

Abstract

Excluded from most South African urban imaginaries – atop the roofs of upper-middle class apartments in Killarney, Illovo, and Rosebank in Johannesburg – lie “Locations in the sky”: residential quarters for domestic workers, built as segregated accommodations during Apartheid. While the domestic quarters are still in use today and shape the urban realities of the people interacting in these spaces, they are not reflected in current conceptualisations of cities of the South, or post-Apartheid cityness. This study draws on a Lefebvrian understanding of space and a Foucauldian understanding of power to investigate how *de jure* and *de facto* rules influence and (re)produce current experiences, perceptions, and urban realities of domestic quarters in the apartment blocks of northern Johannesburg, and complicate definitions of home in this context. Through 41 semi-structured interviews and a Doctrinal Legal Research analysis of 13 body corporate rules, it is found that systems of segregation and power materialise through both structural elements such as urban design, architecture, living conditions, and rules, as well as through social power and relationships embedded in race, gender and class hegemonies which results in nuanced contradictions and contested realities of the city. These systems of power also intersect to produce a precarity for domestic workers, exacerbated by a situation of living at work, the decline of full-time domestic work, and the impact of COVID-19. Domestic quarter residents are faced with oppression and precarity, but this is also complicated by rich lives that play out in the domestic quarters. Finally, the findings indicate that attempts to mobilise change in this context often do not meaningfully involve the very residents who are most affected. While this study is inevitably imperfect, with multiple limitations and positionalities affecting the analysis, it aims to serve as a catalyst for further grounding of “Locations in the Sky”.