the late 1970s, helped immensely in making sense of what the room attendants meant by the statement 'we are oppressed here'. Drawing insights from the domestic work literature, it became clear that issues such as low salaries, long hours of work, and conditions of immobility have long defined the institution of domestic work from time immemorial. Alison Jill King is another scholar in the post-apartheid dispensation who sought to draw insights from Cock's work to understand whether the post-apartheid moment for domestic workers could be characterised as having continuities or discontinuities with the apartheid era. King (2007:1) makes an assertion that "the central question of the research was to establish if the dismantling of apartheid in South Africa had improved the lives of domestic workers". In the context of transformation of institutions of higher learning, Rhodes University specifically, the similar question can be asked as to whether the agenda of transforming the institution has translated into qualitative change for room attendants. Hlatshwayo (2014) postulates that "from the perspective of workers working at universities transformation must lead to an improvement in their working conditions better wages, dignity and full participation in governance of these institutions". The lived experiences of room attendants in so far as issues such as salaries, working hours, and upward mobility are

concerned paint a completely different picture, and it is that the institution is still oppressive and that it has the vestiges of the apartheid wage structure which continues to persist in the domestic worker sector in general.

7. Conclusion

The lived experience of positional suffering for room attendants who belong to the Grades 1-3 occupational level has been discussed in relation to three themes that emerged from the life-texts of room attendants. These themes reveal the meaning that room attendants at Rhodes University attach to their work responsibilities such as the cleaning of public areas in the residences such as common rooms, passages and bathrooms. The first dimension of this positional suffering is bodily pain suffered by room attendants as a result of workplace hazards. In their descriptions of the work conditions, it is clear that working with water, being responsible for cleaning a big residence alone and also working with chemicals has resulted into serious dermatological, respiratory and musculoskeletal problems. What these descriptions also reveal is that it is only through transforming these hazardous workplace conditions that the pain and suffering of room attendants as far as the lived body experience is concerned, can be ameliorated. Insights from domestic work literature helped to make sense of these experiences.

Another dimension to the lived experience of positional suffering for room attendants has been along their experience of interpersonal relations between themselves and other agents in the university residential space such as the students, the supervisors, and also the line manager. Drawing insights from domestic work literature on the history of the nature of intersectional experience for domestic workers in private households, the experience of being 'space invaders' in the understanding and interpretation of room attendants was because of the fact that they are black and also because of their working class status. Badat (2011) has made this point that the institutional structure of Rhodes University remains defined by race, class, and gender. This in the context of room attendants' experience of being in intimate spaces is reflected through their marginalisation from using the same facilities as students in the residence. They embody their status of being cleaners through things such as uniforms, and their personal anecdotes revealed that they experienced serious cases of being racially discriminated against because they are black and also because of their occupational positioning.

The third dimension of this suffering was on the lived experience of exploitation through what in the perceptions of room attendants were low salaries, time poverty, and lack of job promotion. The descriptions of room attendants in relation to the experience of being exploited revealed that they are feeling unsatisfied with the remuneration they were receiving

for expending their labour in the university residences because of the burden of responsibility in their families. The personal anecdotes also revealed that the room attendants are unhappy with the deprivation of time to spend with the families and also being able to run errands during weekends. Similar to what participants in Cock's (1989) study during apartheid described as the feeling of being trapped, the room attendants expressed that they feel trapped as they are also denied job promotional opportunities.

King (2007:1) in discussing the focus of her research argued that "the central focus of this research was to establish if the dismantling of apartheid in South Africa had improved domestic workers". What the literature (see for instance Fish, 2006; King, 2007; Kehler, 2001; du Toit, 2013) on domestic work has shown is that there is a persistence of class, gender and race oppression which is still experienced by domestic workers in private household settings despite the legislative victories in this sector following the political breakthrough in 1994. The same thing can be said with regards to the transformation of higher education agenda as the imperative has been that of obliterating the remnants of apartheid in institutions of higher learning in the country. However, this focus has not encapsulated the lived realities of service staff as the workers who are doing menial labour in South African universities are called. In the context of Rhodes University, the Institutional Culture Staff Survey of 2014 clearly indicated that there is a huge discrepancy in employment satisfaction levels between academics and members of Grades 1-5. This research therefore has sought to focus closely on the certain workforce of this occupational category, the room attendants, and through drawing conceptual insights from domestic work literature, the lived experiences of room attendants are thus necessary insights for understanding transformation at Rhodes University.

The lived experiences of participants in this study also reveal the urgent need to broaden the scope of the imperatives of transformation at Rhodes University, so that their working conditions can start to change for the better. According to the RUICS (2014:6) "given the centrality of racial discrimination to the apartheid era; transformation refers particularly to attempts to deracialise higher education institutions through addressing racism at such institutions, increasing the proportion of black staff members and students and changing curricula and teaching practices". The lived realities of room attendants which have been discussed in this study thus serve as insights to what has been missing from the transformation radar of the institution in so far as the Grades 1-3 workers are concerned. The

transformation objective needs to be inclusive of the positional suffering of the room attendants at Rhodes University.

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