Allen F. Isaacman, Joy M. Chadya, and Barbara S. Isaacman. 2024. *Elusive Histories: Mozambican Migrant Laborers in Rhodesia, ca. 1900–1980.* Athens: Ohio University Press. 299 pp.

Elusive Histories fills a significant gap in southern African historiography by exploring the experiences of Mozambican migrants, primarily men, but also women and children, who clandestinely crossed colonial borders into Rhodesia. Their labor became central to Rhodesia's economic and social transformation, sustaining agriculture, mining, and urban industries. The Isaacmans and Chadya challenge the common perception that Mozambican migration occurred mainly through bilateral labor agreements, revealing instead that many migrants entered Rhodesia outside of official channels. They show how migration often stemmed from a desire to avoid *chibharo* (forced labor) and oppressive taxation, underscoring migrant agency in resisting colonial regimes.

The book's eleven chapters are organized chronologically and thematically for greater clarity and coherence. The opening chapter provides a brief overview of mobility in the Mozambique-Zimbabwe borderlands before colonial rule, emphasizing how trade, warfare, hunting, and shifting political alliances shaped movement. In crossing borders, migrants developed mental maps that they passed down across generations, which later guided colonial-era migrants navigating new frontiers. These migrant laborers became knowledge experts of travel, as captured in the proverb, "*muzivi wenzira yeparuware ndiye mufambi wayo*" (the path on the rock is known by the traveler) (p. 21). Chapters two and three explore the onset of colonial rule, showing how racialized governance restricted African mobility and created economic dependency between Mozambique and Rhodesia. Central Mozambique, alongside Nyasaland and Northern Rhodesia, became a labor reservoir, demonstrating how coercive spatial policies supported colonial economies.

Chapters four through eleven shift focus to the journeys and settlement of Mozambican migrants in Rhodesia between 1945 and 1970. Chapter four examines routes across the border, the dangers of clandestine passage, and encounters with British authorities, where *zvitupa* (identity cards) were issued to authorize work. The next chapter situates migrants in rural Rhodesia, where many endured exploitative conditions on tobacco, sugar, and tea plantations. Others, often Chikunda workers, gravitated toward underground gold and copper mining, which they regarded as dangerous yet lucrative. The urban experiences of Mozambican migrants in Salisbury, the colonial capital, take a center stage in chapters six through eight. Chapter six traces how migrants relied on informal hiring networks to achieve economic stability while evading restrictive labor regulations. Women adapted through informal trading, brewing illicit beers such as *skokiaan* and *kachasu*, and sometimes engaging in sex work. the seventh chapter highlights the resilience of these individuals as they navigated racial segregation and precarious living conditions, ultimately fostering vibrant urban communities that retained robust cross-border ties and reinforced a distinct migrant identity within Salisbury's African population. In chapter eight, the authors emphasize how migrants transformed leisure spaces such as beerhalls, football clubs, and music venues into sites of recreation as well as platforms for networking, cultural affirmation, and negotiating belonging in an alienating colonial setting.

The next two chapters broaden the lens to political and social organization. Chapter nine demonstrates how, between 1945 and 1970, Mozambican migrants asserted visibility and resisted "angry nativism" through associations and cultural societies that reinforced solidarity. Chapter ten situates migrants within the heightened repression of the 1970s, when political upheaval and violence bred suspicion toward foreigners. Despite hostility, migrants sustained community networks and resilience, underscoring their determination to survive amid adversity. The final chapter extends the analysis into post-independence Zimbabwe. While Mozambican migrants briefly benefited under the new government, their status deteriorated after 1985 as anti-foreign sentiment intensified. This closing discussion underscores the fragility of belonging in environments where identities are politicized and "foreignness" remains contested.

Elusive Histories represents a major scholarly contribution. Drawing on over two hundred oral interviews alongside archival research, the authors skillfully recover marginalized voices and reconstruct the everyday struggles and strategies of Mozambican migrants. By foregrounding informal networks and unauthorized migration, the book challenges rigid notions of colonial boundaries and fixed identities, presenting migrants as both shaped by and shaping their transnational realities. The study's implications extend beyond southern Africa. Its analysis raises broader questions about national memory, belonging, and political exclusion in postcolonial societies. By situating Mozambican migrants at the center of Rhodesian and Zimbabwean history, the authors push against nationalist narratives that erase the contributions of "foreign" workers. Overall, *Elusive Histories* is a compelling and original work. Its clear organization, robust empirical foundation, and analytical depth make it essential reading for scholars of migration, colonialism, and African borderlands. While further research might explore the later experiences of Mozambican migrants/refugees, particularly during the civil war (1975–1992) and more recent RENAMO violence, this study provides a foundational and critical approach to reframe debates around labor, borders, and belonging in southern Africa. This volume will remain influential for years to come.

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