

REFUGEE CHILDREN'S ENACTMENT OF RESILIENCE WITHIN THE SOUTH AFRICAN SCHOOL SYSTEM

Juliet Christine Perumal

University of Johannesburg (SOUTH AFRICA)

Abstract

Since the advent of democracy in 1994, South Africa has experienced waves of newcomers – people fleeing wars, drought and poverty from countries such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi, Angola, Sudan, Zimbabwe, Somalia and Ethiopia. South Africa did not recognize refugees until 1993. It was only following the transition to democracy, that the country became a signatory to the United Nations and Organization of African Unity Conventions on Refugees. Despite South African legislation making provision for refugees to seek shelter in the country, unlike other African countries, South Africa does not have any refugee camps. Refugees survive largely without assistance. This article reports on qualitative research, conducted with refugee children attending the Refugee Bridging Program at Mercy College in Johannesburg, South Africa. The aim of this article is to provide pen portraits of their pre-flight, flight and settlement experiences; reflect on their social and academic integration experiences into South African schooling; and discuss their career aspirations as these issues emerged from interviews data. The article draws on theoretical insights from deconstructionist conceptions of hospitality and guest-host dialectics. It also draws on relevant concepts from Bronfenbrenner's [1] bio-ecological theory as it relates to environmental variables that shape human development.

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

1 INTRODUCTION

According to Langmead [2] the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees reported around thirty-four million people of concern in 2011. 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.

Against this backdrop, refugees (both male and female) face fear, powerlessness, uncertainty, lack of recognition, poverty and physical privations. Refugees are among the most marginalized people. In a political atmosphere that favors immigration control above humanitarian assistance, Langmead [2] notes that there is a call to re-think a purely rights-based conception of protection to one that incorporates an ethics of hospitality. A preoccupation with a rights-based conception of protection privileges a focus on legal requirements and technicalities, and marginalizes 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 [3].

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

According to Langmead [2], hospitality is a concept which:

...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 [4] argues that the very concept of hospitality is intertwined with that of the stranger. The word “stranger” (*xenos*) also means “guest” and “host”. Thus, whether someone is a stranger or our guest depends entirely on how we respond to him/her. Sutherland [5] 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 reciprocation”.

Hospitality emerges out of ancient traditions of welcoming the stranger/foreigner and features in the philosophical and political writings of Derrida [6]. Individuals in this context are dependent on the state for protection and for the realization of their rights, with little recognition of the ways in which the state is dependent on the individual for its identity, power and authority. Wilson [3] explains that a perspective grounded in the notion of hospitality, casts both state and individual in the roles of host and guest. The refugee who begins as a ‘guest’, in time can become a (resident/ citizen) ‘host’. The host/state is always obligated to the guest for their identity (in that there can be no host without a guest).

Wilson [3] highlights the following three shortcomings of 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 the law requires and no more. Compassion, morality and ethical obligations are neutralized and ignored. Essentially, individuals requiring protection, if they are lucky, become passive recipients of rights and protection, rather than being respected as human beings.

A second shortcoming with a rights-based framework is that unprotected persons first need to prove that they are refugees in order to qualify for welcome into the political state. A stateless person has even less claim to rights, since in practice asylum rights are conferred through citizenship. Thus, the individual is dependent on the state for the realization of his/her rights. This places the state in the position of power, authority and autonomy, and the individual in the position of vulnerability, obligation and subjugation. Furthermore, once the unprotected persons are identified as ‘refugee’, their interaction with protection agencies and bureaucracies is mediated through the lens of their legal identity instead of being treated as human beings. [3].

A third shortcoming with a purely rights discourse is that the rights of individuals and the rights of states are often positioned in opposition to one another. This framework presents a narrow and negative conception of the relationship between states and individuals because apart from its tendency to ignore the shifting identities and responsibilities of states and individuals, it also excludes recognition of the role that non-state/independent organizations/actors play in global regimes, both as sources of persecution and insecurity and as providers of protection.

Wilson [3] contends that hospitality, understood as an ethical framework, offers one possible approach through which these three shortcomings raised by a rights discourse may be reconceptualized. Hospitality is primarily a theoretical lens through which to explore identity and difference and to develop humane responses to the stranger. It also helps to conceptualize the identity of the *Self* (‘host’), the *Other* - the specific, immediate and near Other (‘guest’); and the *Third distant Other*, (the whole of humanity). Thus, hospitality invites consideration of both those unprotected persons who arrive at our door seeking assistance and welcome, and those far off who have not yet asked for our help.

Hospitality also emphasizes that the roles of host and guest are not fixed; that power comes from a number of different sources. A person is host not only within a fixed geographic space but can also be host to ideas or experiences, which they then invite others to participate in as their guests. While nation-states and their populations may be the hosts of the geographical safe space into which refugees come as guests, the refugees themselves possess ideas, experiences, skills, talents and stories that they as hosts can share with and thereby enrich their new community. [3]

In complimenting an ethics of hospitality that recognizes and values refugee children as holistic, unique human beings, Bronfenbrenner’s [1] bio-ecological theory of human development explicates how individual’s personal attributes (e.g., biological, cognitive, emotional, and behavioral characteristics) and the environments in which an individual lives shapes a person. Bronfenbrenner characterizes the environment as an integrated system of five nested structures; the innermost structure is the individual (in this case - the refugee child).

- The first structure is the micro-system. It is the immediate/proximal setting with which the individual interacts directly (e.g. family, the school, teachers, friends, and objects/symbols/processes of the home).
- The second structure is the meso-system. It consists of the environment in which two or more micro-system settings interact (e.g. interactions and relationships between home and the school).
- The third structure is the exo-system. It influences an individual's behavior and development and is composed of contexts in which a developing individual is not directly involved e.g. policies of a school division.
- The fourth and outermost structure which is most removed from the individual is the macro-system which is the level of cultural ideologies, macro institutions, laws, and public policies that impinge on the individual (e.g. policies from ministries of education, political or academic views on refugee integration).
- The fifth is the chrono-system. It refers to the way in which environmental effects develop over time: also the way transitions such as divorce, relocation, affect the individual's growth and development.
- Individuals, however, differ in their receptivity and response to specific environmental factors, owing to their unique characteristics and bio-psychological resources. Kanu [7] supports Bronfenbrenner's [1] postulation that learning and development involve a complex reciprocal interaction between an active, bio-psychological individual and the immediate environment.

3 SKETCHING THE RESEARCH BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

This article emanated from a larger South African Netherlands Partnership for Alternatives in Development (SANPAD) project titled: *Women Leading in Disadvantaged School Communities*. The study aimed to investigate how women educational leaders navigate the challenges of leading in disadvantaged school contexts ravaged by poverty; food insecurity; displaced students; HIV/AIDS and other social maladies.

An historic episode in the dark history of Apartheid was the 1976 Soweto Student protest against divisive education laws. Against this political backdrop, Mercy College a private, privileged school in Johannesburg was among the first to facilitate access, in 1977, to all races as part of the Catholic churches resolution to defy Apartheid education. Mercy College transformed its enrollment from an all-White, Catholic boys' school into a multiracial, multi-faith co-educational school. Mercy College subsequently faced harassment and hostile repercussions from the SA government. Continuing with its legacy to be socially responsive, currently, Mercy College runs the Refugee Bridging Program on its campus. The children are brought onto the Mercy College campus for the program which runs from 3pm to 6pm. Approximately 150 refugee children between the ages of five and thirteen, emanating from Zimbabwe, Democratic Republic of Congo, Mozambique, Eritrea, Rwanda, Kenya, etc. participate in the Program. These children who currently live in the surrounding suburbs of Yeoville, Berea, Hillbrow are enrolled in the bridging program, which helps unschooled refugee children transition to mainstream South African public schools. These downtown suburbs have fallen into squalor, with the attendant maladies of crime, sexual and gender violence, poverty, a housing scarcity and HIV/AIDS plaguing the community. (See Perumal) [8].

In this paper, I narrate the personal and academic journeys of students who have been granted refugee status in South Africa. While the South African Constitution and the South African Schools Act ensure the inclusion of refugee children in its schooling system, the 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) [9]. In an attempt to mediate the macro-structural obstacles that the children face – the Refugee Bridging Program offers a program that accommodates the tragic circumstances of the children. The program 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 bureaucratic violence associated with the children not having identity documents the program subscribes to an ethic of hospitality. It enrolls the children in the program; provides the children with a meal, school uniforms and free transportation to and from school. It also helps place 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 with medical

clinics and helps them with their application for official documents. Furthermore, it provides bursaries to the refugee teachers as well as their children. Extending its ethic of hospitality to the distant *Other*; the children of the refugee teachers- are for the most part – still in their home countries. The program does not receive any public funding, but is dependent on donations from faith-based organizations in Europe.

The narratives in this paper are drawn from a combination of individual, and paired interviews that were conducted with students in Grades 1 to 6 who are enrolled in the Refugee Bridging Program. The individual interviews were approximately 30 minutes long; and the paired interviews were approximately 50 minutes long. The school principal selected the students that participated in the research based on her knowledge of the students' personal dispositions; and their ability to respond to the interview questions. 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 student's 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 of the Refugee Bridging Program provided me with a Media Protocol, which outlined the conditions of my visits, interactions with the children and guidelines for reporting on the research that was conducted. The Media Protocol acknowledged the importance of conscientizing 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/videos; (ii) the sharing of personal stories; and (iii) the publishing of material were provided.

Ninety minute long individual interviews were also conducted with the two German volunteer administrative assistants; seven refugee teachers who had obtained their teacher qualifications in their countries of origin (namely, Zimbabwe, Rwanda, and the Democratic Republic of Congo) and are employed in the Refugee Bridging Program. Ninety minute long interviews were also conducted with three parents who volunteer at the school. All the other parents were interviewed at their homes. The narratives in this paper draw predominantly from the students' accounts. Pseudonyms have been used to protect the identity of all the participants.

The questions in the interviews were designed to get a sense of the students' personal family biographical details; their pre-flight; flight and settlement experiences; their social and academic experiences on the Refugee Bridging Program; as well as their short and long term academic plans and career aspirations. The data were analyzed through a combination of narrative and Critical Discourse Analysis.

4 PORTRAITS OF REFUGEE CHILDREN

Ager [10] 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 as a useful trope to sketch the profile of the refugee children that participated in the study.

4.1 Pre- flight

Many children recalled stories of war, attacks on their homes and communities and the killing of their friends, families and neighbors. Widespread 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. Some mentioned that their families came to South Africa seeking a better life, education and work prospects.

4.2 Flight

Many fled with little or nothing and under constant fear of being caught and killed. Their flight period sometimes extended over two years (this was particularly the case with refugees who fled from the DRC or Rwanda).

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

I came with my mother. We went from Burundi by bus to Kigali, and then we took a train to Tanzania. We spent a whole month in Tanzania. Then 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. They were somewhere from Maputo. 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. So my father just 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 and then we caught a taxi, which took us to Mphumalanga. My father had a house in Mphumalanga 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. So 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.

4.3 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 so 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? So 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 and I said my guardian pushed me out. Would you please keep my bed for me? He said that I could stay with him. So I talked to my mother and she said it's ok. So everything that happens in my life I just say thank you to God for everyday.

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

5 THE BIO-ECOLOGICAL DIALECTIC: REFUGEE CHILDREN AS GUEST AND HOST

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 children, the parents; and the school personnel reports of uncertainty; hunger, fear for their safety and separation from significant others are issues that still plague the children. However, amidst 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.

5.1 Living conditions

On visiting the tenant homes of some of the children, I found children co-habiting with large groups of people. A two-bedroom apartment in Yeoville, for example, was home to approximately nine occupants; who shared a communal kitchen with three other families. What was striking about the living conditions was the hive of activity in this small living space. It seemed inconceivable that this would be a conducive environment for the school-going children to devote undivided attention to their studies. Student Josh explained:

We are renting. It is the five of us only... sometimes if I'm frustrated in the house I can go downstairs and do my homework in the playground ... I take a table and chair and I do my homework on the playground.

Yvette, a refugee mother shared how her son had come home one evening requesting that she please 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 playing the role of a gracious host in a practical and instrumental way.

5.2 Food insecurity

I arrived at the home at midday; refugee mother, Rachel, 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 meal for the day at school. Highlighting the meso-systemic interaction between the school and homes, when the principal of the Refugee Bridging Program is able to secure food from retailers she sends a food hamper for the families. As a gesture of appreciation, Rachel supervises the children on school excursions.

5.3 Employment situation

Despite South African legislation making provision for refugees to seek shelter in the country, unlike other African countries, South Africa does not have any refugee camps. Refugees survive largely without assistance. Many came to South Africa expecting to improve their lives drastically, but many end up disappointed and demoralized when they fail to find jobs or access social services. Refugee mother, Yvette, told me that she sells sundries like sweets and snacks when she is able to come by these commodities. Yvette's situation highlights the fact that a fortunate few have found casual employment as security guards and car washers. Their enterprising endeavors have not endeared them to the locals who also compete for limited resources. Refugee teacher, Sophia, confirmed how difficult home circumstances affect students' academic performance:

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 ... that is also affecting the learners negatively.

5.4 Friendships and support networks

While some parents and guardians place a high premium on education because they see it as a ticket out of the 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. Refugee teacher, Celine highlights the challenges that teachers have to navigate as it relates 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. In an attempt to forge stronger ties with the students' community, Celine encourages her students to seek help from siblings and neighbors. Seeking help and forging friendships across linguistic and cultural differences sometimes present challenges for refugee students and teachers – as described by Hans:

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 understands what they are saying. Some of the teachers maybe understand, and then they are solving the situations.

Notwithstanding incidents of intra-refugee skirmishes, the overwhelming impulse that emerged from the interviews was the strong friendship networks that existed among the students. Hlatshwayo and Vally [11] contend that social networks and social support variables are of particular interest in characterizing social relationships among displaced peoples.

During a paired interview 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 organically helping children broaden their multilingual repertoire; and is consistent with findings from Hemson's [12] study that migrant students revealed in the fact that they boasted such an extensive linguistic capital. The multilingual and learning from socio-cultural diversity gives credence to Langmead's [2] conception of an ethics of hospitality.

5.5 Culture, religion and spirituality

The student's involvement in cultural activities serves as an important therapeutic expression. During their holiday program the children have created books, staged 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. The children work with professional artists and produced *Journey with an Artist*, which was nominated for a BASA Award in 2013.

The *Radical Girls*, which comprises six girls, have formed a musical group. They normally arrived 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 each other new songs and dance sequences. They have performed at the school cultural events. In 2103, the girl group also performed with American R&B artist, Bill Cisco, at the University of Johannesburg, Valentine's Day Concert.

Central to the girls' music was that their music playlist comprised exclusively Gospel Music. *Radical Girls*, and most of the other participants reflected on their strong ties with their churches. The students showed a deep-seated faith and trust in God. Many indicated that they attended and participated in church related activities. They spent time reading their Bibles; watching evangelical TV broadcasts and listening to gospel music. Their affiliation to the church community was significant in helping them develop resilience; learn forgiveness and provide them with the prospect of attending the church schools after graduating from Grade 6 at the Refugee Bridging Program. Their participation in cultural and spiritual activities provides them with psychosocial support and helps them develop emotional ties to others who are emphatic to their experiences and aspirations.

5.6 Education and career aspirations

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 and enjoy greater interaction with the students at the college beyond the chapel services and cultural activities that they occasionally joined them for. Claude describes the daily regiment in his home in terms of his studies as follows:

My sister and I get up at around 9 and we do the basics - like bathing. Then my sister and I do our homework together. If it is for a test we get up at 7 to study but if it is for an exam we get up earlier. I have been the top learner. My friend Daniel comes second and my sister comes third. He even comes to visit me and I go to visit him. We can spend three hours on the playground revising our work and then we can play. My sister revises with her friends.

Only a few children mentioned utilizing their time at home studying. Some students indicated that they tried coming to school slightly earlier so that they could meet with their friends to revise their work. A few came slightly early to use the library books – which at this stage they can only be used at the Refugee Bridging Program library. In yet another example of meso-systematic collaboration in promoting an ethics of hospitality, the library comprised books that had been donated by organizations in the vicinity.

The leader of the *Radical Girls* had won a musical competition. On interviewing her father, Gilead, who was at the time of conducting the interview, an unemployed teacher, 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 considered 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 professional careers that ranged from becoming famous movie stars to being 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 from chronic illness.

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; and they could prevent these from recurring. Robert who had watched his family decimated through war and political unrest wanted to be a lawyer by day so that he could fight against inhumanity; and he wanted to be a doctor by night. He felt helpless that he could not save his grandmother who succumbed to illness.

Despite the uncertainty of their immediate and long term futures, the children's cultural engagement and career aspirations bolsters Wilson's [3] call to respond to refugees beyond the narrow lenses of a rights-based framework; but to recognize and allow their expression 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. For the children, it did not matter where they stayed; of importance to them was being accepted, recognized; and treated with respect and dignity.

6 CONCLUSION

The article commenced with the contention that responding to refugees within the confines of a rights-based framework dehumanizes one of the most vulnerable and marginalized peoples of concern. Drawing on deconstructionist theories of hospitality it argued that subscription to and enacting an ethics of hospitality has the potential to transform abstract, legal, contractual arrangements of protection into meaningful relationships concerned with wellbeing, compassion, grace, mercy, generosity, opportunities for development and fulfillment. In so doing it redefines the relationship between the state ('host') and refugees ('guest') thereby rescuing it from an oppositional dialectic to one that is mutually beneficial, mutually reinforcing and mutually obligatory. Furthermore, subscription to an ethics of hospitality expands the referential circle to allow for protection to incorporate relevant actors from diverse sectors. Thus, caring for, protecting and collaborating with refugees does not relegate and reduce responsibility to the state; but gives credence to an integrated suite of bio-ecological systems as elucidated by Bronfenbrenner, that include intergovernmental organizations, NGOs, multinational corporations, faith-based organizations, the individuals themselves collaborating and contributing in concert to the process and provision of protection. The Refugee Bridging Program under the auspices of Mercy College is exemplary in this regard. Through its 'inreach' initiative and the extensive network of compassionate and caring individuals and institutions, both nationally and internationally, it promotes the well being of refugee children by ensuring that they are not deprived the basic rights to education because they do not have legal documents. The children's participation in the program grants them the opportunity to also establish social networks across diverse language, ethnic and national divisions. In doing so, for the most part, they are able to appreciate that they are part of a greater humanity endowed with valuable skills, talents and can legitimately and confidently envision a just society. In their expression 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. It stressed the urgency of Wilson's [3] call that protecting refugees needs to shift from being a negative duty to a positive requirement to defend, and to make displaced people feel welcomed, enabled and supported. The children's resilience needs to be met with respect and commendation.

REFERENCES

- [1] Bronfenbrenner, U. 2005. Making human beings human: Bio-ecological perspectives on human development. (Ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- [2] Langmead, R. Refugees as Guests and Hosts: Towards a Theology of Mission Amongst Refugees and Asylum Seekers. Paper presented at International Association for Mission Studies (IAMS) Conference, Toronto, 15–20 August 2012.
- [3] Wilson, E.K. Protecting the unprotected: reconceptualising refugee protection through the notion of hospitality. *Local-Global*. 2010. pp. 100-122.

- [4] Pineda, A. M. 1997. 'Hospitality.' In *Practicing Our Faith: A Way of Life for a Searching People*. Ed. Dorothy C Bass. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. pp. 29–42.
- [5] Sutherland, A. 2006. *I Was a Stranger: A Christian Theology of Hospitality*. Nashville: Abingdon.
- [6] Derrida, J. 2001. *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*. London: Routledge.
- [7] Kanu, Y. Educational Needs and Barriers for African Refugee Students in Manitoba. *Canadian Journal of Education*. 31, 4 (2008): 915-940.
- [8] Perumal, J.C. "Reading and Creating Critically Leaderful Schools That Make a Difference: The Post-Apartheid South Africa Case." *International Journal of Leadership in Education*. 2009. 12(1). 35–49.
- [9] Perumal, J.C *Pedagogy of refuge: education in a time of dispossession*. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 2013 Vol. 16, No. 5, 673–695.
- [10] Ager, A. 2001. *Discussion Guide 3: Responding to the Psychosocial Needs of Refugees*. *Refugee Experience-Psychosocial Training Module*. Rev. ed. Oxford: Refugee Studies Centre.
- [11] Hlatshwayo, M. & Vally, S. 2013. Violence, resilience and solidarity: The rights to education for child migrants in South Africa. *School Psychology International*. pp.1-14.
- [12] Hemson, C. 2011. Fresh grounds: African migrants in a South African primary school. *Southern African Review of Education*, 17: 65-85.