

CINDERELLA IN BABYLON: THE REPRESENTATION OF HOUSEKEEPING AND HOUSEKEEPERS IN HOTEL BABYLON

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ABSTRACT

This paper looks at the representations of housekeeping and housekeepers in the popular television series Hotel Babylon. The paper discusses some possible effects of the impression constructed of this area of hotel employment and suggests that the image of a hospitality career in housekeeping is undermined and undervalued by this construction. The paper takes a reflective approach and looks at how language and image in the 'Hotel Babylon' series are constructed regarding the housekeeping department and workers. The paper posits that image of housekeeping work and those employees is one of mainly migrant workers, sexualized victims and denigrated employees. The paper goes to suggest that housekeeping is in fact often the largest and most important department in hotels as the majority of their income is derived from the sale of rooms. The paper argues that it is ironic that the

employees responsible for the largest revenue generating area of the hotel are so strongly denigrated, when in fact they should be recognised as key employees. In terms of hotel and hospitality generally, this study suggests more fundamental concerns about sustaining service quality and employment relationships in a tight labour market.

Keywords: Housekeeping, Hotel Babylon, Ethnicity, Sexualisation, Denigration

INTRODUCTION

Hotels occupy a fascinating place in the social imagination of the West. In many ways hotels are synonymous with sex, romance and adventure—linked in popular culture with clandestine meetings of spies and lovers, with wedding nights, honeymoons and illicit or transitory sexual assignations (Pritchard and Morgan, 2006).

Bad behaviour, you would think, is par for the course in the luxury hotel business: a demanding guest here, a drunken guest there, an illicit couple, some broken glasses. But what the hotel staff really has to put up with from guests who are shelling out between £350 and £3,500 a night would shock even the most jaded of souls. And it is usually the chambermaids who are at the sharp end (BBC, 2006, p.1).

Recent contributions on the interaction between work and tourism (Harris, 2002; Ryan, 2002; Uriely & Reichel, 2000) challenge traditional notions of tourism and travel as out-of-the-ordinary indulgent experiences (Small, Harris and Wilson, 2008). For many, internationally hotels are a workplace. High employee turnover within the hospitality industry has been accepted as the norm, creating a ‘turnover culture’ (Deery, 2002) in which organizational structures, management and employees show acceptance of turnover behaviour. Figures discussed at the 2006 New Zealand Hotel Council Conference, put hotel employee turnover as high as 60%. This high

turnover can be attributed to the low wages paid and also due to the industry being characterised by historical practices, based on stereotypes and myths such as 'you work in hospitality until you get a real job', typifying a weak psychological contract between workers and hospitality workplaces.

This paper examines representations of both housekeeping and housekeepers in the popular television series *Hotel Babylon*. The paper also notes some potential effects of this knowledge produced about housekeeping and housekeepers in relation to job appeal (and hence recruitment) and employee turnover. *Hotel Babylon* is a contemporary and widely shown programme showing the life and inner workings of a five star hotel in London and the people who work in it. We posit that this programme is representing hotel housekeeping work and housekeepers as a hot bed of migrant workers, sexual activity and denigration - serving to construct the image of a hospitality career in housekeeping as undesirable to many. This image, we suggest, may undermine staff retention efforts in 'real' hospitality workplaces. We begin with a review of the literature on hotel housekeeping. The approach taken in this paper is then overviewed. Findings are then presented and discussed focusing on three themes that emerged from our analysis. We note the potential effects of representations such as these on the housekeeping sector of the hotel industry. We end the paper with some concluding comments.

HOTEL HOUSEKEEPING

As the majority of hotels are 'accommodation led' with most revenue derived from the sale of rooms (Medlik and Ingram, 2000), housekeeping is arguably the most important department in hotels¹. Given the importance of housekeeping it would be reasonable to expect these workers to be recognised as a key part of the operation. However, housekeeping work is often stigmatized because of its association with personal servitude (Purcell, 1993; Ashforth and Kreiner, 1999). Housekeepers

¹ Exceptions may however exist in properties that host gaming and casino facilities where majority revenue comes from these activities.

undertake tasks that Hughes (1971) terms 'dirty work', thus symbolising a lack of dignity and status and potential degradation of the worker.

Scherzer, Rugulies and Krause (2005) suggest housekeeping is 'characterized by a predominantly female workforce, repetitive physical tasks, low job control, low wages, increasing use of contingency employment, and few opportunities for career advancement' (p.1). Wood (1994) states "it is conventional to regard cleaning work as 'unskilled' despite the fact that an argument could be made for regarding such work as requiring a complex balance of task organisation, the application of (though low-level) technology and technological processes and the knowledge of these processes" (p. 62).

Housekeeping is gendered work. The largest proportion of female workers are found in the 'dirtiest' and operative hotel jobs requiring domestic skills for which women are inherently skilled (Adib and Guerrier, 2003; Kinnaird et al, 1994). "Cleaning work in the home is not usually valued by men, being taken for granted or viewed as a wife's duty, a view that has arguably been transferred to the public performance of cleaning in paid employment" (Wood, 1994, p.62). Wood (cited in Hunter Powell & Watson) concludes "chambermaids rank amongst the lowest of the low in hotel work, treated as a cheap and easily replaceable resource by employers and often spurned by their fellow employees" (p. 299). Traditionally women are employed in roles that are considered to represent their domestic roles using the same skills base (Kinnaird, Kothari and Hall, 1994).

As housekeepers usually work independently and autonomously they may be vulnerable to harassment from guests or other workers. Although it is usual for room cleaning to take place when the guest is not in the room, occasionally the guests may return before the room has been completed meaning the staff member is alone with the guest in the room. Furthermore, Hunter Powell & Watson (2006) suggest "the behaviour of some guests may be affected by their freedom from the constraints of home while staying in a hotel" (p. 303).

Housekeepers perform very physical tasks. It is generally accepted that a room attendant will clean a room in 30 minutes. With many hotels having two double or kingsize beds per room, 30 beds may require making in an eight hour shift². This repetitious bending and lifting can cause occupational injury if there has been no instruction regarding best practice. Faulkner and Patiar (as cited in Hunter Powell & Watson, 2006) suggest that other routine activities such as pushing laden cleaning trolleys and moving furniture can also result in spinal and joint injuries. Scherzer, Rugulies and Krause (2005, p. 489) show “room cleaners may be at an elevated risk for occupational injuries compared with hospitality workers at large and the service sector in general”. Their findings put the injury rate for room attendants at four times higher than the national incidence rate.

Furthermore, housekeeping is often considered an entry level position which attracts immigrant workers - often with English as a second language. Amanda Cooper (spokesperson for a labour union in the USA) notes that the hotel industry, particularly in housekeeping, is dominated by immigrants and Hunter Powell and Watson (2006) observe that housekeeping operations in London and other major UK cities are often dominated by migrant and ethnic minority groups. The above research reflects findings from Lucas (1995) who infers ethnic minority and migrant workers are clustered in the lowest graded work in the hospitality industry and that it is common to find that the workers in hotels are drawn from the same ethnic minority or migrant groups, particularly in the ‘ghetto of housekeeping’.

APPROACH AND METHOD

This analysis aims to examine knowledge constructed within a television series - Hotel Babylon, and consider the potential effect of that knowledge. To do so we consider representations of housekeeping and housekeepers in five episodes of the

² Unless the property is following a ‘green’ principle (in that the guest is invited to use the linen again on the 2nd night rather than new sheets each day) 30 beds may require complete stripping and remaking each day.

television series. Here, in this section of the paper, we outline the research site and context, and the analytical method

Research Context

The television series *Hotel Babylon* was selected as the site for analysis for this study investigating representations of housekeeping and housekeepers. Five episodes from Series One were selected for analysis, totalling approximately five hours of footage. *Hotel Babylon* has a prime timeslot and achieves high ratings with around 5 million viewers each episode in the UK. To date it has aired in over 23 countries. Similar to Aaron Spelling's "Hotel" from ABC, which ended about 20 years, *Hotel Babylon* chronicles some of the "most unexpected, outlandish, and downright appalling aspects of life behind the bevelled doors of British society's best hotels (<http://www.common sense media.org/tv-reviews/Hotel-Babylon.html>). The series is based on the same-named novel by Imogen Edwards-Jones, who also authored *Air Babylon* and *Fashion Babylon*.

Hotel Babylon is a tantalising and seductive insight into the sexy world of the five-star hotel industry, where money not only talks but can buy just about anything you desire! Inspired by Imogen Edwards-Jones's searing exposé of life behind the scenes of London's luxury hotel industry, Hotel Babylon takes viewers on a journey beyond the glamour and façade of the smiling faces and glittering chandeliers and into the frenetic, non-stop world of the staff. Hotel Babylon isn't based on any one particular real hotel. "It evolved as an amalgam of three or four very different hotels," reveals producer Chris Aird

([http://www.bbc.co.uk/drama/hotelbabylon/about the show feature.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/drama/hotelbabylon/about_the_show_feature.shtml)).

Character Descriptions

Table One presents a brief description of the major characters featuring in the five episodes studied from Series One.

Table One: Series One Character Descriptions

| |
|--|
| <p>Jackie Clunes (Head of Housekeeping) A staunch team player, Jackie is always fiercely protective of her housekeeping team. She always goes the extra mile for them but sometimes finds herself in deep trouble as a result.</p> |
| <p>Rebecca Mitchell (GM in the first series) Likes to control a tight ship as GM. Beautiful, but torn between the hotel and saving her marriage. Does not take nonsense from staff.</p> |
| <p>Charlie Edwards (Deputy GM, and in later episodes GM) A jack of all trades, master of none, Charlie is our 'everyman' and introduces us to the world of the hotel - giving us all the tips and exposing the dirty little secrets we need to know. Likeable and charming, he possesses impressive moral standards, which is interesting considering his complex past. Just as driven and ambitious as his predecessor, Charlie is determined to make his mark and ensure the hotel's standards and profits are at an optimum. Still technically single, he's had flings with both Jackie and ex-boss Rebecca.</p> |
| <p>Tony Casemore (Concierge) Tony's perfect for this job as he knows the hotel business inside out. He can get his guests anything, from anywhere, and always within 24 hours. An effortless charmer and easy-going, his principle aim in life is to raise enough money in tips over the next few years to retire before he is 50. But being married with children, and working long hours - means he doesn't get to see much of his family.</p> |
| <p>Anna Thornton-Wilton (Head Receptionist) Anna is let's say aspirational. She's gorgeous but knows it, and as far as she's concerned it's only a matter of time before she bags a wealthy and eligible man. Her sole ambition is to marry into the lifestyle she believes she deserves.</p> |
| <p>Gino Primirola (Head Barman) Half-Italian, half-Spanish, Gino is particularly proud of his dual identity. It makes him stand out from all the other Spanish barmen that have flooded the luxury end of the market. Whilst his background might be slightly chequered, he's undeniably clean and kind hearted.</p> |
| <p>Ben Trueman (Receptionist) Ben loves the luxury hotel world because of its style and inherent campness. He's not ambitious - but then he's not sure what he really wants to do.</p> |
| <p>James Schofield (Food and Beverage Manager) He's extremely pretentious and rather old school. His attention to detail is first-class, and he knows the value and importance of all things luxurious. He gets a huge kick from ordering the finest produce. But he just can't help looking down his nose at people who don't share his passion or can't pronounce foreign labels properly.</p> |

(Adapted from BBC, 2008)

Analytical Method

In this paper we are interested in the way in which housekeeping and housekeepers are constructed within the television series *Hotel Babylon*, and the potential effects of those representations. In doing so we are interested in representation and language.

Hall (1997) identifies three approaches to explaining how representation of meaning through language works – the reflective, the intentional and the constructionist of constructivist approaches. He notes that each approach addresses the questions ‘where do meanings come from?’ and ‘how can we tell the “true” meaning of a word or image?’

In the reflective approach, language functions as a mirror through which the inherent meaning of an object, person or idea is reflected. Therefore, according to this approach true meaning exists in the world and language functions “like a mirror” (Hall, 1997, p. 24). In the intentional approach “words mean what the author intends them to mean” (Hall, 1997, p. 25). Language is therefore private as the speaker/author imposes his/her own unique meaning on the world. The third approach, the constructionist approach recognises the public and social character of language. As such “it acknowledges that neither things in themselves, nor the individual users of language can fix meaning in language” (Hall, 1997, p. 25).

In this paper we take a constructionist approach to meaning in language (Hall, 1997). We are interested in how representational systems construct and communicate meaning (whilst recognising that as authors/researchers we too are involved in the construction). In considering representations we take a particular view of language.

We use the term ‘language’ in a very broad and inclusive way.

Any sound, word, image or object which functions as a sign, and is organized with other signs into a system which is capable of carrying and expressing meaning is, from this point of view, 'a language' (Hall, 1997, p. 19).

Taking such a view, we consider the sounds, words, images and objects which work to represent subjects (housekeepers) and job roles (housekeeping). How such an analysis was undertaken is now outlined. The initial stage of analysis involved two of the researchers watching all five episodes of Hotel Babylon included in the analysis. This initial viewing was to familiarise the researchers with the show and its content and characters. In the second viewing of each episode the researchers recorded each time housekeeping staff were featured, or the staff or activities of housekeeping were mentioned by other staff. Second, the researchers identified common portrayals in the series. We have identified these as themes. Three themes which reflect the way housekeepers and housekeeping are portrayed were identified. Through comparing these representations to the extant literature on housekeepers and housekeeping, along with considering the representation of these characters alongside of other characters in the series (see Table One) we also noted silences and absences. Findings from this analysis are presented and discussed now.

FINDINGS

Findings from the analysis are presented in two parts. First we provide an overview of each of the episodes including an episode summary (to provide context), and an outline of each of the references to housekeepers and housekeeping and their content. Second, we present and examine themes emerging from the episodes. Last, we identify potential effects of these representations in the discussion that follows.

Episode Summaries

A brief description of each of the five episodes is presented in Table Two. Note that the font in italics denotes a storyline specific to housekeeping.

Table Two: Episode Summaries (Adapted from BBC, 2008)

| Episode | Plot Summary |
|---------|--|
| One | <p>Charlie introduces us to the world of Hotel Babylon - a world of fantasy and indulgence, provided you have the cash to pay for it and you don't cross the line in disrespecting the staff. Charlie is interviewed by Rebecca for the job of Deputy Manager. Charlie eventually gets the job but is dismayed to find that Anna has taken his old post of Head Receptionist. <i>On the plus side, the beautiful Head of Housekeeping Jackie has started inviting him to assignations in guests' bedrooms.</i> He must prove his worth and this involves manipulating a world famous rock band into spending as much money and trashing as much of the hotel as possible. Thanks to their hard-nosed manager Nina things don't exactly go to plan at first, <i>but when she assaults one of the chambermaids,</i> Charlie takes matters into his own hands.</p> |
| Two | <p>Charlie explains to us that image is everything in the hotel business, and if there's anything that tarnishes it, it's a hotel full of hookers and suicides. Unfortunately for him, Rebecca puts him in charge of keeping suicidal guest Mr Machin alive, while concierge Tony has to deal with the repercussions of mistaking a legitimate guest for a hooker. <i>The staff help an elderly ex-housekeeper celebrate her 50th wedding anniversary,</i> forcing Rebecca to reflect on her own marriage. Meanwhile, shady limousine driver Pete is becoming more demanding as he threatens to divulge whatever it is he knows about Charlie's mysterious past.</p> |
| Three | <p>Wealthy Russian student Natasha begs Charlie to help her organise a green card wedding at the hotel. Charlie only agrees after Tony reminds him of how much cash they could make from delivery scams at the event, realising it's the one way he can raise the money to bribe Pete out of telling Rebecca about his past. Finding an agreeable suitor is easy enough, but can they convince Natasha's billionaire father Vladimir, and more importantly Rebecca, that the wedding is genuine? The whirlwind of wedding plans catch Rebecca on a personal level, but it's obsessive compulsive guest Mr Daniels who makes her realise that hiding in the hotel isn't going to solve her own relationship problems. Charlie's scams earn him enough to pay off Pete, but the whole affair has made Rebecca suspicious.</p> |
| Four | <p>It's not just guests who are affected by the sexiness exuded by any five star hotel worth its salt - it's also the staff. When Anna meets wealthy American lawyer Richard, she becomes convinced they're fated to be together. In a delusional whirl, she stops at nothing to get this man (and the lifestyle) that she's after. And if it means breaching the 'strictly no guest/staff relationships' rule, well, Anna's always felt rules were meant to be broken.</p> <p>Charlie is happy to let beautiful female guest Alice massage his bruised ego after colleague and love interest Jackie goes off on a date. Alice turns out not to be all that she seems, robbing her date and making off with Pete. <i>When the date is found drugged in his room the next day, Charlie realises he's had a narrow escape, and that he should value Jackie more.</i></p> <p>Meanwhile, James and Gino bicker over the treatment of a couple who won a stay at Hotel Babylon in a competition. Rebecca confronts Pete over Alice, but he replies by suggesting she might be surprised by the background of some of her staff. Fortunately for Charlie, she's distracted by a visit from her husband Mark.</p> |
| Five | <p><i>Below stairs, we witness a world the guests never normally get to see - the immigrant labour that really makes the place work. A raid on the hotel by Immigration Officers forces Jackie into a dilemma when she's reminded by the officials about her own immigration status. What can she do to stop them deporting her?</i></p> <p>Gino has less serious problems - in order to keep the tips from a particularly generous guest flowing, he has to pretend to be gay. Can even Ben help him convince in the role?</p> <p>Meanwhile, Charlie is asked by a guest, Liz Sykes to help cover up an affair she's been conducting at the hotel. Rebecca takes a hard line with him and orders him not to intervene, disarming him by implying she knows something about his fraudulent past. When Liz's lover, John Fuller, returns to the hotel with yet another woman, Charlie realises that Liz is being spun a line. A quick phone call leads to an uncomfortable confrontation for John. But Charlie's actions lead to an inevitable showdown when Rebecca realises he's disobeyed her. Fighting to save his job, Charlie manages to turn the tables on her.</p> |

Three themes dominate the five episodes analysed: *sexualisation and sensuality; the abuse of illegal migrant staff; and the denigration of housekeeping work and housekeepers*. Interestingly these themes do intersect with each other as highlighted in other studies of housekeeping (Hunter Powell & Watson 2006; Biswas & Cassel 1996; Zaina 2004) and more generally tourism employment (Purcell, 1996) and studies of women in tourism (Kinnaird & Hall, 1994).

Housekeeping, within the episodes analysed, was represented as being at the lowest end of the hotel hierarchy. The prevailing discourse of drudge work, often performed by the lowest end of the labour force (illegal migrant workers), was upheld in this fictionalized story. Although many other hotel departments portrayed in the series were overtly glamourised (e.g. reception and bar), housekeeping was portrayed in a manner similar to what is portrayed by previous researchers discussed above who have investigated the hotel housekeeping workplaces.

| <u>Episode</u> | <u>Number of Scenes Involving Housekeepers or Containing References to their Work</u> |
|----------------|---|
| One | 17 |
| Two | 15 |
| Three | 5 |
| Four | 11 |
| Five | 16 |

Housekeeping work and/or housekeepers were featured in all five episodes. In Episodes One – Four the majority of scenes that involved housekeeping were less than 1.5 minutes each. Episode One feature housekeeping 17 times, although this centered around the character of Head Housekeeper Jackie and her sexual liaisons with Charlie. Episode Five featured housekeeping most prominently of all the five episodes, as its major plot line was about a raid on the hotel by immigration officers involving characters from housekeeping.

Sexualisation and Sensuality

One thing at odds with common portrayals of Head Housekeepers is the construction of the character of Jackie (Head Housekeeper). Jackie is an attractive and sensual 27 year old. Head housekeepers often have considerable experience and are, therefore, not normally this young. Like many of her staff, Jackie is an illegal migrant, residing in the UK with an expired visa. Unlike most of her staff, however, she is from a Western nation (Australia), not Eastern Europe or Africa. Within the episodes, Jackie is clearly distinguished from her staff by dressing in power suits, and possessing a perfect command of the English language, with only a hint of an accent (albeit from a Western nation). All these characteristics make her desirable to Charlie the English deputy General Manager in Series One. As Head Housekeeper Jackie has access to areas of the hotel - which makes it easy for her and Charlie to have frequent sexual liaisons - Jackie is often the one that is waiting for him to arrive, and the one who remains to clean up afterwards. After all it is her role to maintain high room standards!

The sexualisation of the housekeeping staff starts early in the Series. The first housekeeping scene to appear onscreen occurs 15 minutes into Episode One. A woman, dressed in a housekeeper outfit, is filmed from the back bending over into a cupboard. Her face is not shown, nor does she speak during this shot. This episode also features many scenes with Jackie and Charlie overtly flirting with each other at various places in the hotel, especially while the two of them are conducting room inspections. Forty minutes into the episode they have sex, after which Charlie describes it as a 'weird situation'.

The flirting between Jackie and Charlie continues again in Episode Two resulting in sex. Here Jackie also discovers that Charlie used to sleep with Head Receptionist Anna when they worked together at another hotel. The sexualisation of Jackie continues in Episode Three, when the Head Barman Gino states he would like a lap dance from Jackie.

In Episode Four Jackie waits 25 minutes in a hotel room for Charlie to join her. When he finally arrives he starts undressing stating *'the sooner we start – the sooner we finish'*. Jackie is clearly not impressed and asks him how he defines a relationship. He replies by asking her if she has a spare button noticing he has lost one from his shirt. Disgruntled with the treatment she has received from Charlie, Jackie decides to accept a date with a banker. Charlie becomes unhappy when he discovers he has competition. The following day, after seeing her dressed up for her date, Charlie tells her that she *'looked very nice last night and that you deserve to be appreciated.'* When eating together later in the cafeteria Charlie apologises for not taking her somewhere nice but that *'crap wages and long hours are to blame'*. He asks her not to see other 'blokes'. They then play footsies under the table. What is interesting here is that while appearing hurt by Jackie going on a date, he had a liaison with a guest in the very same episode and attempted to sleep with her.

Abuse of Illegal Migrant Staff

Episode Five is the most powerful examination of power relations between the hotel and illegal migrant housekeeping staff of various ethnicities. In the first minute of the episode Charlie says:

The most important people in the hotel are the cooks and cleaners, but you will never see them, they are our dirty little secret, forbidden from even entering the same breathing space as any of guests. Many are here illegally – they don't even exist. But we are happy to turn a blind eye to fake papers and dodgy passports. If you have two hands to clean with and two knees to crouch on then who cares whether you should be here or not. We feed and water them, and the questions we don't ask are the ones they don't want to answer. Besides if it weren't for them we would have to employ regular people with national insurance contributions, minimum wages and tides of complaints about working conditions, and well are you willing pay for that? This is

the way it has always been. Besides who really built the pyramids - the pharaohs or the slaves?

While in the other four episodes several abusive references are made to housekeeping staff, such as management's wish for them to 'speak in English', and the opportunism and dishonesty amongst housekeeping staff, Episode Five is the most overt demonstration of the disdain that illegal migrants are held in. Conversely, it also shows just how much the industry depends on this labour to keep the hotel operational. In this episode immigration officials raid the hotel. The hotel has a password warning system which they operate in order to round up all the illegal staff and hide them in a small room. Jackie, upon learning that one of the cleaning staff is hitting his daughter Rachel who is also working in the housekeeping department, arranges for him to be the sacrificial lamb that she gives up to immigration. Jackie does this in order to protect her position once an immigration official learns of her expired Visa status. Giving him up in this way means he will be deported back to Sierra Leone, where he worked as a doctor and was arrested. Returning means he will probably face death.

Denigration of Housekeeping Work and Housekeepers

Beyond the sexualisation of the staff, particularly Jackie, and the abuse of illegal migrant labour, the denigration of housekeepers continues in other ways in the Series. For example, ten minutes into Episode One at a meeting of the hotel department heads, one department manager casually accuses housekeepers of stealing. Others present at the meeting passively agree by not challenging this claim.

Furthermore housekeeping staff appear to be easily manipulated by management and other staff, particularly if the housekeeping staff can profit monetarily from agreeing to odd requests. This representation begins right from Episode One when a housekeeper is paid by Tony the Concierge to scream at a famous band consisting of attractive young men who are staying at the hotel. The point of her screaming at

them is to show to the band how desirable they are. The characterization of housekeeping staff as willing profiteers from difficult situations continues in Episode Four. Here Head Receptionist Anna spends the night with a guest hoping for a relationship. However, he leaves 500 pounds next to the bed obviously interpreting their liaison in quite a different way. Albeit hurt, ever the opportunist, Anna takes the money. When Charlie learns of this, he is angry and arranges for the money to be returned courtesy of a housekeeper who he convinces to tell the guest that she took the money thinking mistakenly it was a tip for servicing the room. Charlie pays the housekeeper 30 pounds cash for agreeing to lie to the guest and take the blame due to her 'stupidity'. Another scene in this same episode Charlie asks an Eastern European member of housekeeping to throw a glass of water over a sleeping guest who will not wake. She initially refuses, but Charlie insists so she complies with this unusual request.

The unprofessional and poor work practices of housekeeping staff is inferred in Episode One. Charlie, after having sex with Jackie, goes to use a glass in the hotel room. Jackie however stops him by sharing that her staff do 'disgusting things with drinking glasses and towels', at which time a scene is shown of a housekeeper cleaning the toilet and glasses with the same towel. While this scene could be interpreted as a case of the staff gaining a small victory against the hotel and the guests they are required to serve, it also portrays unprofessional behavior and thus denigrates the work of housekeepers and their attitudes towards hygiene.

Violence is another feature identified within the theme of denigration. Episode One features violence against a housekeeper, who was beaten up by a guest high on cocaine. After the incident Rebecca (the General Manager) first asks if the fixtures in the room were hurt before turning to the staff member to enquire about her welfare. Furthermore, when the maid speaks with a heavy accent the GM barks at her to '*speak English*'. To placate the maid after the assault the GM instructs Charlie to put another 50 pounds in her pay. Charlie says 50 pounds is not much for the GM to be able to '*shit on your own staff*'. Upon hearing about these events Jackie takes on the

GM stating that no one attacks her staff! The GM replies that *'a chambermaid will tell you anything for a price of a stamp'*. At the end of the Episode Charlie chastises the guest who assaulted the housekeeper that how dare she beat up a woman who *'cleans up your shit for minimum wage'*.

In Episode Two, staff help an elderly ex-housekeeper celebrate her 50th wedding anniversary. This grand lady is celebrated for her service and treated like a celebrity guest. She does explain to the managers that when she was working at the hotel *'chambermaids used to be instructed not to make eye contact with guests'*. Later in the episode the lady dies, and while the staff plan to take her body out of the service elevator, the GM makes a decision that she will be taken out the front entrance, just like any other guest would! It also infers that if she was still a housekeeper then being taken out via the service elevator would be fine!

Housekeeping is largely absent from the majority of scenes in Episode Three, appearing only five times. In two of the five rare times it is featured, once is to describe a complaint made by a guest about the standards of a room, and the other refers to the staff having to clean out the bath filled by a purging model! Two further scenes in this episode refer to sexual innuendo about Jackie.

DISCUSSION

This analysis of Hotel Babylon has uncovered possible underpinning discourses and networks of power responsible for maintaining inequity. While Imogen Edwards-Jones has constructed a fictional site called Hotel Babylon, the plot lines were constructed from stories told to her by an anonymous manager of a five-star London hotel, plus her own investigations:

My year on the frontline of the ultimate service industry was a real education. I never expected such decadence and debauchery, I never expected such seediness or such depravity. The highs and the lows, the human sadness contrast amazingly with

the great beauty and the fantastic Epicurean excellence they achieve. The capital's luxury hotels are extraordinary places, full of extraordinary stories and are a microcosm of the world outside (Imogen Edwards-Jones, 2004).

Discourses of sexual encounters and sensuality both frequently frame the marketing of contemporary hotels and tourist resorts, often implying the promise of risk, novelty and excitement, often in exoticised and occasionally eroticized language (Pritchard and Morgan, 2006). As the findings discussed above illustrate, themes of sex and sensuality are very much portrayed as the norm in Hotel Babylon amongst guest-guest relations, guest-staff relations, and in particular staff-staff relations. The end result of this is the portrayal in popular culture of a very sexualized workplace, with the accepted sexuality to be played with is heterosexuality, while homosexuality forms the bases of anguish and comedy (for example, in Episode 5 Gino the Barman pretends to be gay for extra tips). According to Pritchard and Morgan (2006), cultural and feminist geographers have argued for some time that there are no politically neutral spaces and much work has focused (for example) on the ways in which places are heterosexualised (e.g. Aitchison, 1999; Bell & Valentine, 1995; Duncan, 1996; Valentine, 1993). Yet there is little of this cultural or feminist influence in hospitality studies. Indeed, Darke and Guernsey (2000, p. 78) have drawn attention to the 'curious' absence of a broad feminist perspective on hospitality, particularly given the fact that so many employee-guest interactions are overlain by social relations of gender.

Gerrier and Adib, (2000a, b, p. 691) argue that "hotel staff members are vulnerable to harassment because of their status relative to the customers". The kinds of kinesic cues which management encourage employees to display to show warmth towards hotel customers—smiling, frequent eye contact, open body posture, leaning the body forward— are not only associated with friendliness and courtesy but also with intimacy and sexual attraction (Burgoon, Birk, & Pfau, 1990). These behaviors are typically found more in customer facing roles such as reception and restaurant service. However in Hotel Babylon it is the housekeeping staff, particularly the

Head Housekeeper, who are overtly aligned with sexual attraction. Shots of housekeeping staff making beds, bending over to clean fixtures, sashaying down corridors with trolleys etc, predominantly without giving them a voice, are designed to show them as willing to serve with a hint of double meaning as largely shot in bedrooms.

The race to the bottom for staff, relying heavily on illegal migrant labour is concerning as it is so readily constructed as a feature of the industry in Hotel Babylon. Increasingly though the use of illegal migrant workers is a case of 'reality tv', as more hotels have been found to be using illegal or new migrant labour (HSI Liaise Report, 2007; Hsiao-Hung, 2004). The employment conditions appear to have become undesirable to the resident population in many countries. Klemm and Burton (2005) found that non-white people were almost always depicted as part of the tourism product, that is, as 'exotic' locals or workers in hotels, never as the tourists. This is a prevailing stereotype, "despite the growth and increasing affluence of visible ethnic minorities in the UK" (Klemm & Burton, 2005, p. 92).

Below stairs it couldn't be more different. First generation immigrants, asylum seekers, and foreigners who have only a minimal grasp of English all work long hours for low wages. They have no prospect of promotion or even a whiff of a tip. They are the lost souls of the hotel industry who slop out the kitchens, bleach the corridors and hose down the staff toilets in the early hours of the morning (Klemm & Burton, 2005, p. 92).

The denigration of housekeeping staff in such a manner is puzzling and quite contrary to the important role they play in hotels internationally. A personal survey shows an average nightly room rate in the Auckland CBD during the week is NZD315. It would be unlikely that a guest would consume food and beverage to equal that amount. Residential guests provide business for other departments within the hotel, particularly the restaurant and bar, and without the in-house guests these departments would need to rely on casual visitors. As many hotel restaurants

and bars are located within the property and not obvious to street traffic it would be reasonable to suggest that without the patronage of registered guests these departments would have considerably reduced profitability.

Guests usually check into the property between 2-7pm and check out time is between 7am - 10am. This means for a one night stay they are in their room for 9-12 hours on average. It would be reasonable, therefore, to assume that a major influence regarding the guest's satisfaction or otherwise of the property will be based on their impression of the room and the cleaning process. This perception of the accommodation is particularly important as, unlike other departments where a mistake or oversight can be corrected by the server (such as a dirty glass replaced by the waiter), in the room the guest is alone and the housekeeper is not there to correct any imperfections him/herself. Should the guest need to phone to have the item replaced, this imperfection will magnify itself in the mind of the guest and so possibly lead to dissatisfaction with their stay. This suggests that the servicing of rooms is paramount in the operation of a successful hotel. The work of housekeepers is essential to comfort, hygiene and safety but "they are almost invisible as such work is generally performed *unseen* and therefore anonymously" (Hunter Powell and Watson, 2006, p. 298). Housekeepers do, however, have the most contact with the guest through the servicing of rooms.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

The content and above analysis of five episodes of series one Hotel Babylon in the wider context of the hospitality industry suggests a more challenging set of questions. A focus on positive workplace culture, cooperation, values and great communication can improve staff retention, lowering turnover rates and enabling service quality to be maintained and bottom line business goals can be achieved. However a two level system appears operating at Hotel Babylon with a Western core of management and front line staff, and another group of illegal migrant employees representing the reality of a low-pay, poor conditions, casualised industry. The

concern is that this fits with the turnover issues experienced across the hospitality industry which seems to be trapped in a downward cycle of low yield, low pay and high labour turnover (Boxall, Macky & Rasmussen, 2003; Winterton 2004).

This raises the question of how sustainable the negative employment situation, as depicted in the housekeeping department at Hotel Babylon, is, and importantly, through playing out this discourse through popular television, how it is further denigrating housekeeping as a career to potential labour pools in terms of the power relations, work organisation, remuneration and career opportunities. In terms of hotels and hospitality generally, it relates to more fundamental concerns about sustaining service quality and employment relationships with an employment approach which appears unsustainable in a tight labour market. Again, more fundamental changes to work organisation, remuneration and career opportunities appear necessary, as well as promulgating these changes to wider labour markets and general society in various ways such as television. Presenting hotel housekeeping as the Cinderella of hospitality underserves the work and the importance of those performing it.

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