

Overview of *The Namibian Worker Database*

The Namibian Worker Database, a cornerstone of the PhD project "Namibian Labor Empire: Genocide, Migrant Labor, and the Origins of Colonial Capitalism in South West Africa, 1892-1925" (Lyon 2022) and the subsequent book "Forged in Genocide: Migrant Workers Shaping Colonial Capitalism in Namibia, 1890-1925" (Lyon 2024), was developed between 2017 and 2024. It also played a pivotal role in my earlier article "From Labour Elites to Garveyites: West African Migrant Labour in Namibia, 1892-1925" (Lyon 2021).

This extensive database was meticulously compiled from archival records in Namibia and South Africa, documenting the experiences of workers in colonial Namibia. A significant portion of the data comes from estate files of workers who passed away on the job during 1910 to 1920, particularly from the so-called 'Native Estate Files' (NES) preserved at the National Archives of Namibia, which detail the lives and deaths of non-white workers from 1917 to 1951.

Spanning thousands of files, the NES, once on the brink of destruction by the apartheid regime for being deemed 'historically insignificant', were saved by bureaucratic oversight and later rediscovered post-Namibia's independence by Ellen Ndeshi Namhila of the University of Namibia (Namhila 2017). These files, coupled with additional records from the German colonial era, form the backbone of *the Namibian Worker Database*, offering unprecedented insights into the lives of African laborers in Namibia during this period. The database encapsulates diverse data points such as estate values, personal belongings, origins, ethnicity, employment details, causes of death, and more, providing a uniform dataset that sheds light on aspects often missing from colonial archives.

In creating this database, efforts were made to translate multilingual records into English and standardize various currencies into Pound sterling (£), acknowledging the presence of potential inaccuracies for which I assume full responsibility.

This database is not just an academic endeavor but a tool envisioned to support researchers, students, and anyone interested in exploring the intricate histories of labor, colonialism, and African lives in Namibia. It stands as a testament to the individuals whose lives and contributions have long been overlooked, hoping to foster a deeper understanding and appreciation of their roles in shaping colonial capitalism in Namibia.

William Blakemore Lyon

References:

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