



Resilience and Resistance Among Migrant Male Domestic Workers in South Africa

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Abstract

Despite the large body of scholarly research that has addressed the various challenges encountered by female domestic workers, there exists a notable gap in understanding the experiences of male domestic workers in South Africa. The present study seeks to bridge this gap by exploring the experiences of ten black African migrant male domestic workers in Johannesburg. Drawing upon Katz's framework of disaggregated agency, encompassing resilience, reworking, and resistance strategies, the study demonstrates that in the absence of collective resistance through unionisation, male

domestic workers employ resilience and reworking strategies to improve their material well-being. Decision-making processes regarding migration to South Africa, engaging in job-hopping, and engaging in multiple piece jobs are examples of the resilience and reworking strategies used by male domestic workers to improve their living conditions. This study shows that paid domestic work in South Africa, whether performed by men or women, is not without challenges, but that male domestic workers exhibit agency by utilising various strategies to navigate and mitigate some of these challenges.

Introduction

In South Africa, the majority of the approximately 800,000 domestic workers in the country are black African women from marginalised backgrounds who perform domestic and care work duties on a live-in or live-out, full-time, part-time, or temporary basis (Du Toit & Heineken, 2021). Despite the feminisation of paid domestic work, historical studies show that in the Natal region during colonialism, domestic servants were predominantly black African males, referred to as 'houseboys', who cooked, cleaned, and cared for white families (Ally, 2010; Van Onselen, 1982). This supply of male domestic servants later spread to Johannesburg by the late 19th century, as the labour bureaus controlled the influx of black men and women from rural to urban areas and pushed them into domestic services. At the time, black African men rather than black African women were the preferred domestic servants by white households as they were admired for their trustworthiness and working skills (Van Onselen, 1982). Changes occurred with labour shortages in the mines, and black men were steered into mines as miners. Consequently, black African women replaced men as domestic workers, a norm ever since. However, a small proportion of black African men continued to work as domestic workers for families who prefer male domestic help.

Apart from these gender and racial characteristics, paid domestic work is also mainly performed by interregional or international migrants. In South Africa, interregional migrant domestic workers migrate from rural to urban areas, while international domestic workers mainly migrate to South Africa from Southern African countries such as Zimbabwe, Lesotho, Malawi, and Eswatini (Batisai, 2022). A pressing question, however, is why migrant men also perform paid domestic work in South Africa. Looking at online advertisements, for example on *Gumtree*, it seems there are migrant men, mostly from Zimbabwe and Malawi, who seek employment as domestic workers. However, it is not clear why they seek domestic work or what their experiences are of performing a job traditionally associated with femininity. Focusing on migrant male domestic workers' experiences, this study contributes to the discourse of gendered, racial, and transnational performances of paid domestic work in South African households. To unpack this, migration patterns of workers to South Africa are

briefly discussed, followed by a summary of the scholarly work on male domestic workers. Hereafter, the methodology, empirical findings, and conclusion are provided.

Migrating to South Africa

According to the White Paper on International Migration for South Africa (2017), South Africa has been the choice of destination for labour migrants since pre-colonial times. The discovery of gold and other resources pulled many migrants from Europe, Africa, and Southeast Asia to work in the mines. These dynamics started to change with the racial segregation policies during the apartheid period when immigration was tightly controlled and restricted by the government, allowing only white semi-skilled and skilled migrants to become citizens of South Africa. Black African cross-border migrants were considered politically undesirable and could not become citizens of South Africa. They were only allowed to come to South Africa as temporary contract workers and had to renew their contracts annually as per the bilateral labour agreements between South Africa and their home countries (Moyo, 2021). The transition to a post-apartheid dispensation in 1994 transformed migration patterns yet again.

The post-1994 democratic period saw an increase in South-to-South migration. New policies and laws such as the Green Paper on International Migration in 1997, a White Paper on International Migration accompanied by a Draft Immigration Bill, and the adoption of the first comprehensive Immigration Act in 2002, welcomed all types of immigrants to study and work in South Africa (White Paper on International Migration for South Africa, 2017). Due to South Africa's relative stability and economic opportunities, a noticeable increase has occurred in the migration of black men and women from neighbouring African countries, such as Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Malawi, Zimbabwe, and Mozambique, who seek greater access to education, employment prospects, and improved livelihoods (Batisai, 2022). The migrant population in South Africa stands at around three million people, a notable figure considering the country's total population of approximately 60 million. It is worth noting, however, that the actual

number of migrants could be significantly higher, taking into account the undocumented migrants in the country. Recent statistics indicate that around 853,000 migrants entered South Africa during the 2016–2021 period, mostly residing in Johannesburg or Pretoria, which are considered the economic hubs of the country (Moyo, 2021).

Reasons for South-to-South migration to South Africa encompass various factors, including but not limited to unstable economic development and political unrest, leading to conditions of extreme poverty, pervasive violence, and inadequate social circumstances (Batisai, 2022). For instance, Zimbabwean migrants are frequently driven to migrate to South Africa due to the economic and political crises in their home country. These crises have resulted in rampant inflation, high unemployment rates, poor wages, and human rights violations (Makina, 2011). Similarly, individuals from Mozambique and Malawi often seek opportunities in South Africa due to the lack of sustainable development and limited job prospects in their respective countries. In Eswatini and Lesotho, where poverty and unemployment rates remain significant, many individuals are compelled to migrate to South Africa as a means to escape poverty (Bhoojedhur & Isbell, 2019; Simelane, 2011).

According to Moyo (2021), South Africa's political stability and diversified economy make it a desirable destination for migration compared to other African nations. Both skilled and unskilled migrants are attracted to South Africa for both short- and long-term stays. The country's immigration policy has undergone several revisions, most recently in 2016, with the aim of promoting skilled labour migration (Gordon, 2022). For example, the South African government has adopted a more lenient approach towards border harmonisation and has entered into new travel agreements that have facilitated migration within the region. This shift in policy has resulted in a significant decrease in deportations between 2009 and 2018. African migrants frequently migrate to South Africa as a means of survival, with their families relying on the remittances they send back home. Migrants often leverage their social networks to find accommodation and support by relying on pre-existing relationships with friends or family already residing in South Africa (Johnson, 2017). Migrant workers usually enter into a range of low-level service occupations such

as the construction and trade industry, but also the agricultural and domestic work sectors, which come with precarious working conditions.

Male Domestic Workers

Although migrant domestic workers are predominantly women, there has been a growing recognition of the increased employment of male domestic workers, as documented in several studies (Parrenas, 2015; Sarti & Scrinzi, 2010; Perrons et al., 2010). However, research specifically focused on migrant male domestic workers in South Africa remains limited. Therefore, this section relies on international research on male domestic work.

Studies by Moya (2007), Sarti (1997), and Glenn (1992) focus on male domestic work in Europe and the United States. These studies highlight how male servants, alongside female domestic workers, undertook tasks such as butler services, cooking, and cleaning (Moya, 2007; Sarti, 1997; Glenn, 1992). In the 21st century, the migration of male and female laborers, primarily from Asia or Eastern Europe, has resulted in male migrants often working as domestic workers due to limited alternative job opportunities. While male domestic workers still find employment in upper-class households, there has been a shift in the gendered division of domestic work due to globalisation and migration patterns.

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In instances where migrant men have traditionally performed tasks associated with masculinity, such as plumbing, gardening, and painting, there has been an observable increase in migrant men engaging in traditionally feminised domestic work (Bartolomei, 2010; Kilkey et al., 2013). This suggests that global migration processes are intricately connected to the changing supply of and demands for domestic work. For example, in countries like Italy and the Netherlands, male domestic workers, often from the Philippines, predominantly undertake non-care household chores such as cleaning and ironing. In cases where male domestic workers do engage in care work, it typically involves assisting elderly men with tasks such as walking, shaving, or shopping (Parrenas, 2015; Haile & Siegmann, 2014). What these studies indicate is that migrant male domestic workers are more likely to perform domestic tasks traditionally associated with women, while local men tend to focus on traditionally masculinised domestic work duties outside the home, such as gardening, pool cleaning, painting, and household repairs (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2007; Kilkey et al., 2013). This highlights the intersection of gender, migration, and domestic work, illustrating how migrant men's roles in the domestic sphere differ from those of local men.

Looking at the global south, women dominate as paid domestic workers in most countries, but in some countries, men are also employed as domestic workers who perform traditional feminised domestic work. For example, in India, one-third of Western Bengali domestic workers are men and are sought after by wealthy households for their multiple domestic labour skills (Qayum & Ray, 2010). In Africa, in Zambia and Tanzania, male domestic workers encompassed almost two-thirds of domestic workers in the 1980s. Hansen's (1989) study conducted in Zambia revealed that black female employers exhibited a preference for male domestic workers over female domestic workers. This preference was attributed to the perception that female domestic workers posed a potential threat to employers and were more likely to cause problems compared to their male counterparts. Similarly, Burja's (2000) study conducted in Tanzania highlighted the preference for male domestic workers among employers. The rationale behind this preference was the belief that male domestic workers were faster learners and could efficiently handle multiple domestic tasks with greater consistency compared to female

domestic workers. Male domestic workers were seen as capable of performing a combination of indoor and outdoor domestic work duties that meet the diverse needs of employers within the domestic sphere.

Similarly, Pariser's (2015) historical study on male domestic workers, specifically referred to as 'houseboys', in Tanzania sheds light on their extensive responsibilities within the domestic sphere. Houseboys were hired by employers to perform a wide range of domestic tasks, including gardening, laundry, cleaning, and cooking. The study suggests that male domestic workers were valued for their trustworthiness, attention to detail, and ability to handle multiple aspects of inside and outside domestic work. Pariser's (2015) study, as well as others, contribute to our understanding of male domestic work as an immigration niche and a space where notions of gender and masculinity are negotiated and redefined within the international division of domestic labour.

However, within a South African context, where female domestic workers dominate, it is unclear how male migrant domestic workers experience paid domestic work. Not only does this study aim to fill this void, but it also explores how migrant male domestic workers use their agency to respond to the circumstances of paid domestic work. Consequently, I draw on Cindi Katz's framework of 'disaggregated agency', as practices of resilience, reworking, and resistance, to take account of the constraints posed by oppressive contexts and ideologies in shaping both understandings of exploitation and the diverse responses to it (Katz, 2004).

Katz's Typology of Agency: Resilience, Reworking, and Resistance

Katz's theory of disaggregated agency focuses on the diverse outcomes of agentic social action, which include survival (resilience), reconfiguration (reworking), and subversion (resistance) (Katz, 2004). Firstly, resilience is defined as a strategy of endurance and a determination to survive within oppressive conditions on a daily basis without challenging the structure. For example, resilience tactics among workers include working multiple jobs in low-wage occupations to improve their daily livelihood. Another form of resilience could be when workers construct existing working conditions as normative. Despite a consciousness of exploitation and unfair treatment,

workers often show resilience in adopting a range of tactics in response to difficulties encountered at work. Resilience practices commonly recounted included distancing and treating work instrumentally as a means to achieve non-work-related goals (Katz, 2004: 224–246).

Reworking is another type of agency, which refers to altering the conditions of people's existence to enable more workable and comfortable lives within the power and legal structures (Katz, 2004: 247–251). In other words, strategies of reworking tend to be driven by explicit recognition of problematic conditions and to offer pragmatic solutions to better meet their needs and desires (Anwar and Graham, 2022). For example, the common reworking strategy is to change jobs that make more economic sense, instead of trying to get the employer to change the working conditions. Another form of reworking is when workers use their legal knowledge to compensate for some of the imbalances cast by the employment system. For example, Berntsen's (2016) study demonstrates acts of reworking when a Polish construction worker fell and broke his arm. When the employer refused to pay for sick benefits, the worker threatened his employer with informing the labour inspectorate about this. As a result, the employer compensated the worker, although for less than what he was legally entitled to.

Lastly, resistance describes strongly oppositional practices whose goal is to disrupt unequal and

oppressive power relations. Katz (2004: 251–257) refers to resistance as practices that draw on and produce a critical consciousness to confront and redress historically and geographically specific conditions of oppression and exploitation at various scales. Forms of resistance include collective strikes and union organisations to deliberately resist employers' power and change the labour structure and working conditions. For migrants, some trade unions may have been reluctant in the past to represent them, but there is evidence that immigrants, migrant workers with settling intentions and circular migrants do join trade unions when unions make strategic and resourceful efforts to include them. Whether this is the case for migrant male domestic workers in South Africa is unclear, but in general, collective forms of resistance are limited as union membership is particularly low among domestic workers.

Thus, in essence, Katz's typology of resilience, reworking, and resistance provides a useful framework to explore the agency of migrant male domestic workers in the domestic work sector. The next section describes the methodology of this study, which is followed by the empirical findings obtained from the interviews to describe how migrant male domestic workers use resilience and reworking to improve their daily working lives.

Research Methods

This study is situated within the qualitative research paradigm to understand migrant male domestic workers' experiences of working as domestic workers in Johannesburg. It allows for context-specific in-depth views of a subject, which seems appropriate for this study.

Participants were recruited using Facebook where messages were posted asking if anyone employs or knows someone who employs a male migrant domestic worker in Johannesburg. Two responses were received from employers and appointments were made with their male domestic workers. These two male domestic workers referred me to other male domestic workers they knew. In total, eight more male domestic workers were interviewed at their employers' homes or in nearby coffee shops during their lunch breaks. Interviews lasted about 40 minutes to an hour, were recorded, transcribed, and thematically analysed.

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Table 1: Profile of Participants

Participant (pseudonym)	Age	Nationality	Living arrangement	Area in Johannesburg
Dennis	48	Zimbabwean	Live-in	Parkhurst
Paul	43	Malawian	Live-in	Parkview
Baron	47	Malawian	Live-in	Parktown North
Edwin	29	Zimbabwean	Live-out	Midrand
Patrick	38	Malawian	Live-in	Morningside
Matt	46	Malawian	Live-in	Bryanston
Stanley	52	Malawian	Live-in	Parktown North
William	37	Zimbabwean	Live-in	Rosebank
John	45	Malawian	Live-in	Sandton
Daniel	44	Zimbabwean	Live-out	Sandton

Regarding the participants' profiles, all self-identified as black African men, who were originally from Malawi or Zimbabwe (Table 1). The average age of the participants is 43 years. The youngest participant is 29 years old, while the oldest one is 52 years old. The areas in Johannesburg where participants render domestic services are considered to be upper-middle-class suburbs such as Parkhurst, Parktown North, and Bryanston. Regarding the participants' employers, most are couples, while only one works for a couple with children. However, none of the participants are doing any care work and only perform household cleaning and laundry tasks, as well as gardening and household maintenance work.

The research was conducted in the most ethical way possible when data was collected. This entailed obtaining written consent from the ten participants which contained information on the aims and objectives of the study. All participants participated in the study voluntarily and none of them withdrew from the interview, although they could. Participants were assured of confidentiality through pseudonyms, making it impossible for readers of the article to identify them.

The Path to Male Domestic Work: Coming to South Africa

In all the interviews, the participants articulated a narrative of migrating from Malawi or Zimbabwe to South Africa, in pursuit of a higher quality of life. The participants departed from their families and relocated to South Africa to secure employment and remit funds to support themselves and their families. Typical responses included: 'There are no jobs in Malawi'; 'Our economy back home is very bad'; 'Getting a proper job there [in Zimbabwe] is a very big challenge'; 'I don't have any education, so what type of job can I get?'. Given the constrained employment prospects in their home countries and the potential for job opportunities abroad, engaging in transnational work is predominantly regarded by migrants as a reworking strategy aimed at improving their material well-being.

Migrating to South Africa was made possible due to having family members already in the country that could provide them with networks and contacts to secure a job. Stanley mentioned that coming to South Africa more than twenty years ago was easy, because 'my uncle was here and he said I must come to South Africa to work.' Other participants like Paul, John, and Edwin also used social networks to secure a job in South Africa. Despite utilising social networks and family members residing in South Africa to obtain employment opportunities, none of the participants

initially secured employment as domestic workers. Instead, all of the participants worked in manual labour roles within the construction industry, or as painters, gardeners, or kitchen cleaning staff in hotels and restaurants. Some participants spent several years working in these industries before transitioning to domestic work. Patrick (38 years old), for example, shared his story about his journey to South Africa:

In Malawi, I worked on a farm. So, when I came to South Africa, I was working on a farm first, in Durban. I worked on the farm from 2011 until January 2016. But it was tough. The money was the problem. It was not enough at the time. I then left and moved to Gauteng, I was working at Fourways, and I was working as a builder in this group. We built houses. But again, the money was not enough (Patrick, 38 years old).

Similar to Patrick, the majority of the participants' initial employment in South Africa involved tasks that they had experience with back in their home countries, such as working on farms or on construction sites. Nevertheless, all of the participants indicated that they have held various positions since moving to South Africa and that they have changed jobs frequently in search of higher wages. The change in jobs indicates that participants like Patrick used reworking as a coping strategy where they left jobs for better-paying ones. Baron (47 years old), for example, described how he first worked as a builder and a painter before being employed as a domestic worker:

When the guys started dealing with renovations before they moved in, I helped them. So, it took about eight months to almost a year. Building, making the rooms bigger, painting the rooms and the house outside. Cleaning the yard. They were busy doing whatever they were doing, yeah, and I was looking after them and the cleaning, yeah, just that. Since they move in, I just started working inside and outside. This was the first time I was cleaning inside. It was strange at first, but now I'm used to it (Baron, 47 years old).

Like Baron, many other participants recounted their journey into domestic work, which typically began with performing outdoor household tasks such as yard maintenance, pool cleaning, or painting. Matt shared that he was recruited for indoor domestic work by an

elderly couple when the male employer suffered a stroke, and his wife was responsible for caring for him. She no longer had the time to carry out household chores and cleaning tasks and asked Matt if he would be willing to clean the house while she cooked and cared for her husband. Initially hesitant, Matt has grown to appreciate cleaning inside the house.

Duties and Working Conditions

The division of domestic work according to gender is a common phenomenon, where men are usually assigned to perform outside domestic work such as gardening, maintenance work, and painting, while women are expected to perform inside domestic work such as cleaning, cooking, and care work. Men who perform inside domestic work tend to perform cleaning, laundry and tidying up tasks, and sometimes cooking duties, but almost never care work (Parrenas, 2015; Haile and Siegmann, 2014).

Findings indicate that male domestic workers in this study also perform emotionally distant and instrumental domestic work tasks such as sweeping floors, making beds, washing dishes, and tidying up rooms. None of the participants perform any care work, and only Matt sometimes helps his elderly male employer with bathing and shaving, if the employer's wife cannot assist. When asked about their work schedules, the majority of participants reported working from Monday to Friday, with some also working on weekends. They explained that they have a set routine for performing both inside and outside domestic work. For instance, Dennis (48 years old) described his inside domestic work duties, which he alternates with outside domestic work responsibilities:

Like when I came here in the morning, I do the dishes. I clean the bedroom and the bathroom. Then I put the clothes in the washing machine. Then I mop the floors of the bedrooms and bathrooms, dusting or doing anything while the washing machine cleans the clothes. Then I come down the steps cleaning everything, dusting everything, the tables. Lastly, I hang up the clothes outside, I clean the stoep and braai area, and the pool. On Tuesdays, I will do the same job and the ironing. On Wednesday, I have to do the cleaning of the bedrooms and bathrooms, and then after lunch, I work in the garden. On

Thursday, I do the washing and ironing. On Friday, I do the cleaning and clean the garden again. On weekends, there are sometimes people here, but only in the evening. During the day, I will be resting, and then around 6:00 pm when there are people, then I start cooking. The boss buys the food and I cook. On Sunday morning when he wakes up, then I just go in to do the dishes and make the bed, and then I am done (Dennis 48 years old).

Dennis is the only participant in this study who also cooks for his employer, a task he learned while working as a kitchen cleaning staff in an Italian restaurant. The owner of the restaurant slowly introduced him to cooking by teaching him how to make pizza and pasta dishes. Over time, Dennis gradually took on more responsibilities in the restaurant where he worked, including making breakfast, lunch, and dinner. However, he had to leave the job when the restaurant closed down. Later on, he was hired by his current employer where he performs cleaning and cooking duties. Apart from inside domestic work tasks, all participants perform outside domestic work, which includes gardening, cleaning the yard, and pool cleaning, but also other duties like dog walking, painting, washing cars, and looking after the house when their employers are on vacation.

Reflecting on whether participants are satisfied with performing domestic work, most participants offered narrative accounts of a sense of accomplishment and pride in cleaning up other people's homes. Domestic work tasks range over a spectrum of inside and outside domestic work duties, and participants expressed a feeling of achievement when they can turn dirty homes into clean ones. For example, Edwin said: 'It makes me very happy to clean, to see that my boss is happy when he comes back from work and sees the house is clean.' Likewise, Dennis said he is very proud of his job and does not want to do any other job. A sense of resilience is picked up from some of the participants who endure the job because it makes them and their employers happy.

However, the sense of accomplishment that participants experience is perhaps linked to how they are treated by their employers. All the participants mentioned that they have a good relationship with their employers, as confirmed by Edwin who said:

'Where I am working like I am part of the family. I am not like I am a worker or whatever.' Whereas numerous studies have shown that 'being part of the family' masks exploitation and abuse (Ally, 2010; Cock, 1980), in this study, it appears that participants are treated well, given that all of them receive wages that are higher than the minimum wages stipulations and, in some cases, even double, compared to what female full-time domestic workers normally receive.

Not only are they satisfied with their wages, but all participants said that they receive food from their employers, have at least fifteen days of paid leave annually, and receive increases every year, which is in line with the SD7 stipulations. Dennis also mentioned that when it is his birthday, his employer gives him either cash or gifts. Scholars doing research on the paid domestic work sector are often critical of gift-giving and link it to the maternalistic behaviour of the employer to evoke harder work and loyalty from domestic workers (Ally, 2010; King, 2007; Cock, 1980).

Most of the participants also live on the premises of their employers, in modest rooms attached to the main house or in a room in the backyard. While numerous studies (Ally, 2010; King, 2007) argue that live-in domestic work adds to the possibility of exploitation by employers by expecting domestic workers to perform duties beyond working hours, it seems that most of the participants felt that receiving food and lodging reduces their expenses and allows them to send money to their families in Zimbabwe and Malawi. Interestingly, most participants send money to their homeland families not just for their survival, but also to invest in land and property. During the interview, Dennis showed me pictures of the plot he bought and how he plans to build a house for himself and his family. Stanley also said that he does not only send money to his wife and four children to buy food but also to maintain his house there as he wants to retire in Malawi one day. It seems that participants are relatively satisfied with their jobs and that it allows them and their families to have a higher standard of living and status in their home country where unemployment and poverty are high.

All participants are employed by white upper-middle-class employers, who live in wealthy suburbs in Johannesburg. Interestingly, all participants mentioned that they prefer working for white

employers as they are treated better than they would be by black employers. Stanley (52 years old) shared his views about working for black families as a domestic worker:

I got friends who used to work or who are working for black families. So, I know how difficult black men are. I will not put myself in that situation. Mostly they are difficult. They are difficult. And when it comes to payments, they don't want to use money so they give you a lot of jobs, a lot of work but when it comes to payment, they are not good. The boys here [referring to his white employers] are paying me good money. When there is conflict, we sit down and talk. We sort it out (Stanley, 52 years old).

Similar sentiments were shared by others who have no desire to work for black employers. Dennis mentioned how his friend works for a black family in Johannesburg and is only allowed to take two days off per month while working almost 15 hours per day. Thus, participants in this study feel that white employers show more empathy toward them, pay better wages, and treat them better. Perhaps being culturally and ethnically similar to employers and cleaning up their dirt could be experienced as a humiliation and a disgrace.

What is also noted in Stanley's story above, and others like Baron, Patrick, William, and Paul, is that

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when conflict arises, it is dealt with in a mature and amicable manner. They sit down with their employers and discuss the issue and try to solve it pragmatically. Cock (1980) shows how strategies of resistance can also be 'muted rituals of rebellion' (Cock, 1980: 103), consisting of silence and mockery of employers to maintain 'personality and integrity'. None of the participants shared any stories where they felt that they were treated unfairly by employers.

With regards to multiple jobs, only three of the fifteen participants work for more than one employer. For example, Matt (46 years old) works as a full-time domestic worker for his employer, but over weekends, works as a gardener for another family to supplement his income. Similarly, Paul (43 years old) and Daniel (44 years old) perform painting and household repair jobs over the weekends as a strategy to earn extra cash. Thus, Matt, Paul, and Daniel show resilience by not actively changing the systems, but actively seeking pragmatic ways to supplement their income by doing other jobs. Resilience is also shown by some participants by accepting domestic work as just another job, that both men and women can do.

Gender, Masculinity, and Shame

Paid domestic work is predominantly performed by female domestic workers as household cleaning and care work is often believed to come naturally to women (Ally, 2010). In this study, however, participants had mixed views on performing domestic work. The one group of participants, which includes Dennis, Matt, Patrick, and Edwin, had no objection to being referred to as domestic workers and are not ashamed of telling others what they do. For example, Stanley said that: 'I am not ashamed. No. All my family knows what I am doing. I'm a domestic cleaner. I clean homes.' Similar sentiments were shared by others in this group who said that men and women can equally clean homes. As Patrick said: 'domestic work is not a woman's job in Malawi. Men clean in Malawi. Some men also clean here in South Africa'.

However, the other group of participants, which includes Paul, Baron, Stanley, William, John, and Daniel, believed that performing domestic work could harm their sense of masculinity. For example, Paul said that 'domestic cleaning is a girl's job'. Similarly, Paul said that 'people make jokes if they see a man works

inside the home as a domestic. You know, they think you can't get any other job and you must take this job'. Paul's statement implies that domestic work is only reserved for women and men who are domestic workers could not find a better job. Domestic work is a low-status job and others would be condescending to men who are employed as domestic workers. Baron (47 years old) tells the following story about how he was ashamed of working as a domestic worker:

I used to lie and say my boss is owning a company, so I am just helping him do whatever where he lives. I just didn't tell them the truth as I was scared. I was scared they will laugh at me. I was feeling ashamed telling people that I am a domestic worker. (Baron, 47 years old).

Although Baron is no longer ashamed of working as a domestic worker, he and some of the participants were hesitant to call themselves domestic workers or maids, because that implies a job reserved for women only. Paul, William, Baron, and John referred to themselves as a housekeeper, which is a gender-neutral term, while Stanley and Daniel referred to themselves as gardeners, despite performing inside domestic work too. It appears that they fear not being seen or treated like 'real men' and that their masculinity is questioned by others.

The issue of participants' masculinity was further emphasised when they were asked if women can perform outside domestic work such as gardening and pool cleaning. With the exception of Dennis and Edwin, who mentioned that times have changed where men and women can do any job they want to do, all the other men in this study said women should only perform inside domestic work and not gardening, household repair work, or pool cleaning. Matt (46 years old) shares his views on the gendered division of domestic work:

Women must work inside. The men can be outside. Because sometimes you have, maybe you have a big garden, and she cannot push the lawnmower. And they cannot take the ladder and paint the wall. It is hard for women. It is a job for us men. (Matt, 46 years old).

Similar views were shared by others who claimed that while men and women can perform inside domestic

work equally, outside domestic work should be reserved for men only. Matt and others believe that outside domestic work involves masculine strength and skills that women do not have. It is clear that these men have traditional views of the gendered division of domestic work. Men are supposed to do work that requires strength, while women should do the softer, more nurturing domestic work duties like care work. When it comes to inside domestic work, where women normally dominate, participants had no objection, clarifying that they clean as well, and, in some cases, even better than women. For example, Edwin (29 years old) said 'Anyone can do cleaning, and it is very easy', while Dennis (48 years old) thinks he is a better cleaner than most women because he knows 'how to clean, and cook and iron. I'm better than anyone else'. These sentiments potentially demonstrate the participants' resilience, as they show a willingness to embrace their role as domestic workers.

However, some male domestic workers in this study are uncomfortable performing certain domestic work tasks such as handling women's underwear. Baron, who works for a gay couple, said he is lucky that he works for men only, as he said that it would be a challenge to work for a man and a wife and that he 'would not be comfortable cleaning the wife's underwear'. Similarly, Daniel said that he avoids laundry tasks as his employers pay a female domestic worker to do laundry tasks, which he also sees as a task that only female domestic workers should perform:

There is a maid when it comes to ironing. I clean the dishes. I mop and vacuum the floors. I change the bed. I clean the bathroom. I clean the toilet. I do everything. But the laundry [and] the ironing, the maid is there. When it comes to ironing, that's the time when I go to the garden. (Daniel, 44 years old).

The outsourcing of feminised tasks to female domestic workers emphasises the gendered division of domestic work. In the example above, Daniel is distanced from intimate aspects of domestic work where he does not handle or clean the underwear of his employers. What these findings show is that male domestic workers negotiate the tension of inherently performing paid domestic work tasks that are regarded as women's work. Similar to Qarum and Ray's (2010) argument that male domestic workers try to

make sense of their everyday lives in a workspace that is typically feminine and inferior, some participants in this study try to construct a masculine identity that separates them from the degrading domestic work tasks that only women must do.

Discussion and Conclusion

Few studies have focused on the experiences of male domestic workers performing domestic work within South Africa. As such, paid domestic work is perceived and theorised as something between women, where middle- and upper-class female employers pay women, normally from marginalised backgrounds, to clean, cook and care. However, historically and in different geographical contexts, men have also been employed as domestic workers (Scrinzi, 2010; van Onselen, 1982). In recent years, there seems to be a resurgence of male domestic workers, and this study documents the experiences of male domestic workers in South Africa.

The first finding shows that male domestic work has a migrant character, where they leave their home country due to high levels of unemployment, poverty, and poor wages. South Africa is the destination of choice as it appears to offer more and better employment opportunities to them. These findings support the general push and pull factors of migrant literature (Batisai, 2022; Bhoojedhur & Isbell, 2019). While all participants worked in different employment sectors, they ended up in the paid domestic work sector. It appears that perhaps their migrant identity helped them secure a job as a domestic worker. This finding links to Hondagneu-Sotelo's (2007) argument that migrant men are more likely to perform domestic work than local men. Findings also show that participants seem to be satisfied with their job. Inside domestic work is alternated with outside domestic work, which adds to the variety of tasks and the usage of different skills.

The second finding points to the tasks that male domestic workers perform. Similar to female domestic workers, the men in this study perform general household cleaning duties, which include sweeping and mopping floors, tidying up rooms, and washing dishes. Only one participant cooks for his employer, and one participant sometimes does care work helping an elderly man with shaving, bathing,

and dressing. All male domestic workers also perform outside domestic work such as tending the garden, painting, and repairing household fixtures. Regarding the working conditions, all participants felt they are treated fairly by their employers, despite the inherent exploitative character of paid domestic work. Most of the male domestic workers in this study receive better wages than the minimum wage stipulates, but they are responsible for most of the inside and outside domestic work duties. It could be argued that they do more than one person's job and therefore receive better pay.

The third finding illustrates that some male domestic workers hold traditional views regarding the gendered division of domestic work. Despite working as domestic workers performing duties that female domestic workers predominantly do, some men in this study feel ashamed of their job and lie about it to others. By working as domestic workers, some fear being judged that they could not find a job with higher social status, and are, therefore, targets for bullying and public ridicule. However, male domestic workers are active agents by avoiding certain domestic work tasks that they view as inferior to their masculine identity. For example, some expressed being uncomfortable washing the underwear of female employers, saying this is the 'maid's' job – referring to a female domestic worker. Others justify their job by arguing that it requires strength that women do not have. Outside domestic work was found to be a male-only space and women should only perform inside domestic work. In essence, men can do a woman's job, but women cannot do a man's job.

Significantly, none of the participants are affiliated with labour unions. Consequently, in the absence of collective resistance, participants use resilience strategies to enhance their livelihoods, rather than overtly challenging these practices. For example, their resilience is exemplified by their acceptance of the domestic worker role, where they perceive fair treatment from their employers. Additionally, some participants engage in ad-hoc gardening or household repair tasks for other families during weekends, supplementing their income to a certain extent. This signifies their resilience by maintaining the existing state of affairs in domestic work while actively seeking supplementary employment to improve their living conditions.

Moreover, the utilisation of reworking strategies is evident in participants' mobility strategies. Firstly, coming to South Africa and performing transnational jobs indicates a reworking strategy by participants to improve their livelihoods rather than collectively change the situation in their home countries. Secondly, reworking strategies are also demonstrated through the participants' history of job-hopping prior to settling into domestic work. Many individuals initially worked as gardeners or kitchen staff but changed jobs due to poor payment until securing their current employment as domestic workers.

In conclusion, although this study is small in scope and provides only a snapshot of a particular group of migrant male domestic workers in Johannesburg, it shows that male domestic workers are connected to the international division of domestic work. Where class, race, and gender are intricately linked to paid domestic work, when it comes to men performing domestic work, the migrant identity of workers adds a new layer of complexity to the study of paid domestic work. It appears that migrant men are more likely to work in the paid domestic work sector than local men, although the uneasiness of performing work typically associated with women does not disappear entirely. By choosing not to resist collectively or unionise, migrant male domestic workers exert their individual agency in manners that tend to improve their personal well-being materially. This indicates that in order to protect domestic workers as a group from exploitation and to improve their livelihoods collectively, regulators, enforcement authorities, and trade unions need to adopt a proactive approach to include workers, as the initiative for transformative actions and collective resistance at a broader scale is unlikely to originate from the workers themselves.

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