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RESPONDING WITH HOSPITALITY: REFUGEE CHILDREN IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN EDUCATION SYSTEM

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ABSTRACT

Refugees have remained a significant feature on the South Africa landscape and a concern in the country even prior to the advent of democracy. Since the advent of democracy in 1994, South Africa (SA) has received waves of newcomers – people fleeing wars, drought and poverty from countries such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi, Angola, Sudan, Zimbabwe, Somalia, Eritrea and Ethiopia. South Africa allows for the admittance of refugee children into its system provided they have the requisite documents. This article reports on qualitative research, conducted with refugee children attending a Refugee Bridging Program at Mercy College, an affluent private school in Johannesburg, South Africa. The article addresses the questions: (i) what are the personal and academic experiences of refugee children enrolled in a refugee bridging school programme; and (ii) how does an ethic of hospitality facilitate their integration into education and prepare them for entrance into mainstream schooling? The article provides pen portraits of their personal family biographical details; their pre-flight; flight and settlement experiences; their social and academic experiences; as well as their short-term and long-term academic plans and career aspirations. I draw on theoretical insights from deconstructionist conceptions of hospitality and guest-host dialectics as espoused by Derrida (2001). In addressing issues of marginalisation in relation to access to education, the article argues for complementing a rights-based framework with a hospitality-based framework to

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respond humanely and with immediacy to refugee children within South African education, thereby giving credence to the country's policy rhetoric to agitate for promoting the values of democracy, social justice, equity, reconciliation, and freedom from violence, discrimination and prejudice.

Keywords: Refugee children's education, hospitality and deconstructionist theory, refugee children's psycho-social experiences, refugee children's identity, bridging school programmes

INTRODUCTION

So I have a new name,
 Refugee
 Strange that a name should take away from me
 My past, my personality and hope.
 Strange refuge this.
 So many seem to share this name, refugee,
 Yet we share so many differences.
 I find no comfort in my new name.
 I long to share my past, restore my pride,
 To show I too, in time, will offer more than I have borrowed.
 For now the comfort that I seek
 Resides in the old yet new name.
 I would choose
 Friend.

(‘Refugee’ by Ruvimbo Bungwe [2004:26]).

Bungwe's poem, which captures the retrospective, current and prospective identity and experiences of a refugee child, is central to the focus of this paper. It intimates at the dehumanisation and obfuscation that he endures by virtue of his refugee status that has stripped him of his uniqueness, hope and pride. A subject of other's identificatory labels, he would prefer being called ‘Friend’ – an identity marker that translates into a horizontal, reciprocal relationship based on trust, acceptance and respect.

THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS

The definition outlined in the Refugee Convention Article 1A(2) of the 1951 *Convention relating to the Status of Refugees* as modified by article I(2) of the 1967 *Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees*, classifies refugees as anyone who

owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his [sic] nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself [sic] of the

protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his [sic] former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.

Despite the gender bias in the above definition, against this backdrop, refugees (both male and female) face fear, powerlessness, uncertainty, and lack of recognition, poverty and physical deprivations. Refugees are among the most marginalised people in the world. In a political atmosphere that favours immigration control above humanitarian assistance, Langmead (2012:3) notes that there is a need to re-think a purely rights-based conception of protection in favour of one that incorporates an ethics of hospitality. An exclusive preoccupation with a rights-based conception of protection privileges a focus on legal requirements and technicalities, and marginalises its attendant moral and ethical implications. This is antithetical to the spirit in which refugee protection was originally conceived of as a concept in international law (Wilson 2010:100).

According to Langmead (2012:1), hospitality is a concept that

includes justice-seeking, political action, inclusion around our tables, intercultural friendship, pursuing a hospitable multicultural approach to religious life, practical assistance, long-term commitment, learning from socio-cultural diversity, sensitivity to the power dynamics of “welcome”, a willingness to “let go” as well as “embrace”, interfaith dialogue and discovering the intertwining of the guest and host roles.

Pineda (1997:33) argues that the concept of ‘hospitality’ is inextricably inter-related with that of the stranger. The word ‘stranger’ (*xenos*) also means ‘guest’ and ‘host’. Thus, whether someone is regarded as a stranger or as a guest is contingent on how we respond to him/her. Sutherland (2006:xiii), contends that ‘hospitality is the intentional, responsible, and caring act of welcoming or visiting, in either public or private places, those who are strangers, enemies, or distressed, without regard for reciprocity’.

Hospitality emerges out of ancient traditions of welcoming the stranger/foreigner and emerges in the philosophical and political theorisings of Derrida (2001). Wilson (2010:102) explains that the notion of hospitality frames both state and individual as host *and* guest. The refugee, who begins as a ‘guest’, can eventually become a (resident/ citizen) ‘host’. Thus, the identity of the host/state is dependent on the identity of the guest/refugee. This means that there can be no host without a guest.

Wilson (2010:110–111) highlights the following three shortcomings regarding a purely rights-based response to refugees.

The first shortcoming is its tendency to mask individuals, and denude them of their uniqueness, experiences, skills and talents. Providing protection becomes a purely abstract, legal transaction, with states undertaking to do what legislation stipulates, and sometimes doing less than what the law requires, depending on how they are able to (mis)interpret or even ignore legislation. Compassion, morality and

ethical obligations are neutralised and ignored. Individuals requiring protection – if fortunate may become passive automatons of rights and protection, rather than being respected as human beings (Wilson 2010:110).

A second shortcoming is that unprotected persons first need to prove that they are refugees in order to qualify for welcome into the political state. This places the state in the position of authority, and the guest/refugee in the position of vulnerability, subservience and subjugation. Furthermore, once the persons are identified as ‘refugees’, their interaction with protection services and government organs is mediated through their legal identity instead of being treated as human beings (Wilson 2010:110–111).

A third shortcoming is that the rights of the state and the rights of individuals are invariably framed hierarchically and oppositionally. This framework constructs a hostile relationship between states and the refugees. This configuration of the relationship ignores the fluctuating identities and responsibilities of states and individuals, and it also excludes recognition of the role that non-state/independent organisations/actors play in global regimes, both as sources of protection and persecution.

Wilson (2010) contends that if hospitality is conceived as an ethical framework, it could serve as one potential approach to address the three shortcomings raised by a purely rights-based discourse. An ethics of hospitality offers a framework to explore humane responses to the stranger. It helps to conceptualise the identity of the ‘*Self*’ (‘host’), the ‘*Other*’ – the specific, immediate and near Other (‘guest’); and the ‘*Third distant Other*’ (*ibid.*:111) (the whole of humanity). Thus, an ethics of hospitality invites consideration of both those vulnerable persons who seek assistance and welcome, and the ‘distant Others’ who have not yet sought our help.

Hospitality also emphasises that the identities of host and guest are not fixed. Power is circulatory. It emanates and resides in different sources. Conceptions of what it means to be a host should not be reduced to having sovereignty of a fixed geographic space but need to be expanded to include the understanding that people can be host to ideas, experiences, skills, talents and stories. The talent, skills, narratives and experiences that refugees bring can be shared and integrated into their host societies, thereby enriching their hosts (Wilson 2010:113).

REFUGEE CHILDREN AND EDUCATION

As with other countries that provide legal protection for the rights of children to education, which is evident in the work of, for example, Sidhu and Taylor (2007), and Christie and Sidhu (2006) writing about the Australian context, Roxas (2011) writing about the American context, Bacakova (2011) writing about the Czech Republic context, the *South African Constitution* and the *South African Schools Act* also ensure the inclusion of refugee students in its schooling system. However, in a country that

is battling its way towards redress for the black South African majority, refugee children get short shrift because of their socio-economic vulnerability, linguistic variance, lack of official documentation, their arrival in the country at times that fall outside the calendar of the South African school year (see Perumal 2013).

Studies that have examined the status of refugee children in the South African context confirm the marginalisation that these children endure. Meda, Sookrajh and Maharaj (2012) are incredulous that the Millennium Development Goals of achieving universal primary education by 2015 will be realised. They point to the problems of access to schooling that refugee children experience. Their qualitative research found that there are two key barriers militating access to primary school education. These include obstacles to enrolling in a school and sustaining themselves in school after enrollment. The barriers of access to schooling include: first, the lack of education infrastructure and unregistered schools that struggle to remain open and the inability to pay teachers their salaries because of a lack of finances; and second, an inability for students to cover the educational costs associated with tuition fees, school uniforms, examination fees, and subsistence costs, thus dropping out of school.

Spren and Vally (2012:71–89), who employ the 4A typology to discuss the challenges of adopting a rights-based monitoring approach to the education of refugee children in South Africa, highlight the following barriers that militate access to education:

- i. **Availability:** Given that most refugee children reside in disadvantaged communities, their access is usually limited to under-resourced and poor-performing schools. This militates against children receiving quality education. Furthermore, because there is no space available for refugee children in public schools, most children are housed in church facilities and are invariably taught by underpaid refugee teachers.
- ii. **Accessibility:** The South African admissions policy stipulates that a child can be registered or admitted provisionally at a public school if the parent or guardian can present a birth certificate, immunisation card, transfer card/last school report card. However, a number of schools misunderstand or ignore this clause of the policy thereby denying refugee children access to public schools.
- iii. **Acceptability:** In order to assess whether the quality of education is acceptable for refugees, issues such as the language of instruction, curriculum content and relevance, school discipline as well as teachers' qualifications and training should feature as acceptability indicators. Furthermore, acceptability encompasses issues related to social justice, diversity and inclusivity, and the availability and access to adequate and relevant support services.

- iv. **Adaptability:** A large number of children migrate to South Africa because of the death of a parent. Their vulnerability is exacerbated by housing and food insecurity; lack of finances, threats to their personal safety, child labour, sexual exploitation, harassment and xenophobia. These experiences are generally evaded or ignored in the curriculum despite their potential to impact on students' academic and non-academic performances.

Studies conducted by the University of Johannesburg's Centre for Education Rights and Transformation (2012) in Gauteng, Limpopo and the Western Cape, in South Africa reconfirmed the violation of the right to education of refugee children as it manifests through language needs, financial constraints, lack of official documents, xenophobia, lack of clarity and capacity among governments, institutions and organisations regarding their roles and responsibilities; lack of awareness of education rights; willful and unwitting acts of exclusion by agents of the South African government; and discrimination related to identity markers such as age, gender and disability. While uncovering the challenges refugee children experience, the report highlights the resilience and inventiveness of the children who employ adaptive strategies to overcome structural barriers.

Hemson's (2011) study on refugee children in Durban, South Africa, also recognises the debilitating structural barriers that refugee children have to navigate in a foreign country. His findings celebrate the positive cosmopolitan identity and self-concept that these children forge.

Aligning myself with Hemson's (2011), and Spreen and Vally's (2012) analytical orientations through which to understand the refugee child experience, this article attempts to add to the discourse by de-pathologising refugee children. It showcases their dual identities as guests and hosts in an inhospitable South African context.

OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH SITE AND REFUGEE BRIDGING PROGRAM

This article emanated from a South African Netherlands Partnership for Alternatives in Development (SANPAD) project titled Women Leading in Disadvantaged Education Contexts. The study aimed to investigate how women educational leaders navigate the challenges of leading in disadvantaged school contexts. While researching for this project I discovered an anomaly at Mercy College. Mercy College, which is a private, privileged school in Johannesburg, was among the first schools to facilitate access in 1977, to all "races" as part of the Catholic churches resolution to defy apartheid education. Mercy College transformed its enrolment from an all-White, Catholic boys' school into a 'multiracial, multi-faith' co-educational school. Continuing with its legacy to be socially responsive, currently, the college runs an after traditional school hours Refugee Bridging Program from

3pm to 6pm on its campus. The anomaly is that within the portals of this privileged, private college, disadvantaged and displaced refugee children are allowed the right to education. This 'inreach' programme is different from other initiatives, which go out into the community to offer help; instead, the children are brought onto the campus for the programme, after the mainstream school terminates at 2.30pm. Approximately 150 refugee children between five–thirteen years from Zimbabwe, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Mozambique, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Rwanda, Kenya, and other countries participate in the programme. These children currently live in the surrounding suburbs of Yeoville, Berea and Hillbrow. These downtown suburbs have fallen prey to the social maladies of crime, poverty, unemployment, food and housing insecurity and HIV/AIDS (Perumal: 2009).

Hans, the volunteer administrator of the programme, outlined the aim of the Refugee Bridging Program and the framework of the model (see also www.sacredheart.co.za) as follows:

Besides offering academic and social bridging into the South African schooling system, the project also offers protective factors that can build resilience and reduce vulnerability. These include offering children a sense of belonging, a positive school climate, opportunities for success and recognition of achievement, and a non-violent environment The aim is to help de-schooled and marginalized children make the transition to mainstream schooling, to adjust academically and to the local school culture. The most striking feature of this project is the instant relief it offers refugee children from uncertainty and hardship The model fits comfortably into the ethos of a caring school with all the benefit that it carries. Internationally, schools that have taken in refugees have found that their own learners benefit from being exposed to a rich variety of cultures.

Against this background, in this paper, I explore:

- i. the personal and academic experiences of refugee children enrolled in the Refugee Bridging Program, at Mercy College; and
- ii. how an ethic of hospitality facilitates the children's integration into education and prepares them for entrance into mainstream schooling.

In an attempt to mediate the macro-structural obstacles that the refugee children face, the Refugee Bridging Program accommodates the unique and tragic circumstances of the children. The programme is based on a modified version of the South African National Curriculum with a special focus on Basic Numeracy, Basic Literacy and Life Skills. It aims to prepare the children for entry into mainstream public schools. Unencumbered by the bureaucracy of not having the requisite legal documents, the programme subscribes to an ethic of hospitality. Children who are enrolled receive a meal, school uniforms and free transportation to and from school. The programme administrators help the children obtain school admission documents and places the children – on average after a period of two-three years – at public schools. In addition, it provides the children's parents, guardians and custodians access to medical clinics,

and helps them with their application for official documents. Furthermore, it provides bursaries to the refugee teachers as well as their children by extending its ethic of hospitality to the distant *Other* (for the most part the children of the refugee teachers still live in their home countries). The Refugee Bridging Program receives donations from international philanthropic organisations. The dependence of unregistered refugee schools on donor benevolence is also reported on in the Meda, Sookrajh and Maharaj (2012) study (see also Cole 2000).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The narratives in this paper are drawn from a combination of individual, and paired interviews conducted with students in Grades 1 to 6 who are enrolled in the programme. The individual interviews were approximately 30 minutes long, and the paired interviews were approximately 50 minutes long. The pairs consisted of students who were friends and they were generally of the same nationality. The principal selected the students who participated in the research based on her knowledge of their personal dispositions, and their ability to respond adequately in English. Thirty students comprising 15 males and 15 females were interviewed at the school. The interviews were video-recorded. The principal assisted in obtaining informed consent from the students' parents or caregivers. At the start of the interview, students were briefed about the purpose of the interview, and they were informed that they could withdraw from participating in the study at any stage if they felt uncomfortable.

The principal provided me with a Media Protocol, which outlined the conditions of my visits, interactions with the children and guidelines for reporting on the research. The Media Protocol acknowledged the importance of conscientising the public about the plight of refugee children, but cautioned about the sensitivities associated with children and parents who had fled conflict situations and the continuing risk they faced in South Africa should their identities be revealed. A request for the anonymity and confidentiality of the teachers and students was made and conditions on: (i) the taking of photos, (ii) the sharing of personal stories, and (iii) the publishing of material were provided.

Ethical clearance was also obtained from the Ethics Committee in the Faculty of Education at the University of Johannesburg. Proof of ethical clearance had to be submitted to the funders when the funding application was submitted.

Ninety minute long individual interviews were also conducted with the two German volunteer administrative assistants; seven refugee teachers who had obtained their teaching qualifications in their countries of origin (namely, Zimbabwe, Rwanda and the DRC) and are employed in the Program. Ninety minute long interviews were also conducted with three parents who volunteer at the school. All the parents were interviewed in their homes. During the home interview visits, field notes were made to record the refugee children's living conditions. This article, however, draws

predominantly from the students' narratives. Pseudonyms have been used to protect the identity of all the participants, the college as well as the bridging programme.

The aim of the interviews was to provide participants with an opportunity to narrate their personal experiences. The interview questions were designed to get a sense of the students' personal family biographical details; their pre-flight, flight and transitional settlement experiences; their social and academic experiences on the Refugee Bridging Program; as well as their short-term and long-term academic plans and career aspirations – with a view to exploring how subscription to an ethics of hospitality promoted access and integration of un-schooled refugee children to a bridging programme that would facilitate their eventual entrance into mainstream education.

This study was sensitive to *voice*, *difference* and *narrative enquiry* – motifs associated with critical feminist research methodologies that argue for the redistribution of the narrative field so that the marginalised voices of the disenfranchised *Other* can become part of the mainstream conversation (Bagele 2012).

The data was transcribed and analysed thematically through narrative analysis. Narrative analysis, in part, aims to understand the heterogeneous individual as a social actor under construction, and attempts to enter into conversation with the larger theoretical literature so that the researcher can remain sensitive to the nuances of meanings expressed and the multiplicity of meanings that emanate from different contexts (Perumal 2007). Theorists who extol the merits of narrative inquiry (see Clandinin 2007; Wertz, Charmaz, McMullen, Josselson, Andersen & McSpadden 2011) are unanimous in recognising the value of narrative inquiry in enabling the articulation of stories to understand human lives and experiences. Thus, despite the participants in this study emanating from diverse geographical, cultural and political backgrounds, they shared the commonality of having a story to narrate about their lives. The themes that emerged from their narratives revolved around their pre-flight, flight and transitory settlements, family (un)employment, housing, food insecurity, and transitioning education experiences.

PORTRAITS OF THE REFUGEE CHILDREN

Ager (2001:4–5) delineates four phases of the refugee experience, namely, pre-flight, flight, temporary settlement and resettlement/repatriation. I have modified these phases of the refugee experience to sketch the profiles of the refugee children who participated in the study.

- i. Pre-flight: Many children recalled stories of war, attacks on their homes and communities and the killing of their friends, families and neighbors. Fear and insecurity caused them to flee their countries either alone or with their parents. Simone confessed:

I have not read about the history of my country and I wouldn't want to because it is so sad. My grandmother's sister watched her parents killed. She was raped and her 5-year-old daughter was also raped. From that time on she couldn't speak. She was like a statue. She was given a hammer to kill her own husband because he came from a different tribe. When we see her all we see is tears.

Some children recounted experiencing economic hardships, hunger and poverty in their home countries. Ezra recalled: 'There was a time in Zimbabwe, we were poor and we didn't have food.' Some mentioned that their families came to South Africa seeking a better life, education and work prospects.

- ii. Flight: Many fled with little or nothing and under constant fear of being caught and killed. Hans, the administrative assistant, reflected on refugee flights as follows:

[M]any teachers and students were traveling for years. Some were on the road from Rwanda to South Africa for two years, because everywhere they came they were not accepted so they had to move on, move on, move on so they settled here in South Africa where at least they have formal acceptance.

Yehwo recalls:

I remember coming from Congo, walking through the jungle; coming to Zimbabwe where my father picked us up. I saw a person from Congo coming to South Africa and they didn't have money. They went to the train and they got kicked out. They ended up selling their clothes to get money for the train.

Musa offered the following account of his family's flight experience:

I came with my mother. We went from Burundi by bus to Kigali. Then we took a train to Tanzania. We spent a whole month in Tanzania. We met my father and we came to Mozambique. It took us four days. I am not sure whether we landed in Durban or Cape Town. When we came to SA it was a risky life. We could have died. The guys who wanted to help us had knives. But my father is a determined person. He would not want to give up just like that. One of the men wanted to rape a lady. We heard the lady screaming. My father took a stone and threw it into the bush to cause a distraction and then we had to walk for three hours through the bush. I was scared. I had wanted to be in South Africa but at that time I wished I had wings so that I could fly away. We walked until the morning. Then we caught a taxi, which took us to Mpumalanga. My father had a house in Mpumalanga and we lived there for five months. My father came to Johannesburg. My father went to jail for one and a half years because my sister had him arrested because she accused him of rape. I didn't believe that it was a true story. When he came out of jail, he is not allowed to be in South Africa. He lives in Mozambique. I am in South Africa because the schools are better.

- iii. Transitioning and Tenancy Settlement: On arriving in South Africa, many children had to co-habit with people under difficult conditions. Thomas tearfully shared the following experience:

I lived with my father's friend. My father has money but he did not have anyone to send the money with so he didn't pay for the last three months. The man was angry and he pushed me out. I did not get angry because I know that God is there and He can watch. Today is today and tomorrow is tomorrow. It is just another day. I had my bed and my bags. What am I going to do with my bed? I went to an uncle and I talked to him and said: "Uncle please help me out. Please keep my bed for me". He asked me: "What happened?" I said: "My guardian pushed me out. Would you please keep my bed for me?" He said that I could stay with him.

Family fragmentation and separation are familiar refrains in the children's stories. Some miss their families and yearn to return to their home countries. Jacque remembers:

In Rwanda there are a lot of activities that I liked to do; but I don't do them anymore. After school I used to go on the street and play soccer. I loved to play soccer and basketball. What I miss about Rwanda was the beauty of the place – nature. I don't have any photos of Rwanda but I saw them on the Internet. I miss my country. I love my country. I want to go home. It will be a long time before I go back. I have to finish my high school and university. I speak to my cousins there. I remember the distance. There are four to five countries between us.

Two Eritrean friends mentioned that their parents were considering immigrating to Canada; thus they were unsure about their medium to short-term schooling plans.

Kunz (1981) explored theoretical issues associated with the pre-flight and post-flight periods. He contends that there is common to think of the immigrant as *pulled/ attracted* to his/her new land – lured by the prospect of a safer and brighter future. The refugee, in contrast, is *pushed* out. Kunz identified two types of refugee flight and settlement patterns, namely: (i) anticipatory refugee movements, and (ii) acute refugee movements. The anticipatory refugee detects danger early and s/he moves the whole family to a safer place, taking along resources in preparation for a new life. Anticipatory refugees are normally educated, and economically well off. Acute refugee movements result from a necessity to escape immediately without instituting any plans for the future. Thus little, if any thought, is given to the consequences of their flight. They are usually escaping war, political unrest or government policy that pose imminent threat to their safety. The acute movement may be a mass flight precipitated by fear and uncertainty. Only after they reach a place of refuge, often traumatised, in a condition Kunz calls 'midway to nowhere', will the refugee contemplate the three choices that face refugees. These choices include the prospect of returning home, remaining in the place of first asylum, or accepting a resettlement option in a foreign land. At this juncture, the host country and protection agencies pressurise the refugee to make a hasty choice from the unsatisfactory options that are available.

In addition to these forces, Kunz argues that there is a tendency to homogenise all refugees from a given country or region. Most refugee groups are actually quite heterogeneous in that they belong to different waves and vintages. Refugee waves and vintages gesture to the differences among refugees. Their differences may be attributable to the fact that they may have fled at different times from the persecuting land in response to different pressures, experiences and backgrounds. This means that they may even be hostile to one another.

Thus, apart from the children's pre-flight, flight and transitory settlement narratives highlighting their anticipatory or acute movement categorisation, their recollections draw attention to the escalating political and economic crises in their home countries. Their narratives conscientise us not only to their traumatic experiences, but sensitise our gaze to the distant Third Other as well as to the *Other* who is near. Fragmented and separated from their families and friends, their narratives indicate that international protection should not be confined to responding humanely to those near and immediately present, but should also extend to those who are far away by making bolder incursions into eradicating human rights violations on an international scale.

REFUGEE CHILDREN AS GUESTS AND HOSTS

Having fled conflict situations, food insecurity and mounting humanitarian crises in their home countries, the lives of the refugee children and their friends and families have not improved significantly in South Africa. From the interviews with the various participants reports of uncertainty, hunger, fear for their safety, and separation from significant others are issues that still plague the children. However, amid the unrelenting stories of hurt, pain, sadness and loss, the children also shared stories of friendship, solidarity, forgiveness, hospitality, determination, resilience and aspirations for brighter futures.

Makeshift employment, unemployment and invisible labour

South African legislation allows for refugees to seek shelter within its borders. However, unlike other African countries, it does not make provision for any refugee settlement camps. Unprotected refugees have to fend for themselves without any aid. Perumal (2013) noted that many came to South Africa expecting to improve their lives drastically, but end up disappointed and demoralised when they fail to find jobs or access social services. A fortunate few have found casual employment as security guards and car washers. Gilead, a refugee father who participated in the study, mentioned that he is a qualified teacher but when he came to South Africa he had to work as a security guard earning a paltry wage in order to survive. Such enterprising endeavours have not endeared the refugees to the locals who also

compete for limited resources. Yvette, the refugee mother who participated in this research, told me that she sells sundries like sweets and snacks when she is able to come by these commodities. One of the refugee teachers reflected on the situation as follows:

They come from different parts of Africa. One of the children in Grade 1, the father is not there. The mother is all alone and she does not have any job so she provide herself by selling cigarettes and dagga (marijuana) in the street ... when you come to South Africa you will try to do anything so you can have money

Instead of subscribing to the normative discourse that pathologises refugees as being lazy, unproductive, delinquent and/or criminal, their makeshift, informal labour demonstrates the creative, self-empowering and entrepreneurial spirit that ensures the survival of refugees within harsh contexts (see also Landau 2006:230–233). Their endeavours are not lost on their children. Some children spoke with pride about their parents' efforts to relieve their untenable situations.

The gendered division of labour associated with child minding, nurturance and maternal benevolence has not escaped critical feminists writing about the performance of hospitality. They have been astute in teasing out the stereotypical gendered practices associated with hospitality. When individuals face adversity, they seek solace, support and resources from their families and communities. The prevalence of this invisible, unremunerated and gendered dailiness of the female refugee mother's and girl child's nurturance labour within the private confines of the home was also striking. On the day I visited Yvette's home, the neighbour had to take her sick child to the hospital. Yvette was therefore minding both her children as well as the neighbour's children. Many of the female students who participated in this study also reflected on their daily routines revolving around minding siblings and doing household chores. The Bridging Program offers medical help to the families of children at the school, who visit the mobile clinic for assistance. This, in particular, relieves the burden that is generally placed on the girl child in that she does not have to stay home to mind sick family members, but can attend school to continue with her education, and engage in cultural and social interactions with peers.

Housing and home

Home is germane to formulations of hospitality, and it is often regarded as a space that is synonymous with hospitality as it offers rest from mobility. However, Molz and Gibson (2007:13) posit that what constitutes home is contingent on the way hospitality is 'imagined, performed, offered, or denied'. In this regard, they pose a series of questions related to notions of universal hospitality and cosmopolitan rights as they pertain to issues of migration, asylum and citizenship. They ask: 'Where is home? What does it mean to be at home? Who feels at home and who fails to feel at home? Who can be a mobile host away from home, or a guest at home?' (*ibid.*).

These are pertinent questions that Clifford (1997:24 in Molz & Gibson 2007) factors into his analysis of the power equation of ‘hospitality, hospitableness and hospitable social relations’. He asks: Who is able to make themselves at home, and under what conditions? Who is able to offer hospitality, and how does the offer of hospitality entrench certain relations of power, ownership and sovereignty? How are these power relations mediated through the identity markers of race, class, gender, citizenship status? The nation state often portrays itself narcissistically as being hospitable. For example, Chapter Two of the South African Constitution states: ‘Everyone has the right to have access to adequate housing.’ South Africa’s *Refugees Act (130 of 1998)* guarantees those rights provided in Chapter Two of the *Constitution* to refugees specifically.

However, on visiting the tenant homes of some of the children, Yvette, a refugee mother explained that her family was co-habiting with large groups of people. For example, a two-bedroom apartment in Yeoville was home to approximately nine occupants. Yvette’s family shared a communal kitchen with three other families. The Migrant Rights Monitoring Project (MRMP) (in Greenburg & Polzer 2008) reported that 77% of the private rental accommodation accessed by migrants and refugees in Gauteng are sublet from other tenants. This obtains largely because of the difficulties associated with presenting South African Identity Documents. Since Refugee and Asylum Seekers’ Permits are not acknowledged, many refugees are unable to work formally or for a consistent income. Their lack of an adequate and a stable income, and their refugee status leave them with few options but to sublet accommodation, informally. This renders them vulnerable to exploitation by slumlords because they have no formal tenants’ rights. The following table itemises the problems associated with rented or sublet accommodation.

The problems listed in Table 1 are reflective of Yvette’s housing experiences and the insecurity around housing that the refugee children and their families experience. The impact this has on the children and their schooling is unsettling. Yvette narrated that her son had come home one evening requesting that she let his friend move in with them. His friend had lost his accommodation and had no-where to stay. He could not bear the prospect of his friend being homeless. In a classic gesture of hospitality, the friend was accommodated in an already overcrowded home. Such stories of generosity are interwoven into the general narratives of hopelessness and haunting deprivation – a case of a guest in a foreign land – playing the role of a gracious host in a practical and selfless way.

Table 1: Problems experienced with current private rental housing in inner city Johannesburg (Greenburg & Polzer 2008:10)

Overcrowding
Bad services (water, electricity, refuse)
Bad treatment by neighbours for being a foreigner
Bad treatment by landlord for being a foreigner
Threat of eviction for non-payment
Unable to pay (no threat of eviction yet)
Threat of eviction for being a foreigner
Threat of eviction for no documents
Being forced to pay a higher rent because of being a foreigner
Not stated
Other
Total who experienced problems with their current housing

What was striking about Yvette's home was the hive of activity in this congested living space. Amid the restless cries of several toddlers and the television blaring in the foreground, it seemed inconceivable that this would be a conducive environment for the school-going children to devote undivided attention to their studies. In enquiring about his living conditions, student Josh explained the creative and practical way in which he deals with overcrowding in his home:

We are renting. It is the five of us only ... sometimes if I'm frustrated in the house I go downstairs and do my homework in the playground ... when there are no people on the playground. I take a table and chair and I do my homework on the playground.

Furthermore, commencing the school day at 3pm meant that many of the students spent most of their day watching TV or looking after younger children in cramped and noisy homes. Only a few children mentioned utilising their time at home to study. Some students indicated that they tried coming to school earlier so that they could meet with their friends to revise their work. A few came early to use the library books – which at this stage can only be used at the school library. The library collection comprised books that had been donated by various non-profit organisations.

Food insecurity

I arrived at refugee mother Rachel's home at midday. She told me that the children had not eaten anything for the day. She had run out of bread and tea and some of

the children who were students on the Refugee Bridging Program would receive their only meal for the day at school. Inclusion around tables/school desks to share a meal provides an opportunity for social interaction and a reprieve from hunger for many of the children. However, the teachers noted that some children did not eat their meals at school. They saved it to take it home to their families. The teachers reported that some parents reprimanded/punished their children if they did not bring food home. Beyond the surface goodwill gesture of the school providing the children with a meal in the context of the refugee experience, Selwyn's (2000) conception of hospitality that recognises the way kinship and friendships is negotiated through the dialectics of hospitality and hostility echoes Derrida's (2001) commentary of hospitality as being central to human rights issues. Food insecurity that results in some of the children postponing satiating their hunger when food is offered to them so that they can escape being punished by upset elders brings into stark focus the Janus-faced dialectic of hospitality and hostility.

Grantham-McGregor, Cheung, Cueto, Glewwe, Richter and Strupp (2007) argue that many children in developing countries are exposed to several risks, which include poverty, malnutrition, poor health and un-stimulating home environments. These risks have a detrimental effect on their cognitive, motor, and social-emotional development. Although they acknowledge that correlation studies between education and nutrition require more conclusive research, they point out that poor dietary intake has lasting, long-term and additive effects on cognitive functioning. Poor health and nutrition may negatively impact learning for a number of reasons, including fewer years enrolled in school, lower daily attendance, and decreased learning performance per day spent in school. Most of these children are likely to become under-achievers in school, and subsequently become employed in low-income jobs, have high pregnancy rates, and are unable to provide adequately for their children. This contributes to the intergenerational transmission of poverty.

Against this dire background, the meagre sustenance that the children receive at school – while not completely addressing the children's daily dietary needs – is nonetheless a welcome reprieve from hunger and starvation.

REFUGEE CHILDREN'S EXPERIENCES OF TRANSITIONING EDUCATION

While some parents and guardians place a high premium on education because they see it as a ticket out of their debilitating socio-economic circumstances, in the absence of cooperation from parents, the refugee teachers have to work doubly hard to ensure that they create supportive and empowering learning environments for their learners. Celine's excerpt encapsulates the demands placed on these teachers:

[W]hen the parent is there for them to do their homework you can see they are progressing very well; but some, once they go home, even if you give the children homework parents

don't even know. The child says "my father just throw it in the dustbin" or "my mother did tear it". There is that problem the children are facing. While coming to school we need to help them. I ask them next time if your mothers don't want you to do your homework, ask your brother or your neighbor. Maybe he can help

Celine highlights the challenges that teachers have to navigate as they relate to divergent conceptions of parenting. Absent fathers and/or parents operating in survival mode often means that these children are bereft of 'emotionally present' parents. Refugee parents who themselves are assailed by circumstances too difficult to negotiate may tend to relegate their responsibilities to the teachers. This intensifies the teachers' emotional and invisible labour (see Perumal 2015). In an attempt to forge stronger ties with the students' community, Celine encourages her students to seek help from siblings and neighbours:

[M]ost of the children who learn in Refugee Bridging Program come from Congo and English is foreign to them. So initially I had the language problem with them because most of them could not understand English and ... I could not understand their languages well. Through patience and dedication I managed and by the end of the year most of the pupils could now read and communicate in English.

During a paired interview, a Grade 1 student, Anna, mentioned that she spoke four languages and then hastened to add that she was learning a new language. She could not remember what the name of the new language was but mentioned words from the new language she was learning. Her friend responded: 'Oh yes, that is French'. The international friendships were helping children broaden their multilingual repertoire, and are consistent with findings from Hemson's (2011) study that refugee students revelled in the fact that they boasted such an extensive linguistic capital. The students' exposure to diversity through different cultures and languages gives credence to Langmead's (2012:1) conception of an organic ethics of hospitality borne out of their need to help one another navigate their foreign circumstances.

Seeking help and forging friendships across linguistic and cultural differences, sometimes present challenges for refugee students and teachers – as described by two staff members.

I think main challenges are different backgrounds of the parents and children. We have a lot of complaints from younger children, "this one is beating me, this one is violent, this one is swearing at me". It's a lot of aggravation ... especially between the boys. I'm sure it's the same way ... in normal primary schools but, here, it's on another level because they are swearing: "You are Rwandan" and especially in their own languages so nobody of us understands what they are saying. Some of the teachers maybe understand, and then they are solving the situations. It comes, also into the classroom but during the lessons they're silent, but when they're out of work, then it could start.

Refugee student Yunis recounts:

One girl next to me says she cannot be my friend because I am from Rwanda. She says people from Rwanda are ugly. I asked her: “Am I ugly?” She says: “You don’t know it? You are so ugly.” I said: “I didn’t create myself.” She said: “They are witches and they kill other people.” I said: “That thing happened long time ago. You still keep that in mind?” The same thing happened in Rwanda – they say Congolese are witches. I think that she has learnt to hate Rwandese people from her parents.

Parental prejudices and stereotypes are sometimes transmitted to children. For example, an animated six-year-old Alia expressed concerns about the Chinese who were taking over the Bruma Flea Market and putting people, like her Kenyan grandmother, out of business.

Notwithstanding incidents of intra-refugee skirmishes, the overwhelming impulse that emerged from the interviews was the strong networks of friendships that existed among the students. Hlatshwayo and Vally (2013) contend that social networks and support are crucial in characterising social relationships among displaced peoples.

Glynis advises:

The secret to making friends with people from other countries is for them to know who you are and for you to know them. First we stayed in Bertrams. I did not know anyone. First day of crèche I was scared. As I get to know other people I became ok. I became a part of this big family at Refugee Bridging Program. I get along well with all the other children from other countries.

Most of the children attributed their openness to multicultural friendships to spiritual lessons that they learnt at church and at school. Fernando and Ferrari (2011) report that spirituality promotes resilience in children in many ways: by providing them structure, encouraging cognitive reconfiguration, becoming accepting of their traumatic experiences, and developing a sense of self-control. Furthermore, the rituals promote broader social integration. It also helps them develop emotional ties with others who are emphatic to their experiences and aspirations. Furthermore, Hutchinson and Dorsett (2012) note that several studies have reported that religion in its various interpretations enhances a person’s psychological and physical wellbeing.

The refugee children’s affiliation to the church and school communities, and the routinised rituals associated with these organisations were significant in helping them develop resilience, and learn forgiveness. These fora also provided them with a platform to develop friendships through their involvement in the cultural activities. Participating in multicultural activities served as an important form of therapeutic expression.

Over the years, the Refugee Bridging Program has arranged holiday programmes for the children. Eager to escape the routinised boredom at home, the children have welcomed the holiday programme, which provide them with the opportunity

to create books, stage an art exhibition and a stop-frame animation. Working in conjunction with a company that facilitates critical and creative thinking skills in 2012, the company facilitated a five-day art project that was arranged by the Bridging Program. The children worked with professional artists and produced *Journey with an Artist*, which was nominated for a BASA Award in 2013. The exhibition that grew out of the project, raised over an equivalent of US\$4 700 for the Refugee Bridging Program. The Radical Girls is a female musical group. They normally arrive before the start of the school afternoon to practice their songs and dance routine at the far end of the school playgrounds. The girls source their own song and dance material and teach one another new songs and dance sequences. They have performed at the school's cultural events, and performed with Bill Cisco, an American R&B artist, at a Valentine's Day concert at the University of Johannesburg.

The desire to attend school and increase their knowledge was a constant refrain in the children's interviews. The three hours that they spent attending the bridging programme seemed to offer them respite from the routine of boredom and being housebound. Most of the students yearned for their curriculum to mirror the curriculum of mainstream South African schools. Several times during the interviews the children mentioned that they would like to study Biology and History and other subjects. They also indicated that they would have liked to attend school during traditional school hours. Some wished that they could attend Mercy College. In this regard, the Refugee Bridging Program could be seen to be accomplishing its aims to help de-schooled and marginalised children re-enter society to engage socially, academically and culturally.

The leader of Radical Girls had won a musical competition. On interviewing her father, Gilead, who was at the time of conducting the interview, an unemployed teacher, he confided that he would like to take his children back to the DRC. Apart from the continuing humiliation and frustration of trying to acquire the relevant documents for his family to stay with him in South Africa, he did not see any hope for his children rising to the ranks of president or any person of influence in South Africa. In his assessment, their non-citizenship status destined them to invisibility and stagnation. Envisioning a similar future that Gilead had for his children, many of the other children aspired to taking up careers that ranged from becoming movie stars to becoming doctors and lawyers. Their career choices were invariably connected to their traumatic experiences. Many battled to come to terms with their own trauma – one student reported sleep walking; another mentioned hearing voices and seeing ghosts; yet another was reported to absent herself from school because of chronic illness. The impact on their psychosomatic experiences resonates with Eisenbruch's (1991:720) observation that displaced people experience uprootedness resulting from

loss of social structures, cultural values and self-identity: the person – or group – continues to live in the past, is visited by supernatural forces from the past while asleep or awake... feels

pain if memories of the past begin to fade, but finds constant images of the past (including traumatic images) intruding into daily life, yearns to complete obligations to the dead, and feels stricken by anxieties, morbid thoughts, and anger that mar the ability to get on with daily life.

The children reasoned that through their prospective careers they would be able to address experiences and circumstances that they, their friends and families had endured. In this way they could prevent these traumatic experiences from recurring. For example, Danielle and Daisy wanted to become artists. They mentioned painting a window, in which they depicted the refugee experience. Robert, who had watched his family decimated through violence and political unrest, wanted to be a lawyer by day so that he could fight against injustice; and he wanted to be a doctor by night. He felt helpless that he could not save his grandmother who succumbed to illness. Martin shared:

I first wanted to be a president but then I learnt that presidents are involved in politics. Politics is about professional lying so I don't want to be a professional liar. For me being a president I would just like to make everything good. Then to be a doctor I just can't stand blood. I have seen too much bloodshed. I don't mind being a lawyer but that it is also about lying. Acting too is about lying – putting on a performance – but I want to tell poems about life.

Claude shared the following poem that he wrote when my sister passed away:

What do I do when the world seems to be crushing down on me? What do I do when it seems like they won't stand by me? What do I do when everyone seems to be running away from me? Where will I go when everyone rejects me? Oh Lord I hope you understand my pain. Lord I hope you find my rest for me. Oh. Oh hey, hey Lord you died on the cross for me. Lord I hope that you find my rest for me. When I was sick my friends ran away from me. When I was sick my relatives ran away from me. Lord don't give up on me. But you were the only one who was there to set me free. Lord I hope that you set me free.

According to Hutchinson and Dorsett (2012), most refugees are future-focused. If they share past experiences, these are invariably done from a standpoint of the strength that they gained from their traumatic past that has helped them to become resilient. Despite the uncertainty of their immediate and long-term futures, the children's cultural engagement and career aspirations bolster Wilson's (2010) call to respond to refugees beyond the exclusive lens of a rights-based framework. Instead, by recognising them as unique, talented and skilled human beings who are not passive recipients of the state's 'benevolence' but are hosts to ideas, experiences and aspirations serve to enrich the South African fabric. Of importance to the children was being accepted, recognised and treated with respect and dignity.

Cumulatively, the Refugee Bridging Program provides students with a transitioning education within a caring environment. Within this environment, supportive and emphatic teachers – who themselves are no strangers to the trauma

of the refugee experience, encourage multicultural and multilingual friendships, fora for creative expression, respect for diversity, and the acquisition of basic literacy skills. Within such an environment, the children's quest for learning is supported and they remain future-focused on pursuing socially responsive careers.

PREPARING STUDENTS FOR INTEGRATION INTO MAINSTREAM EDUCATION

Education should be considered as essential to the children's emotional, physical and spiritual wellbeing. In the South African context where refugee children endure stigmatisation, discrimination and face other exclusionary practices that deny them the right to education because they do not have official documents, a review of how the Refugee Bridging Program realises its aim to 'help de-schooled and marginalized children make the transition to mainstream schooling, to adjust academically and to the local school culture' (www.sacredheart.co.za) is evident in the following ways when mapped against Spreen and Vally's (2012) 4A typology for monitoring refugee children's rights to education.

Availability: The Bridging Program is run on the Mercy College Campus from 3pm–6pm. By availing a functional infrastructure (classrooms, playgrounds, school hall, and technological equipment), the programme addresses the issue of children being excluded from public schools because of the purported lack of available space at these schools. Thus, through its 'inreach' initiative and the extensive network of compassionate and caring individuals and institutions, both nationally and internationally, the Refugee Bridging Program provides one example of an organisation's attempt to provide immediate relief to refugee children who are un-schooled. Rather than enduring the boredom of being confined to un-stimulating home environments, participation in the Refugee Bridging Program provides the children with the opportunity to acquire literacy skills that facilitate their transitioning to mainstream schools.

Accessibility: The lack of requisite official documentation is one of the principal factors repeatedly cited for the non-admittance of the children to public schools. This violation persists despite the provisions in the *South African Constitution* and the *South African Schools Act* for access to schooling for all children. The Bridging Program intervenes by ensuring that the children are not deprived the basic rights to education because they do not have legal documents. In this transitioning stage, it helps the children to secure the requisite documents to access public schools. It also helps their parents/caregivers to access their official documents so that they can find work and acquire housing.

Acceptability: The children's participation in the programme grants them the opportunity to also establish social networks across diverse language, ethnic and national divisions. In doing so, for the most part, the children are able to appreciate

that they are part of a greater humanity endowed with valuable skills and talents. This provides the children with the legitimate confidence to envision a just and safe society. By expressing themselves through art, music, poetry and dance, they take their positions as hosts of different ideas and experiences in South Africa – despite the xenophobic climate that prevails in the country. The psycho-pedagogical relationship that exists between the teachers and the children also contributes to the children feeling cared for as individuals despite their different cultural and linguistic differences. Refugee teacher Celine testified to how through ‘patience and dedication’ she was able to teach all the children in her class to read and communicate in English by the end of the year, although some had come from non-English speaking countries.

Adaptability: Although much needs to be done in terms of addressing adaptability to South Africa in terms of securing habitable living conditions, food, financial stability, etc. – the bridging programme endeavoured to provide children with one meal a day, food hampers for families, school uniforms, shoes, transportation to and from school, etc. It also provided refugee teachers with employment and paid their tuition fees to further their studies. By attempting to address the children’s basic survival needs, the bridging programme provides instant relief and supports them towards admittance in mainstream schooling.

CONCLUSION

The article commenced with the contention that responding to refugees from an exclusively rights-based framework dehumanises one of the most vulnerable and marginalised peoples of concern. I argued that subscription to and enacting an ethics of hospitality have the potential to reconceptualise abstract, legislative frameworks between the state and refugees into relationships grounded in compassion, grace, mercy, generosity, opportunities for development and fulfillment. Furthermore, subscription to an ethics of hospitality allows for acknowledging the protection and contributions made by relevant actors from diverse sectors. Thus, caring for, protecting and collaborating with refugees gives credence to an integrated suite of socio-ecological systems that include intergovernmental organisations, NGOs, multinational corporations, faith-based organisations, families, friends, strangers and the individuals themselves collaborating and contributing in concert with the process and provision of protection.

In this study, the access to schooling that the Refugee Bridging Program provides by virtue of the philanthropic support it receives from diverse sectors facilitates students’ transitioning to mainstream education. This is consistent with findings from other studies where students acknowledged that the school was the most significant influence in their adaptation in a foreign country. In the interviews, children displayed self-confidence, shared narratives of their resilience and support as a result of the caring, sharing, trusting school community. This, created optimal

conditions for effective teaching and learning. The Refugee Bridging Program accomplished this by emphasising:

- Positive teacher dispositions towards the students
- Styling a repertoire of teaching strategies customised to the needs of individual students
- Celebrating a multilingual and multicultural environment
- Offering a curriculum that students can identify with
- Conducting holiday tutoring programmes facilitated by teachers and volunteers
- Forging school-community partnerships
- Creating opportunities for students to collaboratively solve personal problems with peers and teachers
- Planning opportunities for the school community to participate in creative and expressive extra-curricular activities

This article has supported the urgency of Wilson's (2010:113) call that protecting refugees needs to shift from being a negative duty to a positive requirement so that displaced people can feel welcomed, enabled and supported. The children's resilience needs to be met with respect and commendation.

Responding to the refugee children through an ethics of hospitality and simple, sometimes 'mundane acts of kindness' carve a space for recognising their capabilities enabling them to actively participate in securing their own and others' wellbeing. This is aptly captured in the lyrics: *this is my world* (in Robinson 2004:3), penned by Somali refugee, and international rap star Keinaan. Keinaan, whose name means 'traveller', captures the refugee experience as guest and host as follows:

I'm a drifter, without a thing to call my own, War and hunger the causes I leave my home.

I seek asylum, a burden to my destination, Neglected, I feel like an AIDS patient.

Education, instinct and natural innovation, I'm not wasting a minute I'm community hope adjacent, working labour, Your friendly peaceful networking neighbor, I'm teased about my accent; But my language will be greater, I'm your doctor; I'm authorized to treat your pains, How come you trust me, When I operate in your bleeding veins, Couldn't you see it, When you asked when I would be leaving, Did you think my activities could only be refugeeing?

Chorus: I'm you daughter, cause war isn't really my fault, I'm your son, hunger isn't really my fault, We're your children, we know that politics fall, We forgive you, we won't hold grudges at all, And this is my world, this is my world, This is my world, this is my world ...

I'm a cleaner, a humble beginning for a natural leader, My son is caught up, He's doing crimes of misdemeanours, and I'm a judge, a former refugee myself, I don't condone law breaking But I know what's at stake, and I'm a poet: I offer you a piece of mind, I clear obstacles with my optimal beats and rhymes, I'm an athlete; I absolutely have the fastest feet,

I'm worth millions, A fired bullet couldn't match my speed, I'm an attorney; my journey has been most severe, But the human who's attacked Will adapt and persevere, And those who'd rather wait, Tell me how you validate, when our lives seem to waste Behind the gates you barricade

Chorus

I'm African, and my arrival is no accident, From colonization to miseducation, My track is bent, so I'm here, Like my brother who got chained to a board, Imagine if he and I meet, Detained and chained for court, Ok, I'm, white, yeah, I said it, u'hum that's right, I'm the reason why refugee agencies began their fight, I'm a man-made problem I didn't appear overnight, And while I exist in this world You too will behold the plight, I'm Latino, see me no speak good English, But if immigration give me papers I do big business, I'm Asian, I'm here with an overwhelming population, I can't be defined by creed, race, Let alone occupation.

Chorus

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