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**Ellen Ndeshi Namhila.** *Native Estates: Records of Mobility Across Colonial Boundaries.* Carl Schlettwein Lecture 10. Basel: Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 2017. 44p.

Reviewed by: Nathaniel Mathews, State University of New York, Binghamton.

In a brief but powerful book on archives, author and archivist (now Pro-Vice Chancellor of the University of Namibia) Ellen Ndeshi Namhila reflects on the power of the colonial state to define the past through the creation, destruction and organization of records.

This specific book emerged as a part of the author's Ph.D. research at Tampere University. As the director of the Namibia Library and Archives Services from 1999-2005, Namhila noticed that requests by black Namibians for records related to specific people (such as deceased family members), were exceedingly difficult to fill, while the same requests by white Namibians, in her words, "were easily retrieved and served to clients within minutes" (p.10). Much of the information white Namibians sought was contained within well organized Estate Files, while black Namibians had to rely on poorly archived Native Estate records, most of which were not collected in a central place or were completely undocumented in the larger organizational schema, a so-called "dark archive", in Namhila's words. Those that were organized, "clearly show the signs of administrative neglect and chaos" (p.17). The making of the colonial archive was thus an act not only of omission, but of violence and racism.

Records exist at the behest of archivists and bureaucracies; to be useful to the public they must be sorted and 'appraised' and then placed into the proper place in a larger archival schema. When earlier generations of apartheid-era white Namibian archivists appraised Native Estate Records, they often judged them as worthless and destroyed them. One chilling memo about these files from the then chief archivist in Pretoria to their counterpart in Windhoek (Namibia's capital) contains the phrase: "the rest of the correspondence in the file apparently does not warrant permanent preservation" (p.24). In fact, the only thing that allowed most of the existing Native Estate files to survive at all was the fact that they were not appraised.

Namhila eventually uncovered over 11,000 Native Estates files in her remarkable research, a work of patient and painstaking archival combing for which a generation of black Namibians seeking to trace their ancestors through the historical record will be deeply grateful. These records should also keep Namibia's historians busy for quite some time. As the adaptation into print of a lecture series, this short book does not offer much in the way of deep empirical analysis of the uncovered archival records. But what records it does analyze provide tantalizing clues for the possibilities of future research.

Most intriguingly, there are also a number of records in the Native Estates Records from West Africans—including Liberians, Cameroonians and Sierra Leonians, many of whom were migrant laborers. What emerges most remarkably from these records is what Namhila calls, citing Derrida, the "undecidable reserve of unintended

content”: the information they provide on the working and living conditions of black Namibians under colonialism and apartheid. In addition to its utility for Namibians and historians of Namibia, this is a book that will inspire historians, archivists and all decolonial storytellers and narrators to go back and interrogate the ‘undecidable reserves’ in the data they analyze, in order to develop new strategies (and enhance old ones) for decolonizing the encoded practices of racism in the colonial archive.

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