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Migration Patterns in Swaziland: A Conceptual Analysis of the Trends and Patterns

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Abstract:

This conceptual paper discusses migration practice in Swaziland in light of international theories on migration. As a corollary, the paper unveils literature on Swazi migration as well as discusses migration patterns, trends and developments in Swaziland as revealed in numerous studies. The central thesis is that migration studies on Swaziland have been focused on historical accounts, explaining current trends and narrating challenges to migration. There has been little attention given to the linkages between migration in Swaziland and migration theory. The dearth of theory application has resulted in some analytical gaps in literature which as an example, are revealed through the new economics of labour migration theory. In applying the theory to migration practice, the paper suggests that development efforts can be better devised and enacted.

Key words: Migration, Migration Theory, Markets, New Economics of Labour Migration, Insurance

1. Introduction

Ever since Ravenstein's thesis on migration, scholars and students of migration have sought to understand migration in different contexts. The quest for knowledge has led to many questions arising on theoretical explanations to migration in various settings. It is from one question that this paper came into being. Does migration from small countries surrounded by economic and political giants spurn from factors explicable by already known theories or are there peculiar motives unique to such countries? As a migrant in Swaziland, one of the authors grappled with such questions. From observations, Swaziland received economic migrants, mainly from Mozambique. However, it appeared Swaziland also contributed a steady stream to South Africa. What motivated the migrants? Even more puzzling was the question on how migration to Mozambique could be explained. Was migration important to Swaziland at all? The significance of migration in Swaziland is recognized by Bohningⁱⁱ who asserts that it is 'among the countries that are simultaneously major receivers and major senders' of migrants. Literature on Swazi migration and development is, however scant and often 'hidden' in studies of other countries within the region. Unlike Lucas iii who uses a model which considers economic factors which bear semblance to Todaro-Harris and assesses the forms of investments on major migrant-labour sending countries to South Africa, there is scant research of a similar nature in Swaziland. The glaring gap in the literature available and known to the authors relates to direct testing and application of theory pertaining to studies on international migration in Swaziland. Most studies merely provide historical narratives of migration patterns^{iv}, provide statistical data to show migrant flows, incorporate gender to migration or insinuate theory in their discussions without making effort to directly relate theory to practice. This creates a problem for migration and development policy.

By virtue of studies being predominantly of historical nature, they may not adequately incorporate the migration-development nexus in their discussion. In addition, because of some of the historical pressures that have prompted Swazi citizens to migrate^{vii}, failure to elicit broader understanding risks limiting an understanding of migration in a time snare. Migration is reduced to a phenomenon of the past yet migration is an ongoing exercise. Furthermore, the absence of migration theory in explaining migration practice warrants redress lest it continues to support Vance's^{viii} question on whether theory is relevant for demographers. Importantly, migration is not just historical or a geographic and economic-induced phenomenon; it is tied to development. With migration intertwined with some of the millennium development goals thematic areas such as poverty, HIV and Aids and environmental sustainability, linking development theory to migration practice and trends is vital for policy formulation. Moreover, because 'people rather than inanimate areas are the real issue in development'^{ix}, the movement of persons has a bearing on the pace, nature and extent of development efforts. Therefore, this paper highlights the gap in literature on migration studies in Swaziland. It also highlights emerging migration trends which are as yet unexplained, reveals areas for further research and makes recommendations for future research.

This paper is divided into six sections, excluding the introduction. The first part briefly articulates the literature review which is succeeded by the methodology applied. To reveal the gaps that prevail with regards to migration theory and literature, the paper outlines a select number of theories of international migration, paying special attention to the new economics of labour migration theory. This will be followed by a section which marries migration theory and migration practice in Swaziland using data from past studies as well as applying the new economics of labour migration theory. The last part comprises of a discussion, conclusions and recommendations for future studies.

2. Literature Review: Studies on International Migration in Swaziland

Swaziland has historically contributed to the migrant stream entering South Africa^x. In addition, Swaziland is among a number of countries receiving more remittances than total official development assistance (ODA) or foreign direct investment^{xi}. Consequently, in spite of limited literature, migration has a significant role in the economy. Yet there is little understanding of migration on an analytical level with most studies being of a narrative nature. Historically, migration of certain groups such as women was controlled by chiefs and state authorities^{xii}. The influence of chiefs was diluted by a significant social dimension to migration which exposed paradoxes in the movement of women^{xiii}. In the cases cited by Miles, a desire to join peers in South Africa was a motivating factor for emigration in spite of improving domestic labour markets. Economic factors alone, did not account for the movement of people from one region to another either temporarily or permanently. Knowledge of other women emigrants appears to have played a role in motivating would-be migrants into migrating through the use of networks of known contacts^{xiv}.

Simelane's xv paper on migration employs a historical narrative approach using data from interviews conducted on Swazi women emigrants. In his paper, he considers the role that traditional institutions through chiefs as well as colonial organs through administrators played in controlling migration of Swazi women. The same study unveils the gender diversity of migration in Swaziland during colonial times, setting it apart from being a male domain. Implications on the roles of men and women are revealed. In addition, there is recognition that economic factors alone do not suffice in explaining migration in Swaziland. If economic factors alone apply, then why do the numbers of female emigrants not match those of their male counterparts? The explanation for Simelane lies in gender dynamics. However, the depth of analysis from a development perspective is still critically scant because of the use of 'push and pull factors' to explain the movement from Swaziland to South Africaxvi. What then explains emigration of the women? In other words, why was South Africa a choice for female emigrants? It is not clear whether the women were motivated by existing networks coupled with economic factors or whether it was a desire to engage more accessible markets. Consistent with a historical and narrative approach, Miles vii considers Swazi women migrants by looking at their life stories. The study takes a historical narrative approach following the encounters of Swazi women to South Africa. The women were not entirely motivated by economic factors, but a desire for freedom from a patriarchal system. The study by Miles is, therefore, more concerned with overcoming a patriarchal system through migration as explained by a select group of women. Other studies have considered migration in relation to land imbalances xviii. The study by Booth reveals that native areas with deprivation experienced higher outmigration than others. Eventually, this internal migration metamorphosed into international migration destined mainly for South Africa.

Some of the studies addressing migration involving Swazi emigrants are pre-occupied with volumes and trends^{xix} or presenting statistical data on Swazi migrant labour^{xx}. A presentation of the statistics on mine and cross-border migration will be made in the following sections. At present, it is important to note that the studies do not test the migration theory, but merely present data and extrapolate trends in some cases.

Apart from historical, descriptive studies on Swazi migration, there is a common economic theme explaining motives for migration. This is consistent with migration studies concerned with immigrant labour on a global scale^{xxi}. The study by Harzig focuses on international migration of domestic workers (including Swazis) and recognizes the prevalence of economic drivers which motivate migration from rural to urban areas. It explores the economic rationalization of migration decisions by domestic workers

Structural differences of economies may also explain the movement of migrant labour from Swaziland to South Africa^{xxii}. With South Africa being the region's largest economy, Wilson recognises that changes in mining and agriculture have had various effects on migration. In addition, Wilson reveals that low labour costs in Swaziland deter the economy from experiencing industrialization^{xxiii}. South Africa's economic dominance as well as a regulatory framework which did not place stringent requirements on Swazi migrants is identified as an additional factor explaining labour mobility from Swaziland to South Africa. Does Wilson's paper allude to world systems theory? While Wilson recognises South Africa's economic dominance, the discussion shies from delineating the analysis into core-semiperiphery-periphery stratum. Left as dependence and dominance, the analysis is left open to conjecture on whether political hegemony, economic factors or geographic superiority account for the dominance.

Few papers appear to discuss international migration using theoretical understanding. Where they do, the norm is to either identify push and pull factors and explain them as such or to vaguely allude to theory. One such paper alludes to world systems and neoclassical theories in a study on Swazi migration xxiv. Elkan observes that:

what is not in dispute is that the existence of relatively poor countries on South Africa's periphery has provided her with a highly elastic supply of labour at lower wages than would have had to be paid if she had not been able to draw in labour from outside her own political boundaries^{xxv}.

In addition, analyses on wages –and, by proxy the neo-classical migration model- reveal that rising wages in South Africa have 'tilted the scales in favour of migration'. Thus, from Elkan's discussion, we can postulate that wage differentials and a dominant economy, which has the capacity to draw labour from peripheral economies may explain international migration between Swaziland and South Africa.

A 2004 study into the perceptions of Swazi would-be emigrants and their likely decision-making on migration reveals a strong disposition towards emigration for employment purposes spurred by a familiarity with the most likely destination^{xxvi}. In addition, would-be migrants reveal that they are likely to decide to emigrate on their own and they have knowledge of people who have left their home country for the most likely destination. However, because the study was hinged on ascertaining potential causes and motives, it remains primarily conjectural.

From the literature considered, it is evident that specific migration theories have not been tested or directly incorporated into studies thus far. Assumptions as to which theory best explains migration trends cannot be made on the basis of literature addressed or general explanations on migration lest they misinform policy and recommendations. Indeed, as Simelane and Crush assert, 'the types and motives for movement are far more complex, varied and dynamic than is allowed by traditional stereotypes'xxvii. Their assertion is echoed by Zolnikxviii who notes that 'because the statistical information available is often partial and context-dependent, it provides a poor basis for answering other more insightful questions about the nature of international migration'. There is, therefore, need to make a discursive, informed, and evidence-based conclusion on what causes migration according to theory.

3. Methodology

The paper is premised on a study of literature on international migration from Swaziland with focus on the Swaziland-South African channel. The sampled literature that is used was gathered from academic papers and publications available online. Thus, the review of literature was based on a convenience sampling approach. Journal articles from JSTOR form the mass of literature used. In addition, studies on Swazi international migration conducted by the Southern African Migration Project (SAMP) are used together with migration data from Statistics South Africa (STATSSA).

4. Theories Explaining Migration

Migration patterns in Swaziland cannot be sufficiently explained by push and pull factors alone. The inadequacy of push and pull factors has been discussed in mother studies^{xxix}. Push-pull factors are considered 'post factum' hence do not consider probable causes prior to movement. In addition, the factors are assumed to explain why disadvantaged communities move to better off areas and that movement is spontaneous^{xxx}. Hence, in Swaziland's case, they would be inadequate in explaining why some Swazis would migrate from their country to Mozambique for example. Neither is it sufficient to conceptualize all migration as driven by economic factors as the prevailing literature insinuates. If that is the case, how then is migration of Swazis to Mozambique explicable? Mozambique has a lower per capita income than Swaziland, is prone to adverse weather patterns and is generally perceived by the Swazi populace as backward. Yet cross-border migrants have increasingly crossed the border into Mozambique^{xxxi}. There must be a plausible explanation to international migration causality apart from push and pull factors or wage income differentials. Theories of international migration shed light on some of the possible causalities.

From a sociological perspective migration theory comprises of two broad typologies –macro theories and micro theories xxxii. The typologies are described thus:

In the former category are those which focus on migration streams, identifying those conditions under which large-scale movements occur and describing the demographic, economic and social characteristics of the migrants in aggregate terms. The macro level also includes most theories concerning the immigrant adaptation process, economic and social integration, assimilation, etc., when regarded from a structural or cultural perspective. The micro level includes studies of socio-psychological factors differentiating migrants from non-migrants, together with theories concerning motivation, decision-making, satisfaction and identification. It may also include some aspects of immigrant adaptation, when regarded from a strictly individualistic perspective as distinct from the broader societal consequences^{xxxiii}.

In the absence of one unifying theory on international migration, an assortment of theories has been presented to explain the various shades depicted in migration studies xxxiv. These include neoclassical theories (both micro and macro), the new economics of labour migration, world systems theory, network theory, institutional theory, cumulative causation and migration systems theory. Some of the theories share common premises. Depending on which theory is used to explain migration, there are likely to be different implications for policy formulation for example, some questions will seek to find answers to whether poor markets are the cause of migration or the prevalence of family and friend networks. Alternatively, the answers may point towards an exploitative relationship or a concoction of factors. Each of the causative factors identified will lead to varying policy prescriptions. To acquire a conceptual appreciation of migration motives and causes in Swaziland, this paper employs the new economics of the labour migration theory.

4.1. New Economics of Labour Migration Theory

New economics of labour migration theory considers 'conditions in a variety of markets, not just labour markets,'xxxvi. The theory recognizes that the decision to migrate is not just made by an individual. Instead, the decision is a collective effort within a household made to minimize risks. These risks include those emanating from weak or non-existent crop insurance markets, futures markets, unemployment insurance and capital markets. Inadequate crop insurance among communal farmers, for example,

implies significant exposure to crop failure. In the event of a drought or poor harvest, an alternative source of income may be sought. In some cases, migration becomes the alternative. The household will decide on who migrates and the remitting conditions xxxvii. As a result, migration is not a personal choice but an inclusive one involving household members. Decision-making in migration is explained thus:

just as it is clear that neither a brick nor a bottle of wine can decide to move between markets, so should it be equally clear that a migrant is not necessarily the decision making entity accountable for his or her migration^{xxxviii}

It is not just movement of persons that the new economics of labour migration theory is confined to explaining but remitting behaviour as well. Migration and migrants' remittances have competing effects; they can relax or tighten labour and credit constraints for rural households xxxix.

Another important aspect of the theory is that in making a decision on who emigrates, households select the individual who is most likely to yield returns in the form of remittances at least risk. It is conceivable that although the would-be immigrant is not necessarily the most industrious; they are also not the most ill-equipped.

Market constraints tend to lead some people to emigrating in order to acquire funds which are remitted to cater for the deficiencies in local markets. In other words, 'new economics of labour migration theorists analyse migration as a strategy to overcome local market and other development constraints through remitting money which can serve as investment capital'xl. In building up towards a possible explanation of migration using new economics of labour migration theory, the following section addresses the nature of markets in Swaziland.

5. Markets in Swaziland: fertile ground for NELM?

In spite of hardships from economic or social factors, not everyone from a particular country migrates; implying that there are numerous factors and considerations that people take in migrating. The new economics of labour migration theory proffers a lens through which nuances on migration in Swaziland can be understood. A discussion of Swazi markets is made, followed by trends in migration derived from studies previously made by scholars and then an analysis is made.

5.1. Financial And Capital Markets

Access to financial and capital markets in Swaziland is limited to a small segment of the population^{xli}. People catered for are mostly rich, middle class and working class citizens. The Swazi Stock Exchange (SSX) is illiquid, exclusive and has few companies listed. This exclusive nature leaves out the greater population in the rural areas. With regards to access to finance, banks do not cater for most people in rural areas. Approximately 30 percent of the bankable was catered for in 2002^{xlii}. Development organisations provide credit to some segments of the rural population in projects predominantly involving women. Savings and credit cooperatives also extend credit, which caters for people with access to bank credit and also to some of the unbanked population ^{xliii}. However, such efforts are insufficient to cater for other segments.

As part of the unbanked population, the mostly rural group finds it hard to access credit from financial institutions. They are constrained by inadequate assets which can be used as collateral. For example, Swazi National Land (SNL) which is the land predominantly occupied, is not their personal property and is therefore difficult to use as collateral in securing a loan from a formal financial institutions. As a result, when farmers are threatened by crop failures, they may sell off livestock to earn income in order to survive xliv. In addition to limited access to financial services, the market is not adequately catered for as a result of narrow range of products for the poor xlv.

5.2. Forwards And Futures Markets And Crop Insurance

A commodity futures exchange is currently being set-up and implemented by Pride Group from Dubai and as of 01 September 2012, was scheduled to commence in the first quarter of 2013^{xlvi} . In fulfillment of the commitment by the Pride group,an African Mercantile Exchange has since been set-up –pending clearance from regulatory authorities xlvi - to provide for diverse services ranging from futures trading to 'market making'. In the absence of a futures exchange market, the government has often engaged commercial farmers in contract farming where they produce for a predetermined price or according to the requirements of state agricultural enterprises. However, this is a facility that does not incorporate many people in rural areas engaged in subsistence farming. The gaps in meeting demands in the agricultural sector are evidenced by the high propensity to remit agricultural inputs and implements by migrants xlvii .

As of December 2012, Swaziland had thirty-three registered insurance brokers xiix. Some of the brokers provide agricultural insurance products¹. However, the uptake of crop insurance products is limited among Swaziland's farmers. Crop insurance has been piloted in Swaziland at Sdemane Farming¹ⁱ with success. Suspicion and unsavoury experiences of farmers with insurance companies makes uptake of agro-insurance policies slow¹ⁱⁱ. Insurance companies are willing to extend their services to farmers who are predominantly on SNL upon provision of a permit or a letter to a letter companies.

5.3. Labour Markets And Social Security

In the absence of reliable insurance products for people in both rural and urban areas, government social safety nets become crucial especially in supporting vulnerable groups. Unfortunately, in Swaziland, social grants are only offered to people of old age as a pension. Other vulnerable groups such as orphans remain exposed to economic hazards. Due to the fact that most households buy their food from retailers, do not produce their own food and do not have access to social welfare, household income is a critical determinant of food security. In an environment where unemployment is rife, many households are left food insecure. The situation is compounded by the Swazi government's failure to extend unemployment benefits to citizens.

In addition, insurance companies do not have policies to cater for would-be policy-holders in the event that they are unemployed. When one is out of a job, it is incumbent upon them to find a means of earning an income through formal or informal labour practice. Getting employment is often difficult, especially outside of civil service. The demographic and health survey of 2006 noted that among women and men, the lowest levels of employment were among the 15-19 and 20-24 age groups vii. This is consistent with African Economic Outlook viii data which reflects that unemployment is most prevalent among the youths. As a result, in the wake of a stagnating economy, citizens increasingly have to find ways of engaging in self-employment through business start-ups or through informal practice.

6. Migration Trends in Swaziland

Considering the outline of markets depicted in the preceding section, it is necessary to discuss migration trends in Swaziland so as to reveal the 'grey areas' which have no theoretical explanation. Trends will be identified in two classes of migrants: mine labourers and cross-border migrants.

Swaziland has mostly contributed mine labour to South Africa. Migrant labour from Swaziland to South Africa had been in decline prior to the turn of the millennium. Between 1990 and 2000 for example the numbers fluctuate between a high of 17,757 and 9,360^{lix}.

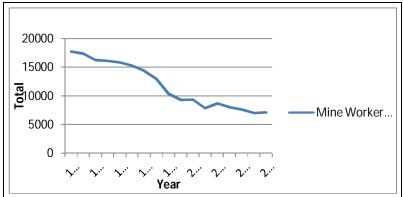


Figure 1: Swazi Mineworkers in South Africa Source: Crush and Williams (2010: 11)^k

Using the mine-labour figures as a proxy for long-term migrants^{ki}, it is clear in Figure 1 above that there is a steady decline in migrants from Swaziland to South Africa. Miners make up the bulk of the Swazi migrant pool and have done so for many years. From the data presented, there is a clear downward trend in mine-labour migration. Migrant labour in the form of mine workers has gradually declined since 1990 with very few periods of stability in between.

Given that the economic challenges which bear down hardest on the rural poor are exacerbated by skewed income distribution, poverty and unemployment, it is worth considering whether there have been changes in emigration volumes. A study on a representative sample of the Swazi population reveals that legal and clandestine movements between the two countries [Swaziland and South Africa] for employment or economic gain have increased. Figure 2^{kiii} corroborates their findings for the period 2000 to 2008 after which there is a slight decline. From year 2010 the upward trend resumes.

Over the period under scrutiny, it is interesting to note that the moving average is reasonably constant. This suggests that while cross-border migration may have responded sharply to the global economic crisis, the volume of migrants is constant in the long term.

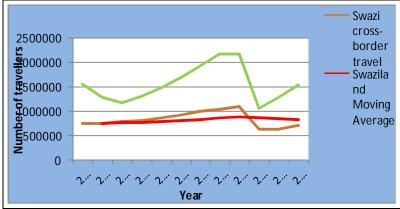


Figure 2: Cross-border Travel to South Africa: Swaziland and Lesotho Source: Statistics South Africa

In the sample used in Simelane and Crush's study, 49.4 percent were between the ages of 15-29 and the search for jobs ranked highestamong the reasons cited for entering South Africaat 32.1 percent^{kiv}. However, before wholly dismissing the likelihood of factors related to new economics of labour migration theorycontributing to emigration, it is important to note that migrants from Swaziland tend to purchase and remit agricultural implements and goods much more than regional counterparts^{lxv}. This suggests a disposition towards circumventing local agricultural markets which are generally more expensive compared to South Africa.

The complexity in emigrating is compounded by the role that families play in migrating decisions. A comparative analysis of the findings in two SAMP surveys on Swaziland reveals that migration decisions are largely the preserve of individuals although this differs by gender. Furthermore, while family in the home country may not wield much influence in decision making, the presence of a family member, friend or contact in the destination location determines the likelihood of emigration. Among the Swazi sample, a 67 percent indicate that they will make the decision to migrate alone, while the remainder deciding with different members of immediate or extended family members livi.

7. Implications of Omitting Theory in Research

With most literature discussed earlier having revealed that migration theory is absent, what then are the implications on the comprehension of available research findings, migration policy and development. There are two distinct trends presented by the data on international migrant movement from Swaziland (a) labour migration among miners has declined and continues to do so, and (b) cross border movement has been fairly constant over the long term. The decline of mine migrant labour is consistent with fluctuating fortunes of the mining sector in South Africa as well, declines in labour demand due to *inter alia* technology advances. While cross-border migrant numbers ebb and flow substantially, the moving average is constant. From the perspective of poor markets in Swaziland, the constant movement of cross-border migrants is reflective of unchanging conditions in markets to absorb the excluded.

Trends whose change have not been associated or explained from theory will likely pose a challenge of being misunderstood, contributing to weak or poorly formed policies or a failure to appreciate the relation of migration to development. As the nature of markets in Swaziland has revealed, the bulk of the Swazi populace is excluded from various markets. Consequently, migration could be a response to inadequate access or exposure to markets. Applying theory will enable scholars to highlight the role of wider social entities and interactions which condition migrant behaviour as well as identify new linkages between migration as a distinct labour market phenomenon and other labour market and non-labour market phenomena [thereby] contributing to our understanding of the process of economic betterment and development. As the nature of development.

The studies alluded to in various sections above present findings which appear to contrast new economics of labour migration theory. Most would-be migrants indicated that they will make the decision to migrate alone. In addition, families exhibit aversion towards migration. However, the decision to migrate alone may not necessarily suggest that markets do not have a bearing on migration. A caveat suffices here; the studies from which data has been extrapolated were not concerned with explaining the new economics of labour migration theory, hence only inferences can be made with the hope of exposing areas for further research. The apparent discordance between migration practice and what the new economics of labour migration theory propounds must not be construed to suggest that the new economics of labour migration theory is irrelevant in explaining migration in Swaziland. However, the studies by Simelane and Crush and by Crush Pendleton and Tevera suggest that decision-making is inconsistent with the new economics of labour migration theory because of the prevalence of would-be solo decision-makers instead of family or household made decisions. Clearly, a clear picture of migration causation in Swaziland is at best fudged and at worst near impossible.

8. Conclusion

The paper has discussed some of the available literature on international migration in Swaziland. Virtually all of the studies have been preoccupied with migration from Swaziland to South Africa possibly because they share a contiguous border, have a long history of migration and have strong economic ties. Gaps in literature pertaining to testing and/or applying theory to migration practice have been revealed as well as prevailing migration trends. Using the new economics of labour migration theory as an example, possible approaches and areas for future research have been discussed. Applying an approach grounded in theory has implications on how migration in Swaziland is conceived, how policies crafted around migration issues are designed and how migration is knitted into the development aspirations of Swazis. It is through more analytic, theory-driven assessments of data and trends that policies can be devised for the development. After all, development is about people; people who in the globalized world are highly mobile for various reasons.

9. Recommendations

While historical accounts of migratory practice and patterns, life experiences and highlighting trends all have their place in academic circles, researching on migration ought to have theoretical underpinnings. In addition, more analytical research should be carried out in similar light to Lucas' study with regards to economic motivations for migration. This will avoid narrow interpretations of the extent of economic factors in contributing to migration. Furthermore, studies revealing contemporary and as yet unexplained migratory patterns to Mozambique as well as among cross-border travelers should be carried out to reveal the nuances in migration practice and consequently reveal specific causes of different migration patterns and practices.

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- lxii Simelane and Crush (2004)
- lxiii Lesotho is a country which can be compared to Swaziland because of population size, integration to South Africa and economy. It exhibits a similar pattern to Swaziland over the same period with a decline in 2008-2009. Perhaps the most

significant factors contributing to the decline starting in 2008 are the fiscal challenge that affected the economy in general as well as the global economic recession.

lxiv Simelane and Crush (2004:20).

lxv Pendleton et al., (2006: 7)

- lxvi Ibid. p.35.
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