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## Life as a Stranger: Experiences of Labor Migrants from Lesotho

**Abstract** Drawing on in-depth interviews with nine Basotho labor migrants in Bloemfontein, this article examines their experiences of being a stranger by exploring their accounts of everyday life. Literature on migration studies confirms that migrants face numerous challenges in destination areas, and South Africa is no exception in this regard. The major concerns expressed by the research participants are harassment by the police, hostility from the local citizens, poor living conditions, exploitation by employers, the language barrier, and difficulty in accessing public services. This article argues that these constraints make it difficult for migrants to establish a sense of belonging. Instead, they have a sense of being outsiders and strangers in Bloemfontein.

**Keywords** Labor Migrants; Migrant Experiences in South Africa; Sense of Belonging; Marginalization; Insecurity; Exclusion

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Migration to South Africa has increased significantly since 1990 (Crush and McDonald 2000:2). Approximately two million people staying in South Africa during the 2011 census were born outside of its borders (Statistics South Africa 2012:28). South Africa draws foreigners from other parts of Africa, especially from countries north of its borders, because it is well-endowed with infrastructure, resources, and services (Peberdy 2001:25). Lesotho is one of the top ten countries in the world whose citizens attained temporary and permanent residency in South Africa in 2013 (Statistics South Africa 2014:17, 37). Migration from Lesotho to South Africa is a long-standing occurrence (Murray 1981:12). It dates back as far as 1867 when diamonds were discovered in the Orange Free State (now called the Free State), and 1887 when gold mines were opened in Transvaal (now called Gauteng). The surge in

mining led to a demand for cheap labor, which was then extracted from neighboring countries such as Lesotho, Botswana, Mozambique, and Swaziland. Basotho men (men from Lesotho) sought work in the mines, and their migration coincided with declining agricultural production in Lesotho at that time (Modo 2001:443). During the 1970s and 1980s, Lesotho, as a country, had most of its working population employed outside of its borders. More than 50 percent of the adult population of this Mountain Kingdom were temporarily employed in various sectors of the South African economy, especially in the gold mines (Cobbe 2012:1-3). Therefore, money earned in neighboring South Africa has always been a major source of income for individual Basotho households and for the Lesotho government as a whole (Mensah and Naidoo 2011:1018).

In the early 1990s, however, when gold production slowed and employers became more inclined to employ men from the local South African labor force (Cobbe 2012:2), many Basotho men were retrenched. This opened a new dimension to labor migration from Lesotho to South Africa. The loss of jobs on the mines coupled with lack of job opportunities and increasing poverty within Lesotho forced many women to take over from men as bread winners and to enter the labor market. A large proportion of them sought employment in the Free State. However, with little or no formal education, job opportunities were limited to domestic and farm work (Ulicki and Crush 2007:155, 161).

A vast amount of research has been conducted on migration from Lesotho to South Africa. Much of it revolves around work on mines, on farms, and do-

mestic work. For instance, researchers have studied the effects of the migration of mine workers on family structure (Gordon 1981; Murray 1981; Modo 2001; Mensah and Naidoo 2011), female migration and farm work, the recruitment process, working conditions, employer demand (Ulicki and Crush 2000; 2007; Johnston 2007), and the employment experiences of domestic workers (Griffin 2010; 2011). While these studies are valuable, they are mostly quantitative in nature and thus more concerned with measurement and generalizations rather than with individual cases and life experiences. They focus almost exclusively on one aspect of migrant life—working conditions—and largely ignore the subjective life-world of the migrants. They also fail to take into consideration other sectors in which Basotho work. This article seeks to add to existing literature by taking a phenomenological approach to the study of migration in order to capture the essence of everyday life. It assumes a qualitative stance in order to reveal the existential experience of being a migrant laborer. Moreover, the article moves beyond the common categories of mine work, farm work, and domestic work to include a number of other occupations such as hairdressing, construction, and taxi driving.

### Migrant Experiences in South Africa

Most of the narratives of migrant experiences of the research participants in this study tell of humiliation and hardship in their country of destination, as well as in South Africa. Migrants face many challenges on a daily basis, including exclusion from their own communities, xenophobic attitudes against them in the receiving country, economic hardship, and barriers to accessing public services. Migrants are

often discriminated against because the dominant population group perceive them as being different and threatening. By focusing for a moment on the concept of belonging, we can move towards an understanding of the experience of exclusion. Belonging is often part of the discourses and practices of socio-spatial in/exclusion. Belonging encompasses boundary maintenance, especially those boundaries which distinguish the world into "us" *vis-à-vis* "them." In other words, the politics of belonging is about belonging to a *group* (Yuval-Davis 2006:204; Antonsich 2010:650). Belonging to a group implies being integrated into the communities in which one lives. A sense of belonging therefore speaks to whether Basotho migrants feel part of the communities in which they live and whether they are able to express themselves in full. This also includes how welcome they feel in Bloemfontein.

Ruth Wodak (2008:60) defines exclusion as "deprivation of access through means of explicit or symbolic power...Inclusion would imply access to participation, citizenship, media, information, language learning, power positions, organizations, jobs, housing, education, and so on." Exclusion is the result of the perceived, as well as real, differences between groups. People become aware of differences through processes such as migration, which bring people from different parts of the world into contact with each other (Easthope 2004:131). Although migration to South Africa has been going on for a long time, Belinda Dodson (2010:6) notes that it increased drastically during the post-1994 era after South Africa's shift to democracy. She points out that African migrants coming to South Africa from various source countries and interacting directly

with South Africans have led to the existential experience of cultural differences. Montserrat Guibernau (2013:14) confirms that perceived differences inevitably lead to an external categorization of others. This involves labeling and stereotyping, as well as creating assumptions about beliefs, views, and behaviors of those perceived as belonging to another group. Assessments of "otherness" are due to the parallel assumption of similarity between members of one's own group and perceived differences from those belonging to the out-group.

Belonging revolves around the interplay of difference and sameness based on perceived boundaries that are created between those who do, and those who do not, belong (Ralph and Staeheli 2011:523). The dominant in-group tends to associate the idea of belonging with sameness (Antonsich 2010:650). This is a challenge for migrants as members of the out-group because a person will only be accepted into the group if its members believe that he or she is *similar* to them (Ralph and Staeheli 2011:523). So, in order to belong, people finding themselves outside the dominant group must attain a significant degree of similarity by adopting large parts of the culture, language, values, norms, and beliefs of the dominant group (Yuval-Davis 2006:209; Antonsich 2010:650). Saloshna and Thirusellvan Vandeyar (2011:4165-4166) note in this respect the importance of language by emphasizing that it "serves as a gatekeeper for acceptance in the host society." They believe that the inability to speak the basic language of the host society inevitably leads to exclusion. However, even if a person does assimilate into the dominant group, Marco Antonsich (2010:650) cautions that there will always be other markers of dif-

ference, such as place of birth, skin color, or even accent, which would prevent complete sameness and, as a result, can lead to the exclusion of the individual. Vandeyar and Vandeyar (2011:4166) emphasize the importance of accent by arguing that even if migrants can speak the language of the host society, their accent sets them apart from the local people, and that can distinguish them as "other."

Ruth Wodak (2008:64) adds that the exclusion of migrants is typically justified by arguments such as "they are a burden on our society," "they are dangerous, a threat," "they cost too much," "their culture is different." By so doing, she maintains, migrants easily become scapegoats as the host society blame them for unemployment, causing general dissatisfaction, abusing welfare systems, or posing a threat to established cultural practices and traditions. The same applies to South African society. Contrary to South Africans' expectations, since 1994, when the country achieved political democracy, development has been slow, while poverty and inequality have increased (McConnell 2009:34). Migrants became a convenient target to blame for high unemployment and crime rates, for an over-crowded informal trading sector, for the growth of the drug trade, and for bringing diseases such as malaria, yellow fever, and AIDS (Crush 2000:109; Peberdy 2001:24; Gotz and Abdoumalik 2003:131; McConnell 2009:35; Dodson 2010:5-6; Landau and Freemantle 2010:378). According to Sally Peberdy (2001:28-29), as well as Ingrid Palmary, Janine Rauch, and Graeme Simpson (2003:111), an extreme form of exclusion resulting from the above stereotypes is xenophobia. Migrants often experience xenophobia in the form of harassment by the

authorities and the police, and through negative societal attitudes and acts of discrimination and prejudice.

Loren Landau and Iriann Freemantle (2010:379) maintain that police often harass migrants irrespective of whether they are legal or not. They might even disregard work permits, or any other legal documents that migrants hold. It is alleged that police sometimes go to the extent of destroying such documents in order to arrest migrants. They make arrests solely based on migrants' physical appearance, their inability to speak the official languages, or merely for fitting the profile of undocumented migrants. Ingrid Palmary and her co-authors (2003:113) add that the police sometimes deny migrants access to services when they have been victimized, based on the argument that foreigners do not have rights to state resources. Michael Neocosmos (2008:588) also relates how the police frequently abuse their power and how they regularly raid and assault migrants in their own homes. Caroline Kihato's (2013:40-41) study on migrant women of Johannesburg shows that police raids are very common at migrants' places of work. When on their way from work to their places of residence, the migrant women narrate, they often encounter the police at roadblocks where they have to pay bribes in order to avoid arrest (Kihato 2013:40-41). In a study on Congolese migrants in Johannesburg, one Congolese migrant said it was necessary for them to have cash with them at all times, just in case they bump into police (Kakonde 2010:227).

Similarly, in the streets and communities where they live, migrants experience hostile attitudes from the

locals. A study conducted by Jonathan Crush (2000) on public attitudes of South Africans towards migrants and non-citizens shows that South Africans are intolerant of and hostile towards these people. In a study done in 2007-2008, African immigrants in Cape Town reported regular incidents of xenophobia in their everyday lives. They narrated experiencing negative attitudes from local South Africans, even from their neighbors. They described locals as being rude to them: they scorn and laugh about their complexion, mock their accent, and call them *makwerekwere* (Dodson 2010:15-16), in other words: "those who speak in an unintelligible language" (Hansen, Jeannerat, and Sadouni 2009:193). Peter Kakonde's (2010:227) study on Congolese migrants shows that they are often easy targets of crime. This is because migrants are forced to carry cash due to the difficulty of opening bank accounts because they lack proper documents. Moreover, Morten Madsen (2004:179) states that criminals will take advantage and attack migrants because they know that migrants will not report the crime.

Another consequence of lacking proper legal documents is that migrants can be exploited by their employers. Employers pay migrants virtually any wage they see fit because they know that migrants cannot complain to the authorities out of fear of deportation. In addition, hiring and firing practices are unfair because of this. As a result, the migrants lack economic security, and the low wages make it increasingly difficult for many to survive in South Africa. Labor migrants in various studies claim that their wages are barely enough to meet their basic needs and cannot allow them to generate savings. This makes it difficult to plan for the fu-

ture (Dinat and Peberdy 2007:194; Ulicki and Crush 2007:163; Griffin 2011:89-90; Pande 2014:384).

In addition to the difficulty of opening bank accounts, the absence of legal documents restricts migrants from accessing other basic services such as housing, healthcare, and education. Even migrants with legal documents often report some difficulty in accessing services, as is shown in Caroline Kihato's (2013:33-34) study on migrant women in inner-city Johannesburg. According to her, the women struggle to access services since employers and service providers, such as landlords, banks, clinics, and schools, disregard their documents.

Housing is a major problem for many migrants globally. Various studies note that it is equally a concern for migrants in South Africa. In the first instance, landlords and agencies frequently refuse migrants the possibility to rent. Those who do find housing pay excessive rent in spite of the poor quality of housing: most houses/rooms have no bathrooms, electricity, or running water. They are also situated in the less desirable areas, and those who live in urban centers often live in over-crowded neighborhoods (Calavita 2005:111-114; Pande 2014:383). Regis Chireshe's (2010:195) study on the narratives of Zimbabwean migrant women in the Eastern Cape found that most of the women live in poor and unhealthy conditions. These migrants endure poor housing conditions due to their inability to afford the excessive rent (Chireshe 2010:195). They often have irregular employment, which means an irregular income. Those working full-time earn low wages as most of them work in retail, factories, and as street traders (Peberdy and Majodina 2000:279-280). Tolerating

poor housing conditions is also related to difficulties convincing landlords to rent them rooms since they lack traceable references (Chireshe 2010:195). Comparing the housing situation in their countries of origin to housing in South Africa, a study on Somali migrants shows that the migrants classify accommodation in South Africa as uncomfortable, crowded, and as only a roof over their heads as they have no other options (Peberdy and Majodina 2000:283-284). Migrant women in Johannesburg (Kihato 2013:60) similarly agree that housing in their home countries is safer and better than what they encounter in South Africa.

Healthcare services, on the other hand, are often perceived as relatively accessible. In a study on HIV risk perception and healthcare access among Zimbabwean migrant women in Johannesburg, the women acknowledge that healthcare services are more accessible in South Africa than in Zimbabwe where anti-retroviral drugs are usually unavailable. However, they mention several barriers to accessing these services. These include financial constraints, fear of being asked for legal documents, and negative attitudes from medical personnel—particularly at hospitals (Munyewende et al. 2011:156-157).

All of these experiences demonstrate that migrants do not have full rights to the cities in which they live. It can be argued that processes of globalization and urbanization have led to the disenfranchisement of many urban residents. Migrants are stripped even further of these rights to the city because they are non-citizens. As much as they share in the routines of everyday life in the cities in which they live side-by-side with locals, they do not have full access to,

let alone control over, the cities (Purcell 2002:99-102). Because of all these problems, Kenneth Madsen and Ton van Naerssen (2003:62) argue that merely crossing an international border poses major challenges to belonging in the destination country—regardless of how close it may be to the home country. While South Africa in general, and Bloemfontein in particular, is a familiar place to Basotho in terms of geographical and cultural similarities, migrants from Lesotho are still humiliated and made to feel like strangers—they still experience xenophobia, restrictive immigration policies, and exclusion from many opportunities that are open to South African citizens. In addition to the many overt ways in which Basotho migrants are discriminated against, they also experience numerous covert social boundaries in their everyday lives in South Africa.

### Theoretical and Methodological Reflections

This qualitative study explores Basotho labor migrants' experiences in an interpretive manner. An interpretivist paradigm focuses on how individuals interpret their lifeworlds (Gray 2014:23). Interpretivism is particularly interested in the uniqueness of individuals and their experiences. In this project, we draw on the theoretical guidelines provided particularly by reflexive sociology because of its focus on individuals' interpretations of events in their lifeworlds within the context of broader social structures (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:3).

The study follows a narrative design with an interest in the lived experiences of Basotho migrants as told by them. We followed a purposive sampling

method to reach the research participants. Purposive sampling involves selecting participants who are knowledgeable about the topic of interest. So we chose to collect narratives from migrants themselves. We also decided to choose migrants working in the informal sector, and without work permits, because we believe they struggle even more with a sense of belonging than other groups of migrants who hold work permits. Lawrence Neuman (2012:149) suggests that purposive sampling is ideal for specialized, hard-to-find populations, which applies to Basotho labor migrants without work permits and who are difficult to locate.

We had interviews with nine participants—four women and five men. Semi-structured interviews were used to gather data. The interviews were guided by an interview schedule which is formulated on the basis of the research questions, concepts from the theory, and the review of the literature. The schedule consisted of mostly open-ended questions to enable the participants to express themselves, but it also had a structured component to enable the researcher to gather specific information from participants (Merriam 2009:90). A pilot interview was conducted in order to check the relevance and effectiveness of the interview questions. As Kathryn Roulston (2010:99-100) urges, interviews must be scheduled at a time and place convenient for both the researcher and participant; interview sites were places of work and places of residence. According to John Creswell (2013:20), sites such as these constitute participants' world of lived experience and offer the greatest possibility of getting a deeper understanding of their experiences. Appropriate ethical measures—including informed consent, with

voluntary participation, and protection of confidentiality—were taken to safeguard the participants. These measures were all in line with the formal ethical requirements and directives of the University of the Free State's Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Humanities (Ethical Clearance Number: UFS-HUM-2013-29). All the interviews were audio recorded with the permission of the participants. The raw data were transcribed verbatim, translated into English, and analyzed thematically.

### Living as a Stranger

When analyzing the migrants' stories, their experiences of life in Bloemfontein can be categorized into experiences of marginalization, insecurity, and exclusion. In the findings below, pseudonyms are used.

#### Marginalization

The migrants lead marginalized lives as they are often harassed by the police and the general Bloemfontein public. Indeed, their everyday accounts point to the fact that they are sidelined and treated as outsiders by authorities and society alike. This finding coincides with information from the literature presented earlier: xenophobia—both in the form of harassment by the police and negative societal attitudes—is a common challenge for migrants in South Africa. The migrants report that police will even go as far as to raid their homes in the middle of the night, come to their places of work, and harass them by searching them in the streets. One man, who works as a laborer in building construction, attests to the police raids:

Like the police, they sometimes arrive here in the middle of the night demanding to see our passports and the like. If you happen to ask: "Who are you?" "We are the police!" When you tell them: "I cannot open for the police at this time of night, come during the day because I cannot open for you now!" They are going to kick the door. They kick it, they kick it. You will eventually open the door so that they can enter. [Tumelo]

The act of the police forcing entry into the migrants' homes at night endangers the migrants' lives as it becomes difficult for them to differentiate between authorities and criminals. Due to the high crime rate in many township areas in Bloemfontein, it is not far-fetched to imagine that people who knock at your door at night posing as police officials are actually criminals who mean you harm.

At the realization that the migrants' documents are not in order, instead of making arrests, the police often assault the migrants or demand bribes from them. One woman who works as a domestic worker narrates:

They always bother [emphatically stated] people from Lesotho by constantly saying: "Give us your passport, give us your passport!" And if it shows that you have overstayed your visitors' visa, THEY BEAT YOU UP [loud voice]. They don't arrest you. They assault you. Or they say: "Give us a bribe!"...Yes, they will beat them up, insult them. "You *makhonyo*,<sup>1</sup> bring the passport!" When you take it out and he finds that you have overstayed your visitors' visa, they will beat you

<sup>1</sup> A word people in Bloemfontein use to curse someone.

up, they will beat you up [emphatically stated]. If they don't beat you, they say: "Give us R250 if you have it so that we leave you." If it's there and you give it to him, the following week they send others. [Itumeleng]

Similarly at their places of work, many participants explain that police arrive unexpectedly demanding to see their work permits. Work permits are not issued for migrants working in the informal sector. Knowing that they will not have work permits, the police chase after these migrants demanding this permit. One man who works as a taxi driver, after numerous encounters with the police at roadblocks, visited the offices of the South African High Commission seeking a work permit, just to discover that he does not qualify for one. This is his story:

Yes, there is...there is a role I once played in trying to find a work permit, you see. It happened that when the police stopped me on the road and told me that I have to get it, I gave myself time to ask them how I can find it. They said: "No, you will find it in Lesotho!" I will find it in Lesotho? Yes, okay, that's how he answered me, so when I got to Lesotho, I tried to find where I can find a work permit, where they are found. Then I found the office which grants work permits. Eh, I think it is where students go to find study permits. So there at the office, the people I found at the office explained that: "Eh, there is no way that people who drive taxis can qualify. We cannot issue them work permits here because South Africa has many people who drive taxis!" He explained it like that...there is no way we can issue work permits for people who are going to drive taxis in South Africa. [Tebello]

The police often humiliate Basotho migrants by randomly stopping them in the streets to search them. The participants mentioned that the police identify Basotho by the jobs that they do. For instance, they claim that the police are well-aware that the construction sector is dominated by Basotho workers and that is how they are caught. Alternatively, the migrants believe that the police identify them by their accent and the way they run. One man who installs ceilings and partitions clarifies this:

No, again the problem that I've realized...You should see how easily we get arrested. We are caught because of the way we walk, the way we speak. When they tell you to count from one to five, they are going to catch you, when you get to two. How does a person from Lesotho say two? Two [saying it in a different tone], they say one, two. A person from Lesotho when they say two, they say two [saying it in a different tone]. When they are told to count from one to five, they say one, two [saying it in a different tone]. They tell you: "Get into the van!" They say: "Run from here to that door!" Before you even get to the door, they say: "Come, get into the van!" Have you seen what they do? They [demonstrating]...This thing, isn't it they always get arrested in my presence? They say: "Run from here to there, run!" When a person runs, they say: "Come back!" Then I ask them how do you know that that person is from Lesotho? They say a person from Lesotho and one from Bloemfontein don't run in the same way. [Kutloano]

The harassment that migrants experience at the hands of the police makes them to live their everyday lives in fear. For most, a negative impact of this harassment is financial because the fear of not

knowing when they will get arrested makes it difficult to budget. It also means having to get money, including loans, so that they can go home to renew their visitors' visas. For taxi drivers, the implication is that they sometimes lose their jobs during regular roadblocks when caught by the police and sent back to Lesotho as the taxi owners have to replace them with local taxi drivers.

Local citizens are not welcoming either. The migrants maintain that some members of the Bloemfontein community are hostile towards them; they call them names, mock their dressing style, and accuse them of a number of misdemeanors. This is in line with earlier reports that South Africans are often intolerant of non-citizens. The name that is often used to mock Basotho migrants is *moholoane*. In Lesotho, this term is actually used to show respect among men, but local people in Bloemfontein use it to degrade Basotho. As one man puts it:

South Africans, ma'am, most of them actually don't like us, Basotho. They really despise us. If you look closely, even in their conversations, when you listen. There is also that thing that you will hear them saying: *Baholoane*,<sup>2</sup> *Baholoane*. It's true that in Sesotho we know what it means to say *moholoane*. But, the way in which they use it, I mean, you find that it's like they belittle [emphatically stated] us...Sometimes, let's say, maybe I appear wearing my gumboots, you see? Yes, there are those who you will find, a person just standing there and mocking you and saying: "These ones wearing gumboots, these ones wearing gumboots!" Swearing and insulting us! [Tumelo]

<sup>2</sup> Plural for *moholoane*.

As occurs with migrants elsewhere in the world, local citizens tend to use Basotho migrants as scapegoats and blame them for things such as job shortages. The migrants refute this by arguing that local people stay behind in the locations, while they go out and look for work. One woman who works as a hairdresser at a beauty salon makes this point:

Yes, there are those small talks which will sometimes annoy you...There was a girl who liked saying girls from Lesotho take their men [pause]; we're witches. What is it again? WE EVEN TAKE THEIR JOBS [loud voice], but you find that when you leave the location for work, those very people from here are the ones just sitting there not looking for jobs. They claim that we take their jobs...I don't think there is someone's space I have occupied because I have never seen them coming here seeking jobs. It's people from Lesotho who come here seeking jobs, while they are relaxing at the location. [Limpho]

From the narratives above, it appears the local citizens are not willing to accept the migrants as part of their communities. They view them as outsiders who do not belong in South Africa. Even the police, who are supposed to ensure everyone's protection, pose as a threat to migrants' security. In addition to this marginalization, the migrants' everyday lives are also marked by insecurity.

### Insecurity

The migrants' insecurity is physical in the sense that they mostly live in poor conditions. All the participants in this study live in the townships, on the outskirts of Bloemfontein. We conducted most of the

interviews at the participants' places of work or residence. When interviewing people at their places of residence, it was clear that the majority of them live in generally poor quality housing. This correlates with findings of studies discussed earlier, which found housing to be a major problem for most migrants in South Africa (cf. Peberdy and Majodina 2000:283-284; Chireshe 2010:195; Kihato 2013:60). One participant's room, for instance, had three double-sized beds taking almost the entire space, and the roofing was of poor quality with plastic sheets for a ceiling. At another participant's place of residence the room was in very bad shape: the roofing was old, the floor was cracked, and plastic bags had been used to cover the walls. Crates were used to store things, and a curtain was used to divide the room. At another participant's home the roofing was old, the paint on the walls was peeling off, and pieces of cloth had been used to fill up the holes, sheets of torn lace curtaining had also been used to cover some parts of the wall. The room was divided with a curtain into kitchen and bedroom. All the houses appeared to be old.

The participants' narratives highlight these poor housing conditions. They raise concerns about leaking roofs, dust during strong winds, overcrowding, and landlords who take no steps to maintain properties. They in fact emphasize that the houses people rent out to people from Lesotho are generally in bad condition. One woman says:

...the houses we normally live in are not good. In fact, the houses that people rent out in Bloemfontein are not good houses, especially if they rent them out to people from places like Lesotho. Even if you tell the

landlord: "You see how it is here!" He will not even take the initiative to maintain. [Rethabile]

Most of the participants state that housing back in Lesotho is much better in comparison to Bloemfontein, where housing is often just a matter of having a roof over one's head. This corroborates other studies mentioned earlier, which indicate that migrants perceive housing in their home countries as safer and as more comfortable than housing in South Africa. As one man says:

This house that I stay in, ma'am. It is just a house because one is on the move, you understand. As long as you just have a roof over your head so that you can work. I mean, in comparison with where I stay in Lesotho: no, this one is not in good condition. It's just a shelter to protect one against rains and to ensure that you don't sleep outside. I mean, even you can see. [Tumelo]

The poor quality of housing in which the participants live even endangers their lives as they might get ill or suffer physical injuries. For instance, the dust that constantly gets in during winds and the damp from the leaking roofs can cause respiratory diseases. Even worse, if the roofs get blown off by strong winds, the participants can sustain serious injuries. Their health is therefore at risk.

The migrants' insecurity is also financial: according to their stories, they suffer exploitation at the hands of their employers in their everyday lives. Their employers usually pay them less than the amount they had initially agreed on and most migrants feel that they earn meager wages. Sometimes employers do

not pay the migrants at all. Some participants also claim to have been unfairly dismissed. They are afraid to report any of these incidents out of fear that they will get themselves arrested due to not having work permits. The employers are well aware of this fact and it is why they continue to exploit migrants. Studies conducted in South Africa reinforce the finding that employers normally pay migrants low wages because they know they will not be reported to authorities. One man recalls:

Oh, I nearly forgot one of the things I despise about working in construction. You find that you have worked; let's say we get paid per fortnight. You work. After a fortnight, when you have to get paid, sometimes you are paid only half of the money. You no longer get the amount that you expected, depending on how much you had agreed you would make per day with your employer. You find that the money is no longer...For example, let's say you agreed that the money you make per day: when you calculate, it's supposed to be R400 in a fortnight. You find that when it's pay day, your employer gives you only R350. When you try to find out what happened with the rest, the supervisor is going to explain that: "No, man, the money arrived just like that." Or: "Our employer didn't send the full amount, we didn't get the full amount of money. That is why I give you this much..." Just like now, there is someone that I worked with. I think I worked with him for about two weeks and three days...the total amount of money that I had to get from that person was R1 300, depending on the job description and the number of days we would take to finish the job. But, he only paid R500. Eh, the remaining R800 is with him. It is still with him. So when we went to confront him about the rest of the money, he kept on

beating about the bush. And now he doesn't even answer his phone when we call...We will never get it. As we continue working, you are going to find that, eh, you work for a fortnight. That fortnight, by the time that person has to pay you, he has disappeared. He is gone. There is no money. You have worked for nothing. You no longer get that money. [Tumelo]

He points to the challenges they face when thinking about reporting their employers to the police:

Hey, now we have a problem because when we think of reporting him to the police, there is a problem at the police station. When we get there, they are going to ask. We are asked [emphatically stated] if we have work permits that allow us to work in this country. That is the challenge we are facing. When we go and report them to the police that: "Hey, we have a problem, we worked with this person, but now the problem is that he no longer pays us as per our agreement." Then comes up the issue that we don't have work permits, permission to work here. If we don't have such a document, then we are facing a challenge. [Tumelo]

There are also cases where employers pay the migrants in kind instead of in money. However, they do not tell the migrants beforehand. Migrants are perplexed after the completion of a job when they expect to get their wages and are instead offered goods. This points to a lack of consideration for other people's circumstances and feelings. It is also deliberate disrespect because they are aware that the migrants cannot report them to authorities. One woman who works on a part-time basis shares her experience:

Yes, this one of blankets, washing clothes: some pay me well, others don't pay. She tells me that: "No, I will pay you with clothing." And, mind you, she tells me when she is supposed to give me money, she doesn't tell me at the time I start work...Any clothes that can fit me. She will be telling me: "I have these shoes, what size do you wear?" I say: "I wear size seven." Then she says: "I have size seven shoes, I'll give them to you. What size do your children wear?" Then I tell her: "No." "I will give you those clothes." I say: "No, I'm not going to be able to work for clothes..." Honestly: no. I didn't see it better to take them because I also have to send my children something so that they get food to eat. So I found it useless to take the clothes because they're not going to eat them [sad]. I didn't take the clothes. I didn't get money...Eh, I don't know what I can do because when I tell the story to someone, she/he will say: "Ooh! When you go to the police, they're going to ask you to produce a work permit." It's things like that. [Itumeleng]

Some participants have become aware that employers exploit migrants, and have as a result maneuvered ways around that. One man learnt first-hand that employees from Lesotho are generally paid less than local workers and so now he conceals his origins. He tells his story:

Mm, they don't even know that I'm from Lesotho. They will take advantage of me, if they know I'm from Lesotho. Isn't it a fact that people from Lesotho are undermined? And you should know that if you work for an employer who knows that you're from Lesotho, you will find that your salary is not equal to other people's salaries...Yes, they are paid less. You are going to find that people are being paid R150

a day, while you are only paid R120 or R100. Eh, I realized because I saw, my first employer knew that I am from Lesotho. When I came to check my salary, I found that: nah, man, my salary is little. These other people have more. Then I thought that maybe it's because I found them already at the firm. Then I learnt... Those who found me already at the firm, these people are also getting more money than I am. Then someone said: "No, it's because that person knows that you are from Lesotho and there is nowhere you can complain." After I left that firm, moving from that firm to the next, I never again disclosed that I'm from Lesotho. [Kutloano]

Employers' exploitation of migrants deprives them of their livelihoods and of a full sense of belonging to the society. Financial security is an important component of belonging. By being paid less than the agreed amount, by not being paid at all, or being unfairly dismissed, migrants enter an unstable economic situation which leads to both hardship and heightened feelings of social exclusion. Additionally, migrants are excluded by being deprived access to services.

### Exclusion

The migrants are excluded from access to public services. They are also excluded in terms of communication because of their inability to express themselves in some of the more prominent languages such as Afrikaans or Tswana during their dealings with service providers and the general Bloemfontein community. While Basotho migrants acknowledge that healthcare services are fairly easily accessible in South Africa, as do migrants from elsewhere, their

experiences are that services such as banking, education, and the opening of accounts are difficult to access. They mention that they are usually hindered by their inability to provide specified documents required by service providers. One such document is an affidavit from the landlord stating that the migrant indeed stays on the landlord's premises. Migrants argue that it is difficult to obtain such an affidavit as the landlords work and often stay far away, and are therefore difficult to reach. Others report that they are denied services merely because they are from Lesotho. One man explains that his children were denied entry into school because they are from Lesotho:

No, services are being offered, but sometimes with that bias [emphatically stated]. For schooling of children, there is still discrimination. In some areas, they don't allow them. They say they don't take children from Lesotho. [Thabo]

Migrants also maintain that they are denied services by the police. This fact corroborates earlier findings that the police deny migrants services when they seek help. One woman tells the story of a fellow migrant whose grievances were not attended to by the police when she went to report assault:

Well, they [the police] haven't done anything to me, but they do to my fellow migrants. They won't be treating them well when they have complaints. They will be like: "She is a *moholoane*" [emphatically stated]. Yes, they will be like: "Oh! She is a *moholoane*!" My fellow migrant will be going to the police to report: "My husband assaulted me." When she arrives, they will be saying: "Oh! These *baholoane* are irri-

tating!"...And they don't assist them. They will be saying: "You should come at a certain time." When you return, they say: "Come at a certain time!" [Itumeleng]

In general, lack of South African citizenship hinders migrants from accessing services. This is because they are asked to produce South African identification almost everywhere. One woman sums this up:

Everywhere you meet deadlines, everywhere. You can go to the bank to open an account—the problem is that you don't have an ID. Obviously, you cannot find your own, right? Because you're not...What do they say a person is? You are not a citizen. In many things, we're hindered by citizenship. You are not a South African citizen, so you don't have the right to these and that...For instance, JUST OPENING AN ACCOUNT [loud voice]. To open an account, you will find that if you use a Lesotho passport, they don't want to open an account for you. For clothing, for...Not for clothing because I have a clothing account...A furniture account. There is no furniture shop which can open an account for you. You will find them saying: "No, we don't open accounts for people from Lesotho!" So I don't know whether Basotho have disappeared with their things or what...It's not easy. In everything, they say: "No, not people from Lesotho. We want IDs." [Limpho]

In addition to difficulties accessing public services, the migrants encounter language problems in communicating with service providers. This is because in Bloemfontein there are many Afrikaans-speaking people. Sesotho is also a common spoken lan-

guage. There are other languages such as Tswana, which is related to Sesotho although it is still a different language. According to the migrants' narratives, the many unfamiliar languages limit their interaction with local people in Bloemfontein. The difficulty in communication is a significant challenge; as the literature indicates—language is a very important prerequisite for migrants being accepted in the destination area since it is an important means for interaction (cf. Vandeyar and Vandeyar 2011:4165-4166). The participants acknowledge that their first language, Sesotho, is one of the spoken languages in Bloemfontein, and that they are able to communicate with some local people. However, in their experience, when it comes to public services, Sesotho does not help them much since they come across service providers who do not understand Sesotho. One woman says:

It's my language and it counts in my favor. Sometimes it doesn't. It helps me when I communicate with people like this. When I go to the shops, I will find people who don't speak Sesotho. Then I become confused as to what language I'm now supposed to speak in order for this person to understand...Let me say, I go to the hospital there, I will find a *lekoerekoere*.<sup>3</sup> She/he is not going to understand what I'm saying. If I go to the shops where they say there's a job available, when I arrive, I won't find a Mosotho<sup>4</sup> person. I will find that she/he speaks Xhosa, Zulu, English, so I will have to speak English. And I don't know it that well. I will then have to find someone who knows English to translate what I'm saying. [Itumeleng]

<sup>3</sup> A name Basotho used to call people from other African countries.

<sup>4</sup> Singular for Basotho.

A similar degree of exclusion pertains to work. Participants maintain that they struggle to find jobs as some employers are not Sesotho-speaking. Because some migrants moved to Bloemfontein to explore job opportunities, the language barrier limits their prospects. In one man's words:

Eh, Sesotho as my language here in Bloemfontein—it honestly gives me problems sometimes. Especially at work because you find that Afrikaans is the most generally spoken language. Since we work with White people, you are going to find that it is necessary to know Afrikaans. And if you don't know Afrikaans, you cannot work...We even prefer to work with Whites because they are trustworthy. Now, most of them don't know Sesotho. They speak Afrikaans. So if you don't know Afrikaans, you cannot be able to work with him because you will not understand each other. [Tumelo]

While Sesotho is spoken in Bloemfontein, the migrants maintain that the dialect differs from that which is spoken in Lesotho. They say that there are some instances when local people fail to understand them when they speak. The alternative is to speak English when they encounter people who do not understand Sesotho. But, resorting to English does not always help as the participants maintain that they sometimes come across local people who do not understand English. The fact that most research participants emphasize that a language barrier exists between them and local residents is in contrast with literature that suggests that migrants from Lesotho do not experience a language barrier in South Africa (cf. Hansen, Jeannerat, and Soudouni 2009:193).

## Conclusion

Migration from Lesotho to South Africa has a long history and it will continue into the future. Researchers have documented dimensions of this migration, but mostly focus on increasing female migration, the recruitment of farm workers, and employer demand in shaping labor migration from Lesotho. Fewer studies investigate the everyday experiences of migrants and of those that do, most have a narrow focus on working conditions. This article explores a broader spectrum of events and situations in the everyday lifeworld and everyday experiences of Basotho labor migrants in Bloemfontein.

When analyzing the migrants' narratives, it becomes clear that they are treated as strangers in a place they are familiar with: geographically and culturally, the Free State is not particularly different from Lesotho and the distance between Maseru and Bloemfontein is relatively short. But, because the migrants have crossed an international border, they are considered as outsiders. Authorities and the general community alike are hostile towards them. The police abuse their power and subject the migrants to humiliation. They chase after them at work, demanding work permits which they know the migrants do not hold so that they can demand bribes. They harass them in the streets and humiliate them by making fun of them. But, it is not only the police; members of society at large call them names, mock their dressing style, and accuse them of stealing jobs. Landlords are unresponsive to their complaints about poor housing conditions which endanger their physical health. Their lack of

proper documents restricts them from accessing public services and also makes them vulnerable to exploitation by employers. Their employability is judged on the basis of language proficiency rather than capability.

It cannot be denied that these migrants' everyday lives are characterized by marginalization, insecurity, and exclusion. The local people have set clear boundaries regarding who can and who cannot belong in South Africa. The lack of South African identity documents already implies that migrants cannot be provided with services. They are ha-

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rassed and exploited by authorities and employers because they lack recourse to the law. Their dressing style and accent distinguish them as "other." For some time, a modern view of life in our times has been that everyone who inhabits the city—irrespective of nationality—has the right to urban residency. But, it is clear that the migrants' right to participate in and to have free access to Bloemfontein still very much depends on citizenship. Crossing an international border indeed poses a challenge to belonging irrespective of how close the distance may be between the country of origin and the destination.

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