The Panacea and Perfidy of Cross Racial Foster Care on Children Living in Cross Racial Foster (CRF) Care Placements: Implications for Children's Needs and Rights

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ABSTRACT Internationally, regionally and in various national contexts, cross-racial foster care (CRFC) placement has been receiving wide debates and discourses with regards to its relevance and effectiveness as an option of custody for children in need of care and protection. The aim of this paper is, through a review of literature methodology, to discuss and debate the panacea and perfidy of the CRFC placements in the contemporary South African context with unrelenting burgeoning cases of orphans and vulnerable children in need of alternative care. The following aspects of CRFC were considered beneficial or a panacea: They offer vulnerable children (orphans) an opportunity for a second alternative care; a forum of ensuring vulnerable children get their basic needs such as food and shelter; offers an opportunity for acculturation to take roots. Contrastingly, the following aspects were considered undesirable or perfidious: possible loss of children's identity; discrimination and prejudice; loss of natural attachment; and challenges of adjusting to a new racial milieu. The paper is theoretically premised on the Systems theory. The paper recommends: training of cross racial foster care parents; as well as having the Department of Social Development to launch strong awareness campaigns to make the public understand the importance of CRFC placements in the country.

INTRODUCTION

Since the early 1991s, the South Africa's cross racial foster care (CRFC) population has gained much impetus following the legalisation of the care and protection of children across racial lines (Snyder 2012). Factors contributing to this trend include the desire by the South Africa to create a more color-blind society that was illegitimate during the apartheid era; an excess of entrances into foster care as compared to exits; and the impact of HIV/ AIDS, poverty, family violence and substance abuse (Banisky 2005; UNAIDS 2012; Moon 2004). Vast literature provides an array of arguments on both the panacea and perfidy of CRFC on children living in cross racial foster care placements. Further, some scholars are of the opinion that placing children in CRFC offers a second best alternative home to children in need of care and protection (Freeman and Nkomo 2006). In addition, some scholars who are at par with Maslow's hierarchy of human needs posit that CRFC warrants children of rudimentary needs such as food, shelter and education (Roby and Shaw 2006; Espinosa 2010). However, others argue that CRFC placements robs children off vital things such as control over their own destiny, control over their identity, maintenance of attachment, only to cite a few examples (Thiele 2005). In response to this quagmire, the question which therefore arises is whether CRFC is the paramount remedy to the crisis of child care and protection within the realm of care and protection of children in South Africa. Therefore, this paper through an analysis of literature, seeks to confer and treatise on the panacea and perfidy of cross racial foster care (CRFC) on children living in CRFC placements in South Africa. In addition, the researchers have suggested the following as the way forward: advocating for interracial foster care placements, training cross racial foster care parents on how best to respond to the needs of the children under their custody; and raising awareness of CRFC as a form of child care that seeks to enhance a more color-blind South Africa as opposed to racial segregation that was well built during the apartheid era.

Problem Statement

As a result of the increase in the number of children in need of care and protection especially among the Black race as opposed to the ab-

sence of availability of same race child custody, South Africa just like many other countries of the developing world takes action in an attempt to respond to the problem (Freeman and Nkomo 2006). Henceforth, legalising the care of children across racial lines is vital as it gives much impetus to the practice of cross racial foster care. Nevertheless, review of literature indicates that there are mixed views and debates about the suitability of cross racial foster care placements as a form of care and protection for children in need of custody. However, the researchers contend that it is important to empirically explore the panacea as well as the perfidy of cross racial foster care on children living in cross racial foster placements. The researchers have also considered it imperative to provide recommendations with the hope of coming up with credible and feasibly viable solutions to the quandary of cross racial foster care placements in South Africa.

Operational Definition

Panacea

While the meaning of panacea is the solution to all maladies, or remedy to all challenges, in this paper, the term means a desirable or a beneficial state of affairs.

Perfidy

While in actual sense, the word perfidy means treachery, trickery, or deceit, it is in this paper operationalized to mean an undesirable or detrimental state of affairs

Cross Racial Foster Care

In this paper, the term cross racial foster care refers to statutory placements of a temporary nature made in terms of the Children's Act 38 of 2005 and/or 41 of 2007 in which the child(ren) being placed is of a race different from that of the parent given custody of the child in terms of the said Acts.

Child

The general definition of a child under the South African constitution is a person under the age of 18. However, this study will also accommodate section 176 of the Children's Act 38

of 2005 which states that a person may, for academic reasons, remain in foster care beyond the age of 18 and yet not above the age of 21. Thus, persons who still remain in foster care older than 18 and younger than 21 will be defined as children in this study.

Foster Care

This refers to a substitute care for a planned period of time for a child when his own family cannot provide or care for a temporary o extended period of time. In South Africa, this refers to a statutory arrangement made in terms of the Children's Act 38 of 2005 and/or 41 of 2007 for the custody of a child in need of care and protection when the immediate family custody fails.

Race

The concept race refers to a local geographical or universal human population distinguished as a more or less discrete group by innately transmitted physical characteristics.

Child in Need of Care and Protection

In this paper, this refers to a child who does not have a home or shelter and no means to obtain such an abode.

Diversity

In this paper, the term diversity refers to the inclusion, welcome and support of individuals from all cultural and ethnic backgrounds.

Acculturation

In this paper, acculturation refers to a process in which members of one cultural group adopt the beliefs and behaviors of another group.

Culture

In this paper, culture refers to the sum of total of the learned behavior of a group of people that are usually deemed to be the custom of that people and are passed on from generation to generation.

METHODOLOGY

The paper has used eclectic sources such as journals, government publications and intuitive and experiences of the researchers in the field of child care and protection.

OBSERVATIONS AND DISCUSSION

The Panacea of Cross Racial Foster Care Placements of Children Living in Cross Racial Foster Care Homes

Provision of a Second Home for Children

It is these researchers' view that the cross racial foster care (CRFC) placements offer a second best alternative home to children in need of care and protection (Colleen Butler-Sweet 2011). This notion is in same line with the Bill of Rights Subsection 28(1) of the Constitution which stipulates that: 'Every child has the right ... (b) to family care or parental care or to appropriate alternative care when removed from the family environment; (c) to basic nutrition, shelter, basic health care services and social services; (d) to be protected from maltreatment, neglect, abuse or degradation (Republic of South Africa 2006; The Presidency Report 2001; Banisky 2005; Zaal 1992). Since child care and protection issues form a pivotal outcry by the United Conventions on the Rights of Children (1989) at a global level, the practice of CRFC in South Africa, is topical and beneficial. This also is a panacea in that it eliminates the potential of having children living in the streets as this will also evoke another psycho-social quandary within the child welfare system of South Africa. This also ensures the children with a sense of belonging.

Continuity in the Provision of Basic Needs

CRFC placements are believed to offer conducive and desirable home environment in which children in need of care and protection do not just enjoy being in a home environment, but can also offer these children basic needs such as food, clothing and affection (Maguire 2002; Espinosa 2010). This provision is a panacea in that noble child care has been believed to improve the academic success and life adjustments of children living in undesirable living circumstanc-es backed up by abject poverty (Espinosa 2010). Children living in CRFC placements, therefore, have the advantage of being in continual reception of basic needs. Although this may be subjective, perhaps the reasons advanced by these researchers is that most foster parents who take children who are not of their race are usually adequately educated people, people who embrace cultural diversity, and usually people of modest socio-economic backgrounds (Kang'ethe 2013a; Afolayan 2004).

Acculturation

It is noteworthy to mention that, as a public policy, cross racial placements open more prospects for a colour blind South Africa along the lines of racial integration since they represent unification of different races (Dubinsky 2007). Furthermore, they provide opportunities for children to learn different cultures that are more vital for their social interaction within the present day atmosphere of globalisation (Kang'ethe 2014). Conceptually, acculturation is a process in which people of one cultural group embraces the culture of another group. This usually entails exchanging practices, beliefs, behaviors, religions, norms and conventions of a group with another. It is a natural phenomenon of assuming cohesiveness and acceptance of erstwhile two divergent groups. It is also a process of embracing cultural diversity (Afolayan 2004; Kang'ethe 2013a). Probably the unfortunate aspect of acculturation is the fact that it is usually the disadvantaged group, or the minority group that adopts the cultures, values, religions, thinking and attitudes of the dominant group. However, acculturation is supposed to be reciprocal in which both parties learn from each other. In the event that each group exchanges its values and aspirations, acculturation forms a strong platform to forge diversity, and dilution of some sectarian and retrogressive cultures. It could be a panacea in a country such as South Africa to address the phenomenon of vices such as xenophobia which poses a national, regional and international concern (Kang'ethe and Duma 2013). However, acculturation may also see different parties, either the adopted children and the foster parents easily accepting and exchanging languages. The phenomenon of people becoming multilingual is also a pivotal axis of assuming and embracing integration, regionalism and globalization (Kang'ethe 2014).

The Peffidy of Cross Racial Foster Care Placements of Children Living in Cross Racial Foster Care Homes

Loss of Control over One's Identity

To say the least, an individual's personality is never complete without a succinct identity. Perhaps this is why the adolescents at their wee hours of teenage years are aggressive in the pursuit of their identity (Erikson 1968; Freud 1964; Maguire 2002). According to Szabo and Ritchken (2002), one possible challenge in the discourse of CRFC is that the children will have a confused sense of identity. This arises when multiple definitions of self comes into conflict and dictate competing, incompatible courses of action which often results in passivity, guilt and a feeling of being a traitor (Roby and Shaw 2006; Colleen Butler-Sweet 2011). Accordingly, children who are cross racially fostered may have special challenges around developing a strong racial identity due to the fact that a great deal of self-image is shaped by the way in which one preserves his or her own heritage and how one perceives societal views about heritage (Thiele 2005). Thus, this matter is a challenge especially in a country like South Africa in which the views of race and ethnicity have been shaped by the racial segregation during the apartheid era (Roby and Shaw 2006; Colleen Butler-Sweet 2011). Furthermore, Roby and Shaw (2006) mentioned that any disturbance in the development of self-identity leads to jeopardy in the development of self-esteem and self-confidence. As such, the child develops what is known as an identity crisis and this is believed to have adverse impacts along the child's life (Freud 1964; Eriksson 1968; Maguire 2002)

Lack of Support on Racialisation and Racial Consciousness

According to Thiele (2005), one of the most notable challenges with regards to CRFC placements occurs when the foster parents disregard the importance of race. Without a family and community sensitive to these issues and able to facilitate a healthy transition, a racialized child could become confused about their identity (Thiele 2005). Racialisation and racial consciousness are highlighted as being of major significance here. Racialisation is a "process by which understandings of race are used to classify individuals or groups of people as well as an important factor in the reproduction of patterns of power and inequality within society (Thiele 2005). Accordingly, black children placed in cross racial white foster family are likely to develop a sense of imagined inferiority in comparison to the white family members whose social and economic ranking has been regarded as superior and privileged than that one of blacks. The child, therefore, may socially and intellectually feel dwarfed and this is going to reflect in the whole of its life. This is an unfortunate state of child development. It does not allow a child to optimally develop intellectually, socially, culturally, or otherwise (Maguire 2002).

Discrimination and Prejudice

Discrimination and prejudice against the children in cross racial foster care might be judged as more unfavorable (Dubinsky 2007; Thiele 2005). Prejudice in the cross racial foster family might include any preconceived judgments and unreasonable attitude by family members towards the foster child from a different race (Dubinsky 2007; Stone 1970). Sometimes, it may not be a conscious effort, but an unconscious one. It may also be perpetrated by the children of the foster parents without the knowledge of their parents. An example of prejudice is when a black child is always accused of stealing in a family because of the preconceived negative beliefs that blacks are not trustworthy. All the above mentioned factors are enormous challenges to the child's social and cognitive development as he/she is most likely to view this as unfair treatment in relation to other members of the cross racial family. The phenomenon is likely to impact negatively on the child's socialization and development (Maguire 2002; Piaget 1990).

Unintentional Racism

Racism is a widespread but destabilizing aspect in the cross racial foster care placements. Race refers to a person's physical appearance, such as skin color, eye color and hair color (Moos and Mwaba 2007). Racism is the belief that a particular race is superior or inferior to another, that a person's social and moral traits are predetermined by his or her inborn biological characteristics. Accordingly, children might undergo some racial attitudes from the family which they are fostered to especially if the family regards other races as inferior to them. According to Hollingsworth (1999) and (Thiele 2005), most of

the children who are placed under cross-racial foster care do suffer from racism from the foster parent themselves. Moos and Mwaba (2007), note that when parents chose to be a family that is different from the child to be fostered, they must confront their own racial biases because everybody seems to carry internalized attitudes about race. According to Hollingsworth (1999), internalized racism refers to stereotypes that are commonly accepted about certain people and this is racism that is often expressed unconsciously to those with whom one interfaces. In addition, racism can come from the natural children of the fostering family and the community members as well. This is so because children placed under cross-racial foster care have their own race, but due to the definition and skin color, they are products of another race. As a result, another challenge is for these children to feel loyal to both races without betraying another one (Hollingsworth 1999).

Loss of Attachment

Incontrovertibly, a child's attachment to its mother is a natural phenomenon that may not be viewed otherwise (McLeod 2007). The need for physical contact with members of one's race becomes imminent and as such the situation of children living away from members of their racial group in CRFC gets the spotlight. However, one major challenge to the children in cross racial foster care is the ability to differentiate and appreciate their own races as well as to understand that of the significant others which often lead to an identity crisis (Thiele 2005; Erikson 1968). Reference is made to the child's cognitive state of belonging to a social group that has a common national or cultural tradition. Thus, when a black child has been fostered into a white family, there develops a challenge of identity crisis, especially if the child has not been properly socialized in his or her own race. Similarly, a white child fostered into a black family inevitably has to face challenges with regards to striking a balance between his/her own race and that one in which he has been fostered in (Hardy 2007).

Challenges in Adjusting to a New Milieu

The phenomenon of adjustment is not an easy process. It has a physical, social, emotional and psychological dimension (Maguire 2002). To this end, Thiele (2005), argued that the United Nations on the Convention of the Rights of the Child Paper 20.3 stipulates that, 'all indigenous children have a fundamental right to their culture, language and apt cultural context'. However, children placed under CRFC placements do experience more difficulties in coping with the immediate demands of the CRFC family culture. This is because many cultures have their own peculiar demands and obligations. For example, a Xhosa male child who is adopted by a CRFC family may still think he needs to undergo circumcision in the bush in accordance to the ethos, principles and obligations of being a real Xhosa man. This is because some of the norms that particular cultures hold have immense social capital that may not be easily wished off (Kang'ethe 2013b). Joseph (1999) noted that children who come from more racialized groups entering into a CRFC family have specific needs related to cultural developments that CRFC parents must support. Contextually, cultural development denotes the manner whereby children procure knowledge imbedded in their birth culture inoder to form behaviors, social skills, and understandings that aid them to succeed in their world (Maguire 2002). The cultural development of cross racially fostered children can be endangered if foster parents are unwilling or unable to address their specific racial or cultural needs. This can pose an immense challenge for both the cross-racial foster parent as well as to the fostered child (Thiele 2005).

Loss of Power over Personal Destiny

Thiele (2005) and Chinyere and Shin (2006) noted that most children placed under cross-racial foster care placements experience challenges in which they lack control or influence in decisions or events of their lives. Many receive little if any information about such new era's arrangements in their lives (Chinyere and Shin 2006).

Theoretical Framework

The Family Systems Theory

This is a theoretical standpoint with proponents such as Moon (2004) who subscribe to a systems approach in an attempt to understand how families function. This theory is imperative in this paper as it addresses itself to the effects of cross racial foster placements on the family system which also impacts on the total well-being of the fostered children. The family systems

theory posits that a family is a system which functions as one whole, yet within the larger sphere of other systems such as the society. This perspective brings into view the possible effects cross racial foster placements have even on the society since it is in constant interaction with the family. The system also brings important aspects of family and societal boundaries as well as systems and subsystems which render useful explanations on the perceptions, influence and roles of family members as well as that of the wider society which are in constant interaction with the family system (Moon 2004). The family systems theory mentions boundaries in terms of inter- familial as well as external boundaries of the family and other systems. Within the family, the explanation of boundaries in the systems theory will serve to help in the analysis of the perceptions and experiences of children placed here since how they are treated and what they experience has much to do with the boundary system within the family. Outside the family, boundaries may help in the analysis of information regarding the influence of society in facilitating adjustment of the child. Here, this influence will be analysed in terms of how open and/ or closed the family system is and what variations exist between families with closed boundaries and those with open boundaries.

The Way Forward

Training Cross Racial Foster Care Parents

Ongoing training for foster parents would be central in equipping racial foster care parents in meeting the special needs of the cross racially fostered children Furthermore, recruiting foster parents, especially more educated persons from the higher socio-economic groups may be of enormous benefits within the care of children across racial lines.

Alternative Care Option

In response to the perfidy of CRFC placements, the researchers noted that there is a great need to consider other means of care and protection such as adoption. According to the researchers, adoption is regarded as an ideal alternative form of care for children in need of care and protection, since it provides a state of permanency and stability.

Raising Awareness for Interracial Child Custody

Professionals within the care and protection of children as well as public do not support a practice of placing children in racially similar homes deeming it to be in coherent with the child's best interest. This comes into play as a way of preserving the cross racially fostered child's cultural heritage and minimizing cultural discontinuity and ethnic identity issues. However, with the dynamics of ever burgeoning cases of the orphans and vulnerable children especially due to phenomena such as HIV/AIDS, road carnage, murder etc., this mind-set needs to be attacked from the middle left and right. People need to be educated that cross radical family care can be a panacea if only they can accept to undergo a paradigm shift to change their norms, thinking, ideologies and stereotypes surrounding the concept of CRFC. The Department of Social Development needs to carry out awareness campaign sessions that will expedite the change of the mind-set against CRFC. Incontrovertibly, they in tandem with other forms of adoption form alternatives to care.

Improving the Responsiveness of CRC (Conventions on the Rights of Children)

CRFC parents need assistance on how best to effectively respond to the special needs of children in their care. It is critical that they are equipped with knowledge package and awareness of diversity and be cultural sensitive to children. They also need to protect the fostered children from harassment from their own children who may see the fostered child as an intruder to spoil their milieu. In addition, cross racial foster parents need concrete therapeutic support that supports them to have the enthusiasm needed to respond to the needs of cross racial foster care children.

CONCLUSION

Irrefutably, this paper has explored the perfidy of CRFC placements to children living in CRFC families with special reference to orphans in the South African context. In addition, attention was also given to the panacea of the aforementioned practice. It has been established that CRFC is not widely understood or known as other forms

of adoption. It is therefore critical that more awareness campaigns be launched by the Department of Social Development for a wider spectrum of the country to adequately understand the CRFC better. Lastly, the paper emphasizes on the need for training of cross racial foster care parents; lobby for alternative care such as adoption option which offers more permanency and stability; improving the responsiveness of CRC and raising awareness for interracial child custody.

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