



Bridge over troubled waters: A sociological investigation into the use of housecleaning services in a South African context

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Abstract

Paid domestic services have changed significantly in recent years, with the rise in outsourced housecleaning services in South Africa and elsewhere. Housecleaning services transform domestic services into a service economy, where teams of domestic workers render professional cleaning services to clients. One of the changes that they bring forth is a less personal and dependent tripartite employment relationship between clients, domestic workers and managers. This implies fewer responsibilities on behalf of clients and more on the management regarding employment conditions, wages, employment contracts and other service benefits. While these benefits drive the usage of housecleaning services, it is not fully understood what other factors contribute to its usage in a South African context. Drawing on 28 face-to-face semi-structured interviews and 333 completed survey questionnaires with current clients of housecleaning services in Stellenbosch, Somerset West and Johannesburg, I found that flexible work patterns; multiple jobs; different employment schedules and retirement; smaller households; and changing household life cycles cultivate the rise in and use of outsourced housecleaning services. The formalisation of paid domestic service also influences people to shift from employing a full-time domestic worker to hiring domestic workers through housecleaning service firms.

About the Speaker

David Du Toit is an academic visitor to the School of Social Sciences. He is affiliated with the University of Johannesburg and Stellenbosch University in South Africa has been awarded a Newton Travel Research Links award to visit the University of Manchester between the 13th of October until the 23rd of November 2018. He is based in the department of sociology, with affiliation to the University's Work and Equalities Institute. His academic sponsor for this visit is Professor Colette Fagan.

In South Africa, David du Toit is a lecturer at the Department of Sociology at University of Johannesburg, and PhD student in the Department Sociology and Social Anthropology at Stellenbosch University. He is in the final stages of his doctoral thesis at Stellenbosch University, which focuses on the transformation in paid domestic service with an emphasis on the emergence of outsourced housecleaning service firms. He has published several articles on the employment conditions of security guards working on campus; the use of emotional labour by petrol attendants; the incidences of public-initiated workplace violence at petrol stations; the effects of outsourcing on care and non-care work; and how changing middleclass households affect domestic work. Other than that, he loves gardening, cinema nouveau and traveling.