

“Blackboxing Whiteness”: A study of the networked home in middle-class South Africa

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the home as networked and relational. These arrangements of space and place were investigated through a digital ethnography and critical discourse analysis of domestically focused posts by 50 Facebook users. This data was supplemented by interviews, and in-situ observations drawn from the broader sample. Facebook has opened up the private space of the home, allowing domestic space, place, and practice to gain visibility, which, when analysed in conjunction with Actor-Network Theory (ANT), illustrates the networked and relational quality of the home. The home, and the relationships between actants, reflects discourses and hierarchy. Women remain tightly bound to the home, and to postfeminist discourses of domesticity and domestopia. This paper reveals that whiteness, and in particular madamhood, is blackboxed within middle-class homes. Domestic workers employed by these households, on the other hand, were largely absent from such narratives and conversations, and were marginalised within networks.

INTRODUCTION

Nearly four decades on from Jacklyn Cock's (1980) seminal work, *Maids & Madams*, there is a need to revisit South African domestic relationships. Not only has the political landscape changed, but social network systems (SNS) and computer mediated communication (CMC) have reconfigured the home. In light of this, this study utilises Actor-Network Theory (ANT) in order to investigate household configuration as highly networked and relational. The home is contextualised not only as the building in which we live, but as a networked *assemblage* of material and digitally mediated space and place as presented on Facebook, for example. These networked configurations of space and place offer insight into gendered and racial power dynamics within typically middle-class urban and suburban environments.

Jaqui Hiltermann has a PhD in Film and Media Studies from the University of Cape Town. Jaqui has cunningly crafted her research interests around her love of stories, food, binge-watching series, social media, and observing humans in everyday life. She has a great love for teaching and interacting with students.

Networked arrangements of domestic space and place were investigated over a three year period. Digital ethnography, and critical discourse analysis (CDA) were used to analyse domestically focused Facebook posts by 50, predominantly white, middle-class¹ South African women. This data was supplemented by interviews and in-situ observations of five couples drawn from the broader sample. In combination, these methods reveal how space, place, and domestic responsibilities are secured through narrative practice.

Whilst this study examines predominantly white middle-class arrangements of domestic space and place in South Africa, it also interrogates postfeminist narratives of domesticity (Gillis & Hollows, 2009; Hollows, 2000, 2003, 2006, 2007; Matchar, 2013; McRobbie, 2004), particularly Dolgoplov's (2003) "domestopia". Within such narratives, women participants stabilise their role as domestic managers within households, and domestic workers are frequently alienated from these narratives. Consequently, the domestic workers' sense of belonging within middle-class arrangements of domestic space and place, in which they perform an integral role, is from a marginalised point of view. This position is argued from the perspective of white middle-class narratives (Brekhus, 1998; Frankenberg, 1993, 1997; Kruger, 2016; Nakayama & Krizek, 1995; Nuttall, 2001; Riggs & Selby, 2003; Steyn & Conway, 2010; Ware, 2013).

Facebook narratives reveal that women participants situate themselves as domestic managers and, in doing so play a primary role in recruiting and enrolling actants² into their home networks. These acts of enrollment are a crucial element in stabilising networks, and assigning roles to actants ensures that networks are maintained (Doolin & Lowe, 2002). This paper examines how women participants use Facebook to assign roles to actants, particularly domestic workers, and it is suggested that gendered and racial discourses operate as "ordering strategies"³ (Law, 1992, 1994, 2004) which further secure network ties.

This paper suggests that networks stabilise because discourses, which circulate within networks, normalise patterns of behaviour and role expectations. This is particularly true in homophilous networks, because homophily functions as an "ordering strategy" (Law, 1992, 1994, 2004) that secures actants to space and place through shared discourse (di Gregorio, 2012; McPherson et al., 2001). Homophily is the idea that "similarity breeds connection" and the result of homophily is that the individual's networks become "homogenous with regard to many sociodemographic,

¹ Middle class is defined according to the South African Audience Research Foundation's (SAARF) most recent Living Standards Measure (LSM). LSM is used as a way to look at markets, and categorises individuals based on "degrees of urbanisation", "ownership of cars and major appliances" (<http://www.saarf.co.za/lsm/lsm.asp>). It is useful because it negates racial categories and defines groups according to their living standards. For this study LSM 7 high to LSM 10 low was defined as middle class (<https://www.mediaupdate.co.za/marketing/14286/making-sense-of-the-new-14-lsm-model>).

² In ANT actants are either human or non-human. Non-human actors are, as the name suggests, everything in a network that is not a human; for example a technology, an ideology or belief, an artefact etc.

³ This process explores how networks are ordered according to "devices, agents, institutions, or organisations" and is concerned with how networks hold together (Law, 1992: 386).

behavioural, and interpersonal characteristics" (McPherson et al., 2001:415). Whiteness, in particular, is secured within middle-class domestic networks, and is indeed "blackboxed" (Callon, 1986) and normalised.

Furthermore, this paper argues that analysing moments of context collapse (Marwick & boyd, 2011), where the intended meaning of a text is misinterpreted by the reader (or audience) on Facebook, is a way of scrutinising blackboxing. This is because when networks are stable it is harder to identify power relations because each actant behaves as an intermediary, and acts in a predictable way. It is suggested that whiteness, and particularly madamhood as an aspect of whiteness, is secured in networks and is revealed during context collapse. This is because during misunderstandings, insight is given into the relationships that hold networks together. Network instability allows for the observation and interrogation of the invisible support, or the erasure of the support, which enables middle-class home networks to function. It is often during context collapse that marginalised individuals or groups are brought into focus, and whiteness is disrupted. Doolin & Lowe claim that a "stabilized network is only stable for some" (2002:75), and this stability is reflective of inherent power relations, which in this case, are reflective of white middle-class normativity.

1.1 Four decades on

Nearly forty years since Cock's study, domesticity remains a discursively loaded social and historical construct that reflects power. In South Africa, employing a domestic worker is still the norm for many white people, although the country's changing class structure, and income distribution is reflected, with black, coloured and Indian households employing domestic workers.⁴ According to the recent Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS)⁵ data provided by STATS SA, South Africa has over one million domestic workers. The practice of employing domestic workers has ramifications for gender and racial politics within households, and even in post-apartheid South Africa, many black women still rely on domestic work, which accounts for nearly 8% of the total workforce (BusinessTech, 2015, 2016).

In South Africa, as in Europe and America, from a political and historical point of view, domestic work has a history of being low paid or unpaid work for women who are seen as economically inferior (Callaway, 1987; Cock, 1981; Marks & Unterhalter, 1978; Schmidt, 1982). Cock's (1980) analysis of the power relations afforded to South African women argue that both the "maid" and the "madam" are in subordinate positions and subject to discrimination. Both parties share social and political dependence in that the maid is dependent on the madam (her employer), and in an era where many women were not employed, the employer is

⁴ AMPS data revealed that nearly 13% of South African households, and 56% within the white population, employ one or more domestic workers (SAARF, 2015). In this study, forty one participants employed a domestic worker, with the majority of households employing a domestic worker once or twice a week. Eight participants employed a domestic worker on a full time basis.

⁵ QLFS 2017 Data Retrieved from <http://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/P0211/P02112ndQuarter2017.pdf>

dependent on her husband. It is for this reason that the madam often asserts her authority over the lesser domestic worker.

This paper explores the middle-class home as a network, and examines the extent to which domestic workers contribute to household networks, and what roles they are expected to fulfil. Furthermore this paper interrogates power relations as they emerge in digitally mediated and material space, and it is suggested that these networks are reflective of white normativity.

1.2 Developments in studies of networked space and place

A review of the literature suggests a shift towards analysing *both* digital and material space and place in order to gain a clearer picture of the “ordering strategies” (Law, 1992, 1994, 2004) that allow for network stability. Material space and place is that which we inhabit in our everyday lives – what Graham describes as, “spaces and places in which daily life is confined, lived and constructed” (1998:166). Digitally mediated space and place on the other hand, is mediated by a digital interface such as a computer screen. There has been a shift away from separating the material and digital, because they are not binaries, and viewing them in this way is a fallacy known as digital dualism, where material space and place is seen as more “real” (Graham, 1998; Jurgenson, 2012). Hence it is prudent to theorise the home as an assemblage of *both* the digital and the material.

Within these networked configurations of digital and material space and place, discourses circulate and ascribe and normalise network roles. While participants’ digital domestic presentations and representations are useful for exploring narratives and patterns of organisation, they are not sufficient for a thorough analysis of the intricacies of domestic networks. Furthermore place is heterogeneous and complex, and is informed by sociality (human actors), as well as being made up of numerous intricate parts and processes (non-human actors). For these reasons ANT is utilised as a socio-technical approach (Doolin & Lowe, 2002; Knights & Murray, 1994; Law, 1992, 1999, 2009) in order to analyse the household as highly networked and relational.

ANT provides a useful starting point to analyse the organisational structures of domesticity in both its material and digitally mediated manifestations. Facebook, for example, has enabled many areas of everyday life – in this case domesticity and domestic work – to gain visibility. Furthermore, it is argued that Facebook is used as a way to build networks by recruiting and enrolling actants as well as prescribing and assigning their roles. These relationships between actants, particularly the interaction between women participants and domestic workers, are important to this study.

Actants function either as intermediaries, or as *mediators* within networks, and here lies an important juncture. For example, if one were to hire a domestic worker to perform housework, she would eventually fall into a cleaning routine, and her role within the network would stabilise and become fairly predictable; she would act as an intermediary. However, if the domestic

worker were to renegotiate her network role, because of unfair labour practice, for example, then she would destabilise the network, and function as a mediator. Hence mediators are unstable because they are subject to change. It is important to note that an actant can act as *both* an intermediary and a mediator depending on the context of the network. ANT illustrates how power and resistance, and the negotiation thereof, are crucial to assembling intricate networks of strong and weak ties. The actions of the various human and non-human actors are of concern because they allow us to understand how networks thrive or fail.

This paper argues that discourses regulate prescribed network roles, and networks involve a range of discourses that maintain stability. In the case of domesticity, roles are regulated as gendered, because of ordering strategies about "women's work", racial inequality, representations and discourses of domestopia, and so on. Over time, where relationships between actants become normalised and stable, actants behave as intermediaries. Hence, networks function because every element acts in a predictable way (Callon, 1992).

Network stability is thus dependent on every enrolled actant agreeing on their network role, and often power negotiations take place. Networks are unstable by nature because of the numerous possibilities for change. Changes to networks, such as the entry of a new actant, may cause the "black box" (Callon, 1986) to open and allow the whole network to be scrutinised. "Blackboxing" is the process where the internal workings of a network, or system, become invisible because actants adopt the role of intermediary. Hence, the network functions without any glitches (Latour, 2005). It is only when the network fails, or needs to be scrutinised in order to understand the relationships between actants, that the black box is "opened". This paper suggests that whiteness, in particular white madamhood, is blackboxed and normalised within everyday domestic networks, allowing for middle-class arrangements of domesticity to be secured.

1.3 Trends in studies of postfeminism and whiteness

Historically, gender and feminism have been tied to ideas of whiteness (Ferber, 1998; Frankenberg, 1993, 1997; Heron, 2007). Feminism and domesticity continue to have a complex relationship, which is why postfeminism is a more useful approach because it acknowledges the ambiguities and complexities within feminist thought, while striving to refute gender essentialism (McRobbie, 2004). Postfeminism enables white middle-class women to exercise their own feminism, by selecting aspects of domesticity that fit into their ideals, and indeed *preferences*. This paper suggests that by negotiating their own network roles and responsibilities, based on their beliefs about domesticity, middle-class women are able to assert their power within the home. Furthermore, recruiting domestic workers into household networks in order to support their own absence in the housework aspects of domesticity, allows these women more flexibility.

Space and place are dimensions of discourse, and this paper shows how women participants create utopic or "perfect" versions of the home in digitally mediated and material space.

These representations align their identities with discourses such as the “ideal housewife” and “domestic goddess”. Dolgoplov (2003) refers to this practice as the creation of “domestopia” where the home is represented as a utopian, or idealised, space. The analysis of domestopia as a postfeminist narrative, provides valuable insight into gendered, and often racialised, relationships and negotiations. This study shows how place and power are reflected in domestic networks, and how women participants negotiate domestic responsibilities and navigate home space.

For many, the assumption is that housewives, in particular, are contrary to feminist goals (Gillis & Hollows, 2009; Hollows & Moseley, 2006). McRobbie (2004) explains that postfeminism is fraught with “double entanglements”, where neo-liberal values and conservative values clash. Domesticity is an aspect of postfeminism with such entanglements, because traditionally feminist discourse has highlighted the fact that women cannot enjoy the domestic realm while being a feminist. Hollows (2000, 2003, 2007) and Matchar (2013) introduce postfeminism as a “return to the repressed” (Hollows, 2003), declaring that immense pleasure can be derived from domestic life. There is also an entanglement because in order for middle-class women to progress in their careers, enjoy more leisure time and/or spend time with their children, they often recruit an additional actor, namely a domestic worker, to perform housework.

The overarching fact is that there is no “true” feminism and that feminism itself has differing meanings for different groups. Although postfeminism takes intersectionality and difference into account, postfeminist media culture is nonetheless “obsessed” with the female body (Gill, 2007), which continues to be represented as white. Postfeminism reimagines the relationship between feminism and domesticity while examining the tensions surrounding this relationship. Yet, there is evidence of a backlash where middle-class women are examining their roles within the home, and there are signs of negotiations regarding domestic space, place and practice. This paper illustrates that for many women participants, their postfeminist embodiment of domesticity is made possible by employing a domestic worker to perform the unpopular aspects of domesticity such as housework.

2. “DEEP HANGING OUT”: NEW WAYS OF RESEARCHING NETWORKED SPACE AND PLACE

This study utilised quantitative and qualitative methods, and the mixed methods approach (Cresswell & Clark, 2007; Tashakkori & Creswell, 2007; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998, 2010) comprised of digital ethnography, CDA and content analysis. The aim of this methodology was to allow for an approach that analyses social behaviour, practice, and place (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010).

The sample was selected based on the researcher’s own Facebook networks, which allowed for the selection of 50 women who fitted a prescribed list of criteria.⁶ This method allowed for the identification of an affinity space because of homophily. The researcher’s own social networks seeded a small, purposive or criterion-based (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993) sample of 30 women, who, by January 2013, had consented to the three-year study. Then, through the process of “snowballing” (Browne, 2005; Miller, 2012) the sample was expanded to 50 women participants, as seen in Figure 1.

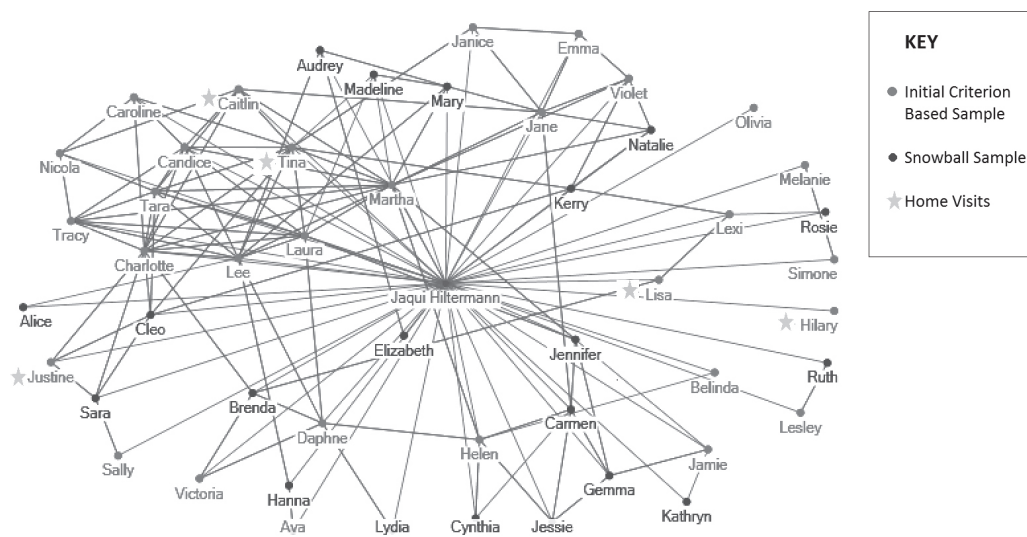


Figure 1: Final Sample of 50 women participants

Purposive and snowball sampling provided a sample that by no means gives an exhaustive study of South African domestic everyday life. However, it is a large enough sample to legitimise this research as representative of a particular facet of domestic everyday life. The research involved “deep hanging out” (Geertz, 1998) that included a systematic collection of data from each woman’s timeline. The Facebook algorithm is a limitation, so each timeline was examined individually in order to collect data that fitted the criteria. These relatively new digitally mediated spaces offer a broader picture of everyday life especially when combined with embodied space and place. For this reason fieldwork was conducted in the homes of five women participants.

⁶ Participants we selected if they were 25-35 years old, middle class, South African, English Speaking (first or second language), married or co-habiting with a partner, a weak tie and identified as posting domestically focussed content on Facebook (Domestic content was defined as posts that showed or described the home as well as housework or homemaking practices. Housework and homemaking practices were identified as cooking, baking, cleaning, gardening, grocery shopping, household DIY, homemaking projects, home renovations, purchasing household appliances or household goods, parenting (specifically motherhood), and domestic workers.

Despite being limited in scope, and reflective of the researchers own heteronormative Facebook networks, the picture that this research develops is insightful. This insight into white middle-class domestic life is certainly enough to provide a window into racial and class dynamics. The decision to focus on the homes of predominantly white South African women gives insight into the persistence of racial privilege in South African spatiality. Domestic space and place in South Africa has largely been understudied and the decision to “study up” (Nader, 1974) and focus on predominantly white middle-class women is because the majority of studies around women’s domesticity have been from the perspective of the subordinate social classes (Ally, 2013; Cock, 1980, 1981; Gaitskell et al., 1984; Hansen, 1992; Nyamnjoh 2005). The intention of studying up is in order to be unapologetic about tackling research sites that have been marked as normative.

Despite an increased focus in research (Steyn & Conway, 2010; Ware, 2013), whiteness is still largely viewed as normative. Hence, the racial category “white” still remains an unmarked term that allows it the benefit of appearing normative and invisible, while other races remain marked and noticeable in their difference (Brekhus, 1998; Frankenberg, 1993, 1997; Kruger, 2016; Nakayama & Krizek, 1995; Riggs & Selby, 2003).

Nader argues that in terms of power and responsibility the middle classes need to be studied in order to contextualise “dominant-subordinate relationships” (1974: 5). Examining the everyday lives of predominantly white middle-class women shows how power and subjectivities are formed through discourse, and how gender and race are hierarchised in domestic space and place. Ferber also suggests the “need for theories that account for both race and gender to explain adequately the lives of women of colour” (1998:50). In addition, studying white middle-class women shows how women’s domestic roles are naturalised more broadly through various discourses. For example, madamhood is viewed largely as the pursuit of white women, while domestic service is viewed as the pursuit of black women. These discourses disseminate in networks and serve as a commentary on race and class dynamics in post-apartheid South Africa.

3.1 *Making themselves at home*

Traditionally women have been secured to the home (Felski, 2000; Kaplan, 1998; McKeon, 2005) and domestic activities have been naturalised as “women’s work”. For most women participants, the appearance of being a proficient domestic manager was very important and their success was often measured in terms of Facebook presentations. Through the process of translation (Callon, 1986, Latour, 1987; Law 1992, 1999) women participants renegotiated and redefined their own network roles based on how successfully they could recruit additional actants into their homes.

In South Africa it is commonplace for middle-class households to employ a domestic worker because of the relative affordability coupled with the high unemployment rate.⁷ In this study,

⁷ Nearly 28% according to QLFS. (2017). Retrieved from <http://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/P02111/P02112ndQuarter2017.pdf>

41 out of the 50 participants employed a domestic worker. Most of participants indicated, though, that they were only able to afford a domestic worker once or twice a week, as opposed to full time, which was the norm in previous decades, as indicated by Cock (1980, 1981).

Women participants who were employed full time often employed domestic workers in order to compensate for their own absence in the home. Yet it was also not uncommon for households where women participants were housewives, or stay-at-home mothers, to employ domestic workers. For women participants in egalitarian relationships, it was important to exercise their own feminism by negating strict gender roles and sharing household responsibilities. However, a few participants commented that they had compromised their own feminist views and values by employing a domestic worker. This is because they felt conflicted about doing so while they worked outside of the home.

In cases where domestic workers were recruited into home networks in order to look after children, they were often referred to more fondly, as "part of the family", as confirmed by Cock (1980, 1981). There was a tension in this situation, and it was reflective of McRobbie's (2004) "double entanglement", because middle-class participants, who chose to work outside of the home often employed a domestic worker, or "nanny" to look after their children. Women participants could then renegotiate their own domestic duties by delegating them to someone who had less power within the home network. In some cases, participants who were stay-at-home mothers employed a domestic worker so that they could spend time with their children at home while someone else took over the housework. These dynamics are complicated because they reveal the vast social and economic imbalance, where socially and economically disadvantaged mothers are seldom afforded these opportunities.

For Hilary, and a number of other participants whose husbands did not participate in domestic labour, employing a domestic worker was affordable and eased the burden of housework, particularly cleaning. In many cases the work of domestic workers often went entirely unnoticed by male actors because of their absence from housework. In an interview Carmen revealed:

I don't even think my husband knows when our maid comes in. I have never heard him comment on how nice and clean the house looks and he never tells our kids to tidy up after themselves. I try to get them to help out but my husband doesn't back me up so I just leave everything until the maid comes (Carmen, f 25, face-to-face interview, 24 July 2013).

The exploitation associated with domestic work is particularly relevant to the South African context. This is because of the high unemployment rate and the low market value of black labour. A few participants indicated the unease that they felt about employing domestic labour, as well as the guilt, or shame, associated with having someone, particularly a black woman, cleaning up after them. For a few participants, such as Justine for example, employing a domestic worker was an area of constant conflict. This was because of the discomfort or uneasiness in employing someone at a race, class and gender disadvantage to perform a job with low market value, while on the other hand, recognising the high unemployment rate.

In a few cases there was evidence of the stigma of class, race and poverty where domestic workers were expected to perform the undesirable jobs around the house. This could be seen where domestic workers were required to clean up after dogs, empty cat litter trays, and clean children's bedrooms. From a South African context, this is socially and politically problematic, because domestic workers are often viewed as "maids" or "servants", and frequently undervalued and exploited in their work. Gemma, for example, described the role of their domestic worker as: "she does the dirty work" (Skype interview, 12 August 2013), while Natalie referred to her domestic worker's role as "doing the stuff I hate" (Skype interview, 11 August 2013).

ANT illustrates how actants, are translated into networks (Callon, 1986; Latour, 1987; Law, 1992, 1999), and how women participants were able to negotiate domestic responsibilities. These networked processes are important, because they show how power is negotiated. Power is reflective of gender, class, and race dynamics. This illustrates the privileged position of the participants, and highlights the social inequalities of post-apartheid South Africa, which has restricted the economic and social mobility of black women.

The mobility of women is a central issue and the "double entanglement" (McRobbie, 2004) of postfeminism was revealed because many women participants enrolled socially and economically disadvantaged women into their networks, in order to reconfigure their network goals. And, although women participants were able to choose and redefine aspects of domesticity (Matchar, 2013), these same choices did not apply to the women who were employed to perform housework. As a project, postfeminism has done little to account for socially and economically disadvantaged women (Ferber, 1998; Frankenberg, 1993, 1997; Heron, 2007). This research shows that women of colour remain outside of these narratives, and do not experience the levels of choice afforded to middle-class women, who are predominantly white, for example.

3.2 Visible & invisible labour

Domestic work, seen largely as the pursuit of women, is primarily back stage work and therefore unseen in the majority of middle-class western homes. This is because historically the architecture of houses kept back stage work almost entirely invisible (Attfield, 2002; Bech-Danielsen, 2012; Huggett, 1977). It is through changing architecture, and more open-plan living, that contemporary homes have enabled women, and certain aspects of their work, to steadily gain visibility. Coupled with popular discourses of domestic bliss and "domestopia" (Dolgoplov, 2003), women in the home are steadily gaining visibility. However, this evolution of domestic space has an economic and social element, because in order to gain visibility, and to secure agency, middle-class women in South Africa often recruit socially and economically disadvantaged women to perform the majority of back stage work; the housework.

Facebook has also opened up another platform for domestic display where the digital manifestation of the home has become another form of open-plan living. Middle-class women,

and certain aspects of domestic work, are presented, rather than hidden from view. Facebook is used as a platform for display and analysing these presentations, as depicted in Facebook narratives, and this allows insight into home networks and domestic rhythms.

This study revealed that the kitchen remains the most gendered space in the home. Historically, this area has been designated as women's space (Bech-Danielsen, 2012; Huggett, 1977) and discourses around kitchens and home cooking continue to secure women to this domain. Yet, Facebook presentations of kitchens highlighted discourses of domestopia.

The majority of women participants were mediators in the kitchen, and were responsible for enrolling intermediaries into the space to assist with cooking. Hilary, for example, enrolled a domestic worker as an intermediary in order to alleviate the burden of weeknight cooking. Domestic workers were often invisible helpers in these scenarios because couples worked and therefore did not see the labour involved. Hence, a domestic worker's labour was often relational to the meals that they prepared. For example, during a home visit with Hilary, a tray of macaroni cheese was visible on the kitchen counter. When asked about it Hilary said, "our domestic made that earlier today. It's the kids' favourite. I just have to throw it in the oven." (Hilary, f 34, home visit, 10 November 2014). This convenient meal was very reminiscent of the "here's one I made earlier" trope used by celebrity chefs, which ignores the back stage work of the crew who prepared the *mise en place* as well as the dish itself.

The scullery was another heavily gendered area attached to kitchens and for the few houses that had the space available, the scullery reflected gender and race. Historically, the scullery has been a place that servants occupy (Bech-Danielsen, 2012; Huggett, 1977) and South African domestic workers are often ascribed to the scullery because it is a back stage area where the majority of household appliances are kept. Furthermore, the scullery area is usually out of sight and hidden from view. The scullery thus contributes to the unseen position of many domestic workers within homes because the majority of the time-consuming housework is conducted in this space. Having a separate scullery and laundry area is an economic benefit, and means that front stage presentations of the home can remain uncluttered by laundry and dishes. However, separating this space also stabilises racialised gender roles, because domestic workers primarily occupy this space.

The visibility of women participants has certainly increased owing to open-plan kitchens. Furthermore, participants' used Facebook as a way to bring their cooking and kitchens to the front stage. This visibility is important because it offers middle-class women a sense of agency as they don't feel secluded or hidden from view. However, for most women employed as domestic workers, their position within material space is largely in the back stage.

There were a few instances where women participants inadvertently highlighted the back stage work of domestic workers. This was demonstrated when Lee posted photographs of her home renovations on Facebook. Lee's photographs showed paint rollers, plastic sheeting, etc. and gave insight into the back stage reality of home renovations. Lee's post generated a large response with over 70 likes and several comments;

What a little taster... more pics please! (Cindy, Facebook comment, May 2012).

Once the maid has whipped through the house with a mop ... will send photos of the completed bedrooms (Lee, f 26, Facebook comment, May 2012).

This exchange gave Lee's network insight into the usually invisible "back stage" area, where the hard work of home maintenance takes place. Lee also introduced the presence of the domestic worker, although the "maid" was barely visible, and her role within this particular narrative was taken for granted. The role of the domestic worker was to make the back stage more palatable by "whipping round with a mop". Largely unintentional comments such as this were relatively frequent, and domestic workers, and their work, were often glossed over, solidifying the domestic proficiency of middle-class women. Furthermore, referring to the domestic worker as "maid" highlighted the marginalised position of domestic workers within this particular home network.

While the layout and architecture of homes has increased the visibility of domesticity, Facebook, as a platform to display such domesticity, is certainly reflective of the trend for women to reconnect with the home. The discourse of aligning the home with domestopia appeals to women because it frames the home as escapist and enjoyable. In this way, the idea of domestopia anchors middle-class women to homes because homemaking has been fantasised as leisurely and appealing. Many women participants reflected this attitude when they explained their decisions regarding the posting of photographs of their homes and domestic pursuits on Facebook.

3.3 Blackboxing whiteness

Discourse is an essential component to "naturalising" network roles and if a network is "naturalised" successfully it becomes blackboxed. Nonetheless, actants do not always behave as intermediaries or act in predictable ways. Facebook allows individuals shared contexts of communication because of homophily. Often these shared contexts involve the act of complaining, or humblebragging (the act of masking bragging in order to appear humble) (Sezer et al., 2018), and at other times there is context collapse.

This paper suggests that during these moments of context collapse, "blackboxing" (Callon, 1986; Latour, 2005) is scrutinised. By scrutinising blackboxing it was revealed that whiteness, and particularly madamhood, was very much normalised in this particular study. Facebook observations revealed many instances of context collapse, which happened most prominently when women participants discussed, or complained about, domestic workers. The act of complaining was in order to recruit support from intended readers, but this frequently backfired because friendship networks expressed support for the domestic workers instead.

The perceived shame at employing domestic workers was frequently expressed by women participants on Facebook. This strategy shifted the conversation onto the employer, rather

than the domestic worker. Hence, in these instances employers were perceived as victims of shame, and this became the focus of conversations. This practice furthered the invisibility of domestic workers, ensuring the stability of, and thus blackboxing, white middle-class space and place. Melanie, for example, posted:

When you realise your cleaning lady is coming tomorrow so you start cleaning! (Melanie f 27, Facebook status, December 2013).

Melanie, and similar women participants, often alerted their networks to the fact that they were uncomfortable hiring domestic workers. They often tried to quash their perceived sense of guilt by presenting themselves as domestic over-achievers on Facebook. By telling their networks that they were tidying their homes because the domestic worker was coming, they presented themselves as sensitive to the work pressures of domestic workers. Comments on these posts revealed that this was a common practice, and many admitted to being "guilty" of this same behaviour. In conversations such as these, domestic workers were erased from the conversations and Facebook became a platform to discuss the employers' experiences, rather than the domestic workers.

Job notices were also relatively frequent on Facebook, and a number of women participants posted adverts or references for domestic workers. In cases such as these, the skills of the domestic worker were highlighted, indicating suitability for recruitment, and attributes such as "speaks good English", "reliable", "good with children", "a hard worker" and "pleasant and friendly" were highlighted. These qualities of a good and employable domestic worker reinforce typical post-colonial values as explored by Marks and Unterhalter (1978), Cock (1980, 1981), Hansen (1992), and Nyamnjoh (2005). While these job notices were seldom open to scrutiny, there were a few occasions where there were instances of context collapse. For example Natalie posted:

Is anybody looking for a reliable, hard-working, trustworthy, domestic worker. I'm moving and I don't need one. Be in touch (Natalie, f 29. Facebook status, November 2014).

To which an acquaintance commented:

I do hope you are offering a good retrenchment package and are up to date with your UIF payments⁸ (Carol, Facebook Comment, November 2014).

This exchange highlighted the findings of Cock (1980) and Nyamnjoh (2005) that women of a higher class exploit socially marginalised women in order to maintain their social position. In this case Natalie was moving and "no longer needed one" and therefore she could divorce

⁸ UIF or Unemployment Insurance Fund provides temporary financial relief to workers who are unemployed. Contributions to UIF are compulsory and amount to 2% of the worker's total earnings. Available from <http://www.sars.gov.za/TaxTypes/UIF/Pages/default.aspx>

herself from employment responsibilities. Although Natalie highlighted her domestic worker's skills, the post itself was fairly generic and devoid of emotion. In response, Natalie was asked whether or not she had thought about her domestic worker's financial wellbeing, which was relatively unusual in these types of posts. In this example, whiteness and madamhood were destabilised because the domestic worker and her needs were brought into focus by Carol.

In an incident of naming and shaming, Hanna also ran into opposition when she posted:

I love walking into my kitchen and seeing my beautiful sheepskin coat spinning around on 80 degrees in my washing machine. Wow what a real treat. Housekeeper not in my good books! (Hanna, f 29, Facebook status, July 2014).

Readers of this particular post remarked, "you probably left it on the floor so what did you expect?" (David, Facebook comment, July 2014) and, "we are lucky to have domestic workers, accidents happen" (Jasmine, Facebook comment, July 2014).

When asked about this incident, in a Skype interview, Hanna explained that she was annoyed at the time, but ended up learning a lesson in naming and shaming. She said that she ended up being shamed for her own negligence rather than the other way around:

I'll never do that again ... a lot of my friends really took me apart for posting this status ... a lot of them said I had the right to be angry but that I should have approached my domestic and not come across like a "cross white madam" on Facebook. Looking back they are right ... I sound like my grandmother! (Hanna, f 29, Skype interview, 3 December 2014).

This example shows a clear case of context collapse, where Hanna intended her post to garner sympathy, but it backfired when the real readers didn't agree or identify with her position. Hence context collapse shifted the power from a particular type of white middle-class sensibility, to a more liberal perspective.

The privileged position of middle-class women was often in stark contrast to that of domestic workers. In cases such as these, blackboxing illustrates just how far removed many women participants were from the reality of their domestic workers' lives. For example, Hilary posted:

The worst thing about holidays is that my beautiful domestic goes on leave... housework and holidays should never be in the same sentence ... they just don't get along EVER ... (Hilary, f 34, Facebook status, December 2012).

This status illustrated Hilary's frustration at having to do housework when their domestic worker was on leave. Numerous women rallied in support of Hilary, and this status received 26 "likes" and numerous comments. The fact that the couple's domestic worker had a family of her own was completely overshadowed by Hilary's need to have a clean home over the

festive season. The absence of the domestic worker was clearly felt by Hilary, because she had to pick up the additional responsibilities while she was away. Yet, Hilary's husband Mark did not sympathise with Hilary having to renegotiate her network role, and commented:

Stop complaining, at least you have a house. (Mark, Facebook comment, December 2012).

Although Mark's comment was tongue in cheek, it highlighted the couple's gendered relationship. Mark argued that Hilary shouldn't complain, because she was one of the lucky few South Africans who had a house in a wealthy suburb. Nonetheless, by positioning himself as outside of this domestic conflict, Mark offered little solution nor help. Mark's position also perpetuated a cycle of gender inequality because Hilary was clearly frustrated with spending her holidays cleaning the house. Yet, she was unable to see past her own frustrations and acknowledge how imbalanced her complaint was. Again, this example emphasised the perceived struggle of white women by making their work visible, while completely ignoring the fact that domestic workers have lives outside of middle-class networks, and again domestic workers were largely absent from these narratives.

The role of domestic workers is vast, and the support that they offer households enables women participants to renegotiate their own roles within domestic networks, or realign the goals of the network. According to ANT, these support systems only become visible when they break down. As we understand it, the inner workings of networks are largely ignored or understudied until blackboxing (Callon, 1986; Latour, 1987) is scrutinised. Analysis into blackboxing occurs when we investigate *why* networks aren't working. The visibility of the intricacies and workings of networks are therefore entirely dependent on their ability to work efficiently. Despite the fact that domestic workers played a crucial role in home networks, when it came to scrutinising their network roles, they were frequently left out of these conversations. Domestic workers were seldom tagged in Facebook conversations, and often didn't have the agency to participate in conversations that were about them.

In a number of cases this was because of their limited presence on Facebook, but also because the majority of Facebook participants indicated that they were uncomfortable being Facebook friends with their domestic workers. This meant that often domestic workers were spoken about, rather than spoken to, especially when they were being "named and shamed". From a discursive point of view, domestic workers had almost no input into narratives, and were therefore alienated from conversations. Hence, domestic workers were left out of narratives about their contributions and had almost no input in the madams' postfeminist narratives.

4. CONCLUSION

This study has interrogated domestic relationships within networked arrangements of middle-class domestic space and place. Furthermore, drawing from Cock's (1980) study it re-visited domestic relationships in contemporary South Africa.

Studies such as these increase the visibility of domestic labour by exploring work that has previously been invisible and confined to private space. Historically, domestic space and place was largely backstage, but the changing architecture of homes has allowed this space to open up. The increase in more open-plan spaces has brought a lot of domestic work to the front stage and has enabled women participants more scope to redefine discourses of domesticity, and have more flexibility within a domestic role. Not only this, but Facebook has emerged as another form of open-plan living, which offers women participants an alternate space to bring work, that was previously hidden, to the front stage.

The analysis of Facebook posts is a way of examining how women participants bring domestic space, place and practice to the front stage. As a methodological tool, it also adds great insight into the home as a site for constant negotiation of territory. In conjunction with ANT it was revealed that women participants were largely responsible for recruiting actants into household networks, and roles were assigned based on normativity.

Whiteness was very much the norm in this study, and domestic workers in South Africa remain on the periphery of middle-class women's postfeminist narratives of domesticity. And, despite playing an integral role within home networks, domestic workers are, for the most part, marginalised and silent. The largely racial and class inequalities that support the everyday comforts of white middle-class domesticity are largely overlooked. Unfortunately for domestic workers, they have seldom been included in South African postfeminist narratives. While the scope of black postfeminism is opening up in South Africa, with the popularisation of television shows featuring Siba Mtongane and Zola Nene,⁹ the vast inequalities of post-apartheid South Africa means that upward mobility for black South African women has been slow.

It was revealed that many domestic networks are normative, where white women are responsible for the household and homemaking, and black women perform most of the laborious housework. The role of the domestic worker is often vague and in some cases they are expected to do "everything". The majority of women participants, as household manager, were reluctant to foreground the domestic worker's presence on Facebook, maintaining the illusion of domestopia (Dolgoplov, 2003). Insight into Facebook presentations revealed clear social ordering where domestic workers were only invited into aspects of middle-class domestic space, and alienated from narratives.

The success of these networks relied on all human actors agreeing on their roles but this meant that domestic workers remained relatively marginalised within these structures. One of the main issues regarding domestic worker relations are the expectations versus the low wages and low value associated with the work. Analysis shows that spatial arrangements that support middle-

⁹ Siba Mtongane is the popular celebrity chef from Food Network's *Siba's Table*, she appears as a judge on *Chopped SA*, and is the published author of the cookery book *Welcome to my Table*. Zola Nene frequently appears on SABC 3's morning show *Expresso*, is the new judge on *SA Bake Off* (season 3), and has published *Simply Delicious*.

class domesticity are largely unchallenged because counter discourses seldom emerge in networks that have been blackboxed.

This study showed that whiteness and madamhood are blackboxed, and regarded as normative, because they are only scrutinised during moments of context collapse. It was during such moments of context collapse where whiteness and madamhood were disrupted. Although domestic workers, may often be referred to in conversation as "part of the family", as discussed by Cock (1980) and Nyamnjoh (2005), this is often disingenuous and may perhaps be used to justify the low wages and low value associated with the work. There is a danger of over-sentimentalising domestic labour, as well as overplaying the shame associated with employing, and perhaps exploiting, domestic workers.

There is a need to research domestic workers in order to provide a different perspective. As with space and place, narratives reveal power dynamics and add insight into relationships. Although this study only looks into specific narratives within the context of predominantly white middle-class domesticity, there is opportunity to increase its scope by looking to other race, gender, class and age demographics in order to broaden the view of domestic everyday life.

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