

# Relevance of International Migration Theories to African Migration: Evidence from Lesotho

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### Abstract

The conditions that initiate international movements of workers across borders may be quite different from those that perpetuate it across time and space. Thus, international migration theories may be dichotomized into theories of initiation (the neoclassical, new economics of migration, world systems, and, to some extent, the dual labour market theories) and theories of perpetuation (the network, institutionalist, cumulative causation, and migration systems theories). This paper will argue that the neoclassical and the new economics of migration theories of international migration form the base on which many of the other theories stands. A juxtaposition of the insights from these theories (on the driving force behind international migration, the migration decision making process, the choice of destination, the significance of psychic cost, remittance flows and decisions about their use, etc.) and the evidence from the migration experience of men from Lesotho – “Africa’s number one migration country” – to the mines in South Africa is expected to provide guidance for migration policy formulation in Africa.

Key words: neoclassical migration theory, new economics of migration, Lesotho’s experience

JEL Classification: E13, F22, F29, J61, R23

## 1. Introduction

International migration theories, formulated from the experience of industrialized nations, are usually couched in terms that suggest their application to all cross-border movements of workers. In terms of the proportion of the labour force involved and the period over which it has occurred, the migration of men from Lesotho for work in the South African mines is unprecedented in Africa. In view of this experience, Lesotho household migration decision making processes may be used to investigate the relevance of the dominant international migration theories to African migration, and therefore their use in formulating migration policy. If these theories are truly international, the evidence from Lesotho should be in conformance with them. This article will pitch Lesotho's migration experience – the migration decision-making process and the forces that in the view of migrant households drive migration – against the dominant theories, in search of some guidance for migration policy formulation in Lesotho, and perhaps in Africa.

The paper uses primary data generated from a survey of households conducted during December 2006 and January 2007 – and is still the latest available (Mensah, 2010). Though 208 households were interviewed in the rural areas of the four western lowland districts and one mountain district of Lesotho, complete information was available for the 150 households reported on. Because of the focus on three groups of households – former migrant, current migrant and non-migrant households – a combination of stratified and systematic sampling with a random start would have been ideal for data collection. However, the nonexistence of a sampling frame for rural Lesotho ruled out this design, and so a combination of purposive sampling, cluster sampling and systematic sampling with a random start was used.

## 2. Lesotho's Economy and the Migrant Labour System

Lesotho, a once prosperous and food-secured nation, lost most of its arable land to European settlers and was transformed in only a few decades into a labour reserve – a country of male migrant workers who service the South African mining industry (Omer-Cooper, 1987: 60, 88, 97; Bardill and Cobb, 1988: 12, 13). With the passage of time, labour market dynamics,

especially unemployment in land-scarce rural areas, sustained the flow of Basotho men into the mines in South Africa. This migration soon became an important employment outlet for especially rural men from Lesotho; and of equal importance for the health of the economy in general and for the welfare of migrant households in particular was the counter flow of remittances. In fact, Crush and James (1995: 222) have observed that until recently Lesotho used to be “the largest foreign supplier of mine labour” – a position that was held at different times by Mozambique and Malawi (Crush, 2000). This section presents the Basotho migration decision-making process, which will later be compared with the received theories of international migration.

Lesotho’s mine migration experience has two distinguishing features: it is predominantly a migration of unskilled labour, and since the early 1970s TEBA has been handling most of the issues that international migrants usually contend with – choice of employer and destination, and covering moving cost and settling down cost. Migration is said to be “selective” in the sense that “those who move [out] are not a representative sample of the people who live in the places they leave. Migrants [in rural-urban and South-North migration] tend to be young and well-educated relative to those they leave behind – *although the markedness of this [i.e. the extent to which this is the case] varies between countries*”. (Sinclair, 1978: 69 – emphasis added) In Lesotho’s case the selection is negative; it is those at the tail end of the income distribution – the uneducated (though generally literate in Sesotho and sometimes, though to a much lesser extent, in English) and unskilled – who have demonstrated a higher tendency to migrate to the mines in South Africa because of the nature of the work.

Two pertinent and interrelated features of the internal and external aspects of Lesotho’s economy deserve mention. The first is the remittance flow of the large number of Basotho men who work in the mines in South Africa. This flow of income from abroad has consistently made GDP much less than GNP (Central Bank of Lesotho, 2010: ...). The second is the perennial problem of trade deficit. Mensah (2010: 63 – 66) has demonstrated the seriousness and persistence of this problem, which the remittances of Basotho migrant mine workers contribute towards addressing. Dwindling migrant numbers in the last two decades could therefore make the management of this chronic deficit more difficult; even though exports have recently been rising, the negative trade gap has also been widening

(Central Bank of Lesotho, 2011 **Merchandise trade**). This puts pressure on Lesotho's foreign reserves. In this regard, it has been noted in connection with Lesotho's monetary policy that "within the context of the Common Monetary Area, price stability is attained by maintaining an adequate level of reserves which underwrite the fixed exchange rate system and reduce domestically-generated inflation". (Government of Lesotho, 2004: 13) Thus the position of Lesotho's foreign reserves, a significant part of which comes from migrant remittances, is critical to the management of the economy.

### 3. International Migration Theories

The conditions that initiate international movements of workers across borders may be quite different from those that perpetuate it across time and space. Thus international migration theories may be dichotomized into theories of initiation (the neoclassical, new economics of migration, world systems, and, to some extent, the dual labour market theories) and theories of perpetuation (the network, institutionalist, cumulative causation, and migration systems theories). Also, the determinants of international migration flows that the theories identify usually require consideration of demand-side characteristics in receiving countries and supply-side characteristics in sending countries (Gregory, 1991). The position taken here is that the neoclassical and the new economics of migration theories of international migration form the base on which many of the other theories stands. Placing the insights from these theories in juxtaposition with the experience from Lesotho – "Africa's number one migration country" (Adepoju, 1991) – is expected to provide some guidance for migration policy formulation in Africa.

Rossi (1980: 119) has observed that if migration is seen as a process, then "desires and behaviour become stages in a connected sequence". The question of the initiator of the stages in the migration decision-making process is one of the areas of dissent between the new economics of migration and the neoclassical migration theories. While neoclassical theory considers the individual as the initiator of the decision, and information on costs and returns (and its processing) as the key ingredients in the migration decision making process, the new economics of migration theorists view the household collectively as the decision making unit, and information on the position of the household vis-à-vis other households in the local

income distribution (i.e. household relative deprivation) as a key factor that is considered ahead of net expected returns in the decision to send a member of the household to participate in a foreign labour market.

#### 4 Lesotho's Migration Decision-making Process

This section presents and teases out the migration decision making process in Lesotho from the perception of the respondents. It should be mentioned that analysis of migration decision making can be complex because from the perspective of the new economics of migration theorists, the observable variable (migration by individuals) may not necessarily be the variable to focus on or the accountable variable (the household or family) in analysing migration decisions. The focus here, however, is how migrant household representatives have experienced the migration decision making process. And the relevance of the received theories to understanding Basotho mine migration is discussed in the light of the information provided by respondents.

The logic of the migration decision making process suggests that any discussion of the process should begin with the identification of the initiator of the process, the person(s) that the new economics of migration theorists refer to as “the variable to focus on” in analysing migration decisions. On the mine migration process in Lesotho, Eldredge (1993:183) refers to individual homesteads making “choices concerning participation in migrant labor” and gain to “reason for individual homesteads to allow or encourage members from their family to migrate abroad for work”. These remarks suggest, along the lines of the new economics of migration thinking, that migration decisions are made more by households or homesteads as a collective than by the individual. Table 1 reports the views of former- and current-migrant household representatives on who bears the responsibility to make the migration decision in the Basotho mine migration process; non-migrant households are excluded because they are deemed not to have engaged in the migration decision-making process<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> It is possible that some non-migrant households did engage in migration decision making, but that no member of the household could find work in South Africa, or that they decided against migration. But since these options were not explored in the survey, it is assumed that they did not, hence their exclusion from the analysis here.

Table 1: Making the decision to migrate

Migration decision maker	No.	%
Household head	28	23.5
All adults in household	10	8.4
Nuclear family	3	2.5
Individual	78	65.6
Total	119	100.0

Source: Computed from December 2006-January 2007 Household Survey

The evidence in Table 1 suggests that to a large extent the neoclassical view of the initiator of migration decisions is what prevails in Basotho mine migration: 65.6% of respondents view the individual as the decision maker on mine migration; and almost 32% give it to either the household head or the adult members in the household. In a paternalistic society like Lesotho, one would expect the household head to have a big say in decisions that affect the welfare of the household – such as on mine migration – which would be in line with the thinking of the new economics of migration school. But, on the surface, this view seems not to have strong support from the evidence available. Some young migrants who still live in their parents' home still maintain that the individual is the decision maker in mine migration. (Q011: 1.3.2IX, 2.4) It is noted, though, that the prospective migrant (i.e. the individual) who is reported to be the main decision maker on mine migration is also, often, the household head. So, in one sense, the controversy between the neoclassical theorists and the new economics of migration theorists on the decision maker seems not to have been unequivocally resolved by the evidence from Lesotho; but, in another, it could be seen as having been resolved since both schools correctly identified the decision maker in the migration to the South African mines – the *individual*, who also happens to be the *household head* in most cases. The fact that some respondents attributed the migration decision to the nuclear family is also noted as an indication that Basotho society, even in rural areas, is changing – gradually becoming more inclusive in decision making on important household/family issues, like migration.

A Marxist critique of theories of migration that analyse the decision to migrate on the basis of costs and benefits to the migrant and his/her household is that the individual's decision to

migrate (or a household's decision to send out a migrant) is not based on free choice because it "takes place in a context where structural constraints limits the degree of choice individuals or groups possess in the matter". (Satzewich, 1991: 37) This critique seems to draw strength from the world systems theory of international migration. When applied to Lesotho, the argument of this critique may be presented as follows: the individuals who are perceived as making the decision to migrate (or households seen to decide to send out a migrant worker) is/are not exercising their free choice in the matter because they have been forced into that decision making situation by the expansion of the capitalist mode of production to the vicinity of Lesotho. The complex constraining factor in this case is this: if the expansion of the capitalist mode of production did not make the Dutch East Indian Company station Dutch farmers at the Cape to restock ships en route to India or Europe, and if the same expansion did not bring the British to take over control of the Cape from the Dutch, there would not have been trek boers and voortrekkers; and if the expansion of the capitalist mode of production did not bring the land-hungry trek boers and voortrekkers to the neighbourhood of Lesotho, the country would not have been reduced to "a narrow strip of [arable] land" and rural Lesotho may not have been reduced to poverty; also, if the descendants of the trek boers and voortrekkers and other Europeans had not expanded the capitalist mode of production into South Africa, there would not have been a capitalist mining industry in South Africa that would require labour from rural Lesotho, and so individuals and households would not have had to make mine migration decisions. Individuals and/or households that have to make mine migration decisions have therefore been forced into that decision situation.

The reasoning above is obviously a misapplication of the principle of universal causation – the view that every event is the sequel to, or results from, some previous event, which having occurred makes the other certain to take place (Loyal and Barnes, 2001) – that reaches the wrong conclusion that because the circumstances under which we make decisions for our actions are effects of causes from the remote past we have no control over our actions. This conclusion will also mean that we should not be held accountable for our actions because they are the results of factors over which we have no control – it is all the fault of Adam and Eve and the snake! But this is not the way human actions are generally perceived. We take credit for decisions and actions that bring rewards, and we are held accountable for decisions and actions that hurt others. Therefore, history notwithstanding, rural Basotho men have had

to make choices on mine migration: stay and work at home and eke out a meagre living from land that is either dwindling in size because of erosion or losing fertility, or migrate for work in the mines and earn a slightly higher income, while wife and children cultivate the land. Many in more recent times had chosen, of their own free will, to migrate for work in the South African mines, and others have chosen to stay at home – given the same constraint of history. Their decision is therefore considered ‘free choice’ in this study.

The neoclassical model can be used to address the self-selection question in migration – that, as demonstrated by Borjas (1987, 2000) and Yashiv (2003), though those with human capital attributes that generate higher NERs are more likely to migrate, “very low returns to observable skills in the foreign economy” will exclude skilled workers. Because apartheid job reservation meant low remuneration for skilled black workers, and the mine work for which Basotho men were recruited involved physical exertion rather than mental or natural ability, for which reason the majority of Basotho mine migrants usually have below-average education and skills, the migrant labour system generally involved *negative selection*. The evidence from migrant households in the survey conducted for this study confirms this assertion. Only 46% of current migrants in the survey claimed to have had some education (with a standard deviation of 0.54), though most of them had some primary schooling. Their average schooling is 7.2 years, with a standard deviation of 4.1; and the most educated person in the sample had 18 years of schooling. 82% of all mine migrants – former and current – admit that educational attainment and/or acquired skills were not a requirement for their recruitment. It is, however, noted that as mine wages improved, especially from the late 1980s, many educated and skilled workers left their work in Lesotho for unskilled work in the mines: there were construction workers, carpenters, builders, clerks, electricians, and even some teachers. (Q003, Q021, Q022, Q033, Q147, Q081: 3.1IV, 3.4 respectively) Even a university graduate with a B. Ed. degree went to the mines as a labourer straight from his studies. (Q095: 1.3.2V, 3.1IV, 3.4) One of the migrant mine workers provided this explanation for educated Basotho working as labourers in the mines: “because unskilled work in the mines mainly required physical exertion, anyone big enough and strong enough could do it, without regard to educational qualifications” – if he likes the wages. (Q148: 3.4) But those who respond to advertisements that specify educational qualifications got “high profile jobs” in the mines. (Q105, Q140, Q149: 3.1IV, 3.4)

Unlike South-North migration which tends to be permanent, Basotho mine migration in the early days was circular: migrants went back and forth to the mines on various contracts, on the basis of need. In more recent times, return migration is becoming the norm. Mensah and Naidoo (2013) provide evidence that Basotho migrant mine workers consider their work as a career and would hold on to it till retirement. And even though mine work is still on contract basis, Basotho migrants are no longer required to return to Lesotho before applying for renewal of their contracts; the situation now allows for *in situ* renewal at the end of contracts. Therefore, apart from the usual regular weekly, monthly or quarterly visits, migrants return permanently to Lesotho only when they lose their jobs in the mines and have not attained permanent residence status in South Africa. However, migrants who have permanent residence could make their migration also permanent, and look for work in other sectors of the South African economy should they lose their job in the mines. This also means, that their wives and children can now join them in South Africa permanently. And yet this South-South permanent migration will not generate the complex issues of integration and assimilation of second and subsequent generations from migrants that have become important for host countries in South-North migration: millions of Basotho are already South Africans, the progeny of those who were carved in with the land annexed by white settlers in the 1800s. And there are strong ethnic and linguistic ties between the Peli, Sotho, and Tswana peoples of South Africa. Also SeSotho is one of South Africa's eleven official languages. So Basotho are already integrated and assimilated in South Africa, and therefore neither the South African government nor second and subsequent generations from Basotho mine migrants will be drawn into these issues that have to be addressed in South-North migration.

## 5. Forces driving Basotho mine migration and International Migration Theories

The quest for the determinants of external migration from Lesotho will focus only on supply-side conditions for two reasons. First, the reason for identifying the driving forces in Basotho mine migration is for these forces to be used in designing policy to reduce the urge among Basotho for mine migration, which requires only consideration of supply-side factors. Second, the demand-side conditions are fairly obvious: for decades large quantities of

unskilled labour which the South African labour market could not supply was required by the mining sectors and so the quest for labour stretched through central and east Africa to China. And it is non-market (and possibly politically) induced changes in demand for migrant labour for the mines that have caused the migration shocks, which are the subject of this study. Demand-side conditions are therefore considered to be exogenous in this study.

Some studies on the determinants of migration start with the assumption that income differential is “the key economic variable in the migration decision” (Adams, 1993) – an assumption that could be drawn from both the neoclassical and the new economics of migration theories. This section will not make any such assumptions, but rather use the information given by respondents to identify both the determinants they consider important in Basotho mine migration, which may include income, and the weighting that should be assigned to each. The more important determinants identified will then be among the variables to focus on in suggesting policies to change the mine migration mindset in this era of dwindling job opportunities in the mines. This approach would also provide a simple way of testing the empirical relevance of the forces identified in the theories of international migration in Basotho mine migration.

The variables that respondents identified as important determinants in Basotho mine migration and the number of respondents that listed them are presented in Table 2 below.<sup>2</sup>

Both the prospects of higher income at destination and specific uses of income are listed by respondents, as shown in Table 2, as important determinants of mine migration. To some extent, this would support the neoclassical focus on expected net returns as the dominant determinant of international migration flows. And the “Can’t find jobs in Lesotho” factor also fits into the expected net returns framework. However, the relative deprivation argument of the new economics of migration theorists is also supported by the higher income motivation for migration – higher incomes from migration could generate higher remittance incomes that would reduce the relative deprivation of migrant households. And migration

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<sup>2</sup> Respondents could list more than one factor considered as an important determinant of Basotho mine migration.

with a view to providing children with better education (an important way of increasing future household income, even in the absence of migration) and/or stabilising household source of income (i.e. redistributing household labour to different and uncorrelated labour markets as a buffer against labour market risks) may both be seen as providing some evidence for the new economics of migration view of the determinants of international migration. But the “Be like my friends in the mines” factor, though its weighting is relatively small, more directly links migrating to the mines to reducing relative deprivation, as it suggests that the “friends” in the mines are better off, and opportunities for mine migration could even out the differences. And the “improve financial standing” motivation, like higher expected income, could go either way. So, though the Basotho mine migration experience presents features that support aspects of the two main theories of international migration, the evidence in Table 2 seem to lean more heavily towards the neoclassical theory’s positive net expected returns as the main driving force.

Table 2: Motivation for Basotho mine migration

Motivation for mine migration	Number	%
Increase earnings	93	78
Education of children	26	22
Stabilize source of income	19	16
Improve financial standing	16	13
Buy cattle	9	8
Be like my friends in the mines	8	7
Build a house	8	7
Invest in family farm	3	3
Can't find job in Lesotho	20	17
Gain recognition (as a man)	5	4

Source: Computed from December 2006-January 2007 Household Survey

Note 1: There are 119 migrant households in the survey.

Note 2: Percentages do not add to 100 because households may choose more than one motivation

It is, however, noted that the proposition that more relatively deprived households are more likely to send out some members into foreign labour markets as a strategy to improve households’ income distribution position in the local community and thus reduce households’ relative deprivation is not easy to formally establish. The proposition presents relative

deprivation as an important determinant of international migration flows. Stark and Taylor (1989) have argued that rigorous testing of this hypothesis would require “a multi-level statistical model that not only contains the usual individual and household-level predictor variables, but also incorporates the community characteristic of income inequality, or an operational measure of income inequality”. The data requirement presents a serious obstacle in testing this hypothesis as most developing countries do not have income distribution data at community levels. Lesotho does not even have income distribution data at national levels. Because of this paucity of data, discussions of income distribution in Lesotho are often either conducted in terms of the proportions of the labour force in formal employment, in informal employment, and the proportion without regular employment that has to make do with casual work (Sechaba Consultants, 1995), or in terms of sectoral shares of GDP. An indirect approach was therefore adopted in this study to determine the role that relative deprivation plays in fuelling Basotho mine migration.

This approach assumes that the small size and relative coherence of rural communities in Lesotho make it possible for all adults in a village to know each other well enough to be able to place each household in a subjective community income distribution. Respondents were therefore required to locate their households in their subjective local income distribution. Four steps are involved. First, respondents from migrant households are requested to select the situation (from a list of six situations – five economic situations and an “I don’t remember” provision for those who cannot recall) that best represented economic conditions in their households before they had a migrant. This set of situations presents a spectrum of household economic conditions from struggling to cover expenses for basic necessities to ability to provide luxuries. The economic situation of households – given by what households could or could not afford – before members of the households migrated could give an indication of households’ sense of relative deprivation. Second, respondents had to compare the sizes of their house (i.e. the number of rooms in the house) and farmland with those of their neighbours – whether their house has about the same number of rooms as, has fewer or more rooms than, those of their neighbours, and whether their farmland is about the same size as, is smaller or larger in size than, those of their neighbours. A feeling of relative deprivation may be suggested when houses and/or farmlands are deemed to be “smaller than” those of neighbours. Third, they had to place their households’ income in one of the five

quintiles that represent the community's income distribution. Except for households in the first quintile, all other households will be relatively deprived to varying degrees. Fourth, respondents had to indicate whether the family's economic/financial position in the community influenced the decision for some members to migrate; that is, whether, even if only at the subconscious level, household migration decisions were influenced by feelings of relative deprivation. The information from respondents is discussed below.

Table 3 presents the economic situation of households before a member's migration and Table 4 gives their current economic situation. Table 4 is similar in structure to Table 3, except that the "I don't remember" option of the latter logically drops off in the former so that situations 2 through 6 in Table 3 become 1 through 5 in Table 4. Because some Basotho households have had mine migrants for generations, it would have been a surprise if all migrant household representatives remembered the economic situation of their households before they had a migrant. As shown in Table 3 almost a fifth of migrant household representatives could not remember this; many were born into migrant households. Some two thirds of migrant household respondents could remember that before having a migrant their households struggled to meet their basic needs; while most had difficulty with providing food, education and healthcare, some could not afford adequate clothing. And while less than three per cent could afford a TV, none could afford a car or a new house. Though Basotho society was never egalitarian in a utopian sense, the *mafisa* system ensured that abject poverty was minimised. The progressive annexation of Lesotho's land however made it difficult for more and more Basotho households to provide their basic needs. Table 3 shows that some 43 percent of migrant households found it difficult to cover household expenses for basic food, education and health care before a member became a migrant. Though relative deprivation may not be inferred from this because of absence of information on the rest of the community, the low household estimation of their well-being before a member's migration makes a good case for the relative deprivation hypothesis of the new economics of migration.

Table 3: Household economic situation before migration

Situation	Former migrant		Current migrant		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
I don't remember	9	28.1	14	16.1	23	19.3
It was difficult to cover the household expenses for basic food, education and health care	11	34.4	40	46.0	51	42.9
It was manageable to provide basic food, education and health care, but difficult to pay utility bills and buy adequate clothing	6	18.8	22	25.3	28	23.5
Adequate food, clothing and expenses for utility bills were affordable, but not such goods as TV, refrigerator, etc.	6	18.8	8	9.2	14	11.8
Buying TV or refrigerator was affordable, but not a car or a new house	0	0.0	3	3.4	3	2.5
It was affordable to buy a car or a new house	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Total	32	100	87	100	119	100.0

Source: Computed from December 2006-January 2007 Household Survey (Mensah, 2010)

Tables 3 and 4 could also provide some insight into household relative deprivation and the extent to which this was a motivation for the migration of a household member.

Table 4: Households' current economic situation

Situation	Non-migrant		Former migrant		Current migrant	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
It was difficult to cover the household expenses for basic food, education and health care	2	6.5	1	3.1	14	16.1
It was manageable to provide basic food, education and health care, but difficult to pay utility bills and buy adequate clothing	14	45.2	6	18.8	12	13.8
Adequate food, clothing and expenses for utility bills were affordable, but not such goods as TV, refrigerator, etc.	6	19.4	9	28.1	20	23
Buying TV or refrigerator was affordable, but not a car or a new house	7	22.6	6	18.8	31	35.6
It was affordable to buy a car or a new house	2	6.5	10	31.3	10	11.5
Total	31	100.2	32	100.1	87	100

Source: Computed from December 2006-January 2007 Household Survey (Mensah, 2010)

The gains from migration become obvious when the economic situations of households before a member's migration in Tables 3 are compared with those after migration in Table 4. Mobility across the border has brought about upwards mobility in the economic situation of migrant households: the proportions in the lower welfare levels have decreased whilst those in the upper levels have increased, with considerable numbers are now in a situation to afford cars and new houses. It is also obvious that proportionately more migrant households are in the higher welfare situations than non-migrant households, which, according to the new economics of migration, would make migration self-perpetuating as a result of feelings of relative deprivation by non-migrant households 'left behind' by migrant households. However, the recorded improvements in households' economic situation before and after a member's migration by themselves do not indicate that a feeling of relative deprivation was the driving force behind household members' migration. A question in that regard was more explicitly posed, and the responses are discussed later in this section.

Table 5: Comparing respondents' house size with houses of neighbours

Comparing rooms	Non-migrant		Former migrant		Current migrant	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Fewer than	12	38.7	16	50.0	30	34.5
Same as	17	54.8	15	46.9	35	40.2
More than	2	6.5	1	3.1	22	25.3
Total	31	100.0	32	100.0	87	100.0

Source: Computed from December 2006-January 2007 Household Survey (Mensah, 2010)

Household members in non-migrant households did not migrate because, according to the new economics of migration, they either did not feel sufficiently relatively deprived or could not afford the cost of migration, or could not find employment as migrants. So proportionately fewer (more) of them should feel that their houses and/or farms are smaller (bigger) than those of their neighbours. The evidence available in Tables 5 and 6 is not conclusive: while it is former migrant households that are most relatively deprived with respect to house size, it is also current migrant households, not non-migrant households, as the relative deprivation hypothesis would predict, that are the least relatively deprived.

Table 6: Comparing respondents' farm size with farms of neighbours'

Comparing farms	Non-migrant		Former migrant		Current migrant	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Fewer than	10	32.3	8	25.0	30	34.5
Same as	17	54.8	23	71.9	48	55.2
More than	4	12.9	1	3.1	9	10.3
Total	31	100.0	32	100.0	87	100.0

Source: Computed from December 2006-January 2007 Household Survey (Mensah, 2010)

It is emphasised that the discussion of income distribution in this section is based on perceptions of household representatives and not on actual income distribution. The evidence from the information on farm size in Table 6 leans much closer to the new economics of migration idea: current migrant households are proportionately the most relatively deprived (possibly because their reliance of remittances has dampened their urge for bigger farms) and non-migrant households are proportionately the most relatively advantaged. However, since a considerable proportion of non-migrant households are in the 'fewer than' group in both Tables 5 and 6, the relative deprivation hypothesis would predict that the migration stream should be swelling up. But the non-market forces responsible for the dwindling opportunities for mine migration would not make it possible for this to be tested, as the downward trend is likely to continue.

Households' position in the community's income distribution is the main indicator used in the literature for determining the relative deprivation or otherwise of households. Table 7 gives the income distribution positions of the two types of migrant households.

Table 7: Households' perceived position in income distribution before migration

Position	Former migrant		Current migrant		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Quintile 1	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Quintile 2	2	6.2	4	4.6	6	5.0
Quintile 3	11	34.4	34	39.1	45	37.8
Quintile 4	12	37.5	32	36.8	44	37.0
Quintile 5	7	21.9	17	19.5	24	20.2
Total	32	100.0	87	100.0	119	100.0

Source: Computed from December 2006-January 2007 Household Survey

Notes on "Position": Quintile 1 represents the top 20% of income earners or, in a cumulative sense, 80-100%; Quintile 2 represents 60-79%; Quintile 3, 40-59%; etc.

In spite of the difference in sample sizes, the before-migration income distributions of the two migrant households are strikingly similar – though former migrant households are slightly more represented in the second quintile, they are also more represented in the lowest quintile; and current migrant households have a slight edge in the middle quintiles. These pre-migration income distribution positions may be explained more by household history – access to land and acquired herd of cattle, etc. – than by differences in the individual members.

Table 8: Current income distribution of households - by migration status

Position	Non-migrant		Former migrant		Current migrant	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Quintile 1	0	0.0	1	3.1	3	3.4
Quintile 2	3	9.7	6	18.8	26	29.9
Quintile 3	22	71.0	20	62.5	48	55.2
Quintile 4	1	3.2	5	15.6	10	11.5
Quintile 5	5	16.1	0	0.0	0	0.0
Total	31	100.0	32	100.0	87	100.0

Source: Computed from December 2006-January 2007 Household Survey

The gains from migration can again be seen in Table 8, which juxtaposes the income distributions of the three types of households for ease of comparison. Current and former migrant households have higher proportional representation in the higher income groups than non-migrant households; and the reverse is true in the lowest income group where only non-migrant households are represented. Neoclassical theorists will argue that the income distribution position of migrant households improved because household member(s) made the rational decision to migrate in response to high net expected returns. And new economics of migration theorists will point to the fact that migration has improved the income distribution position of migrant households and deduce that this will make non-migrant households more relatively deprived, which will induce further migration. But the point has been made above that the forces behind the dwindling opportunities for mine work will not allow this prediction to be tested.

Migrant household representatives were also asked the more direct relative deprivation hypothesis question: did your family’s financial standing in the community have anything to do with the decision for some members of the family to migrate? A predominantly “yes” answers will uphold the position of the new economics of migration theorists; a “no” answer will go counter to their position. The responses from respondents are summarised in Table 9. Household income distribution position was seemingly not uppermost in the minds of household members when they made the decision to migrate. As indicated in Table 2, the majority made the decision to migrate because of concerns for increasing household income; any added utility from the improvements in income distribution positions, shown in Tables 7 and 8, is therefore a bonus. The evidence from Table 9 therefore aligns Basotho motivation for mine migration more closely to the neoclassical explanation.

Table 9: Income distribution position and decision to migrate

Income position before migration ...	No	%
Influenced decision to migrate	18	15.1
Did not influence decision to migrate	101	84.9
Sub-total: migrant households	119	100
Non-migrant households	31	
Total	150	

Source: Computed from December 2006-January 2007 Household Survey

It is generally assumed that, in line with neoclassical thinking, the high incidence of unemployment in Lesotho is a major reason for mine migration because of its effect on net expected returns. Of the 122 former and current migrants in the sample, most of whom are mine workers, 67 (55%) claimed to be unemployed at the time of their migration, which could also mean that some of them were engaged in traditional low-productivity, and therefore low-earning, work; the remaining 45% claimed to have left jobs in Lesotho for the mines. Some in this latter group were gardeners, herd boys, farm workers or farmers and yet considered themselves to be unemployed in line with the traditional view of work, and they would therefore look forward to doing real work in the mines; but others had what would normally be regarded as ‘good work’ in Lesotho: builders, cashiers, drivers, electricians, factory workers, machinists, tailors, and traditional healers. Also, some worked for the flour mills, the Lesotho Highlands Development Authority or even for the Government! This confirms the hunch that many Basotho men consider mine work as the first choice of work. But since such workers who leave ‘good work’ to migrate to the mines would not be considered relatively deprived, given Lesotho’s income levels and living standards, only the neoclassical theory’s positive net expected returns would explain their migration. As one current mine migrant succinctly put it, “I heard that there is relatively higher earnings at the mines than I earned where I worked.” (Q100: 2.5)

For mine migrants, the recruitment and job placement services of TEBA replace a considerable part of the role of migration networks with institutional factors in determining the rate of migration flows to the mines. Because of their effects on migration cost, both network and institutional forces could be subsumed under the neoclassical school. This does not however detract from their significance. TEBA’s services, notwithstanding, there are many Basotho mine migrant workers who were eased into mine work through their own migration networks. (Q029, Q049, Q074, Q126, Q149: 3.1IV, 3.5) In situations where job opportunities are available in several mines, TEBA gives recruited mine workers choice of destination. Mine recruits then choose on the basis of ‘distance from home’ (to reduce to cost of home visits and psychic cost) or ‘presence of family and/or friends’ (to ease the strain in adjusting to a new location and thus reduce psychic cost). (Q100, Q104: 3.3, 3.5) Thus, the opportunity to choose destination, by allowing prospective mine migrants to be drawn by

their migration networks, tends to reduce migration costs and thereby increase the net returns from mine migration. Such behaviour also underscores the importance of migrant networks as a driving force in Basotho mine migration. But for non-mine migrant workers, especially female migrants, networks seem to play a much bigger role in their access to opportunities for migration. (Q112, Q138, Q139; 3.5) Thus, the cost-reducing effects of both institutional factors and migration networks increase expected returns, and, thereby, facilitate migration in line with neoclassical thinking.

TEBA plays the role of an institution that facilitates mine migration from Lesotho, but there are external constraints on its activities, which differ from those on the activities of institutions involved in North-South migration. Empirical evidence is provided here on the extent of TEBA's involvement in Basotho mine migration, and therefore the role of this institutional factor as a driving force in Basotho mine migration. In most migration situations, decisions on choice of destination, job search and mode of transportation to destination all involve acquiring and processing considerable amounts of information – on possible destinations, job opportunities and cost of travel – which do not come cheap. For Basotho mine migrants, all these considerations are usually handled by TEBA, without any direct cost to prospective migrants. For more than 70 per cent of migrants (85 out of 122 migrants – and some of the 122 migrants are not in the mines), decisions on destination, finding work and covering travelling cost were handled by TEBA; 10% of all migrants (including some mine migrants) chose destination, covered their travel cost and found work; and 20% relied on other migrant networks, mainly family members or friends. (Mensah, 2010)

The role of TEBA discussed above shows that, in line with the institutionalist views, TEBA brings order to the flows of mine migrants by ensuring that they proceed smoothly; and this facilitates external migration from Lesotho to the South African mine. In this sense, TEBA serves as a form of social capital provided by employers that prospective migrants can draw upon to gain access to the South African mines. But for the relatively fewer unskilled or semi-skilled Basotho non-mine migrants in South Africa, their migration process involves

going through some of the hassles common in South-North migration: choice of destination, selecting mode of transportation and bearing transport cost, and engaging in job search.

## 6. Conclusion

The neoclassical theory and the new economics of international migration are efforts in the pursuit of a general and holistic theory of international migration. They therefore seek to provide a broad explanation of the motivation for migration by migrants whose situations and circumstances are often very dissimilar. Also, these situations and circumstances seem to affect migrants' motivations for migration, and so while one theory may explain the circumstances and motivations of one group fairly well; it may not do so well in explaining those of other groups. However, the situations and circumstances of some groups of migrants – say, a group whose circumstances and motivation for migration fits the neoclassical view and a second group whose motivations are best described by the new economics of migration thinking – tend to overlap, in which case their responses to questions on their motivation for migration will show that the two broad theoretical explanations of motivations for migration also overlap.

For example, in the case of Basotho mine migrants, Table 2 shows that the motivations for migration are not mutually exclusive – so some migrated both to increase their income and to improve the position of their household in the local income distribution. Neoclassical theorists will put their migration down to moving in response to higher net returns, but from a new economics of migration angle, their motivation is seen as reducing household relative deprivation by increasing household income. So, overall, though the evidence from Basotho external migration presented above seems to lean rather heavily towards the neoclassical theory side of the debate, it could be said to be inconclusive – in an either/or sense – with respect to selecting the more relevant of the two broad theories of international migration; the explanations from both theories fitted some situations. The Basotho migration experience therefore shows that the two broad theories of international migration should not be seen as alternatives, even though at the level of theory they sometimes lead to different conclusions on the decision to migrate.

Finally, on the relevance of international migration theories to understanding of the Basotho mine migration experience, it was found that migration decision making was more the preserve of the individual than the household or the household head and that the quest for higher income was cited by more households as the motivation for migration than the desire to reduce relative deprivation (or to improve household position in the local income distribution), both of which favoured neoclassical thinking. The use of remittances also revealed more concern with short-term needs of households and durable consumption cum unproductive investment in housing and less with productive investment in agriculture or in business, which, according to the relative deprivation and risk management propositions of the new economics of migration theorists, should have been given priority.

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