

Border Jumping and Migration Control in Southern Africa. By Francis Musoni, Indiana University Press, 2020. pp. 218

René Bogović

Volume 37, Number 2, 2021

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1091292ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25071/1920-7336.40949>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Centre for Refugee Studies, York University

ISSN

0229-5113 (print)

1920-7336 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Bogović, R. (2021). Review of [Border Jumping and Migration Control in Southern Africa. By Francis Musoni, Indiana University Press, 2020. pp. 218]. *Refuge*, 37(2), 173–175. <https://doi.org/10.25071/1920-7336.40949>

© René Bogović, 2021



This document is protected by copyright law. Use of the services of Érudit (including reproduction) is subject to its terms and conditions, which can be viewed online.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/en/users/policy-on-use/>

This article is disseminated and preserved by Érudit.

Érudit is a non-profit inter-university consortium of the Université de Montréal, Université Laval, and the Université du Québec à Montréal. Its mission is to promote and disseminate research.

<https://www.erudit.org/en/>



Book Review

René Bogović

REFERENCE

Musoni, F. (2020). **Border Jumping and Migration Control in Southern Africa**. Indiana University Press. pp. 218. ISBN (hard cover): 9780253047151

Bridging historical and migration research, *Border Jumping and Migration Control in Southern Africa* explores unofficial border flows between Zimbabwe and South Africa from 1890 to 2010.

Exceeding a mere analysis of push-and-pull factors driving cross-border flows, this volume situates border jumpers as rational actors who adjust crossing strategies to structural circumstances. They adapt to changing statecraft and migration politics, while questioning the legitimacy of African colonial borders.

The book is organized chronologically. It begins by describing the rise of colonial rule of the Zimbabwe plateau by the British South Africa Company (BSAC) and the establishment of Southern Rhodesia in the 1890s. The focus then shifts to changing cross-border flows as Southern Rhodesia evolved into Zimbabwe, and the Transvaal Colony became part of the Union of South Africa, later the Republic of South Africa.

The introduction sets up the definitional framework of the book, contesting customary terminology in migration studies. Border jumping, a local definition of unofficial cross-border flows, is chosen over terms that ignore state structures (i.e., undocumented/unauthorized) and carry pejorative connotations (i.e., illegal) or suggest a disorderly flow (i.e., informal/irregular). Border jumping advances the book's objective of contesting the validity of the border's existence while recognizing jumpers' agency.

Chapter 1 opens with the BSAC's establishment of the Limpopo River as a colonial border, with Southern Rhodesia to the north and the Transvaal to the south. From its inception onwards, the border made customary cross-river movements illegal, severing ethnolinguistic regional units. Colonial rule furthermore disrupted economic systems, as the introduction of wage economy, land dispossession, and forced relocations pushed native populations to seek labour opportunities south of the Limpopo.

CONTACT

^a  rene.bogovic@mail.utoronto.ca

Department of Sociology, University of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario, Canada

South African mining interests, led by the Witwatersrand Native Labour Association, kept the border porous. South Africa skirted enforcement of border checks, ensuring a steady flow of cheap labour southward, despite BSAC's efforts to retain its labour force north of the Limpopo. The border was both the stage of colonial powers vying for labour and a site of subaltern resistance, with locals continuing to cross the border in defiance of its legitimacy.

Chapter 2 opens with the legislative changes ensuing the merging of several colonies south of the Limpopo into the Union of South Africa in 1910. South Africa implemented a sweeping ban on immigrants from north of the 22nd parallel (roughly corresponding to the Limpopo) ostensibly to reduce ill-health in tropical workers unsuited to South Africa's cooler climate. As the ban's implicit rationale was to contain South Asian immigration, the flow of cheap labour from north of the Limpopo remained unchanged. However, making Limpopo crossings illegal exposed migrants to rising violence and exploitation, leading to the emergence of officials' corruption and human smugglers.

Chapter 3 follows the aftermath of the ban's lifting in 1933, as South Africa needed foreign labour at the end of the Great Depression. Migrant flows, formal and informal, continued, encouraged by South African businesses, as the National Party, architect of apartheid, came into power in 1948. Return labourers supported the efforts of human smugglers and informal recruiters to bring more labour to South Africa. These activities grew increasingly violent and devolved into kidnappings and farm raids to add labourers. The activities in the Limpopo Valley came to resemble aspects of the transatlantic slave trade.

Chapter 4 starts with the implementation of apartheid in the 1950s. Forced relo-

cations to overcrowded and resource poor "native reserves" (Bantustans) meant millions of black South Africans lost prime land and access to informal trade in urban areas. Apartheid led to skyrocketing Black unemployment, encouraging South African businesses to shift to local labour while restricting foreign workers. The proliferation of Black liberation movements in the 1960s, including the victory of the Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army, a Black liberation movement opposing apartheid, prompted the South African government to militarize the Limpopo border and install an electrified fence in 1985. By 1989 hundreds of border jumpers died at the fence.

Chapter 5 details the collapse of the formal economy in Zimbabwe and the intensification of cross-border trade and work across the Limpopo as South Africa transitioned to democracy in 1994. Despite the end of apartheid, South Africa continued to protect its local labour force and borders. By 2009, most migrants continued to use unofficial channels to cross the Limpopo. Human smugglers and corrupt state officials remained the biggest risk to migrants, especially women, often victims of rape and gender-based violence.

The conclusion reiterates that, much like events at the Berlin and Mexico-US walls, the Limpopo shows that border fortification does not inhibit flows and instead makes them more dangerous, encouraging human smugglers and corruption. Colonial borders feed border jumping, and border jumping will not cease as long as the nation-state system persists.

The book offers a comprehensive review of local border dynamics rarely explored by academics in the Global North. Rich detail is the book's strength but also its shortcoming. It highlights the interdependent role of labour market interests, the agency

of border jumpers, and the legacy of colonial statecraft in the changing attributes of the Limpopo border. Yet these theoretical contributions are diluted with the minute detail of successive legislative changes and personal accounts encountered at the border. While individual stories provide much-needed humanity to otherwise impersonal descriptions of migrant flows, the information overload and fragmentation muddles the theoretical contribution of the book.

Some phenomena do not receive the attention warranted by their influence on border dynamics. For instance, the contribution of border securitization to a surge in violence against women deserves its own chapter. The claim about the unique nature of African borders, legacy of the colonial scramble for Africa, is insufficiently explored. State borders that ignore economic and cultural regional continuities exist within and outside the post-colonial world—borders in the Balkans being a case in point. Exploring the unique significance of the Limpopo border would highlight the relevance of the book among anti-colonial works.

Recommendations for future policy, as well as activist and community work are

also lacking. Other than advocating for the removal of colonial borders, there are no systematic suggestions that would help policy-makers, activists, or border jumpers work towards a safer, fairer, and sustainable approach to crossing the Limpopo.

Despite missed opportunities for greater theoretical impact, *Border Jumping and Migration Control in Southern Africa* adds a strong voice from the Global South. It provides migration studies with the opportunity to break away from its narrow focus on the Global North, broadening the range of cases available in theorizing and labelling cross-border phenomena. I am enthusiastic about including it in my migration studies syllabi.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

René Bogović is a PhD candidate in sociology at the University of Toronto. The author may be contacted at rene.bogovic@mail.utoronto.ca.



This open access work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/).

This license allows for non-commercial use, reproduction and adaption of the material in any medium or format, with proper attribution.