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Guests and hosts: migrants' experiences of in (hospitality) during the covid-19 pandemic in South Africa

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ABSTRACT

The Covid-19 pandemic provides a heuristic which reveals the dynamic hospitality relationship between migrants in South Africa as guests, and their host(s). Using hospitality as a conceptual framework, this study explores how migrants understand the South African government's response to the Covid-19 pandemic, with a focus on the Social Relief of Distress (SRD) grant. Based on qualitative methodology and the use of thematic, narrative and discourse analysis, three main findings emerge: Firstly, the South African government is not a hegemonic host; secondly, migrants are heterogenous guests; and thirdly, migrants as guests are powerful. Migrants understand the government's decision to offer partial hospitality to certain foreigners through the SRD grant in terms of their categorizations as 'foreigner.' This deepens existing divides based on nationality. Significantly, what migrants experience as guests, in relation to what they think they deserve from their host(s) is contested. Despite the South African government's hospitality or hostility, migrants have the agency to choose how to respond. Ultimately hospitality is not necessarily a panacea, nor is it always a virtue.