

The Jeremy Newman Papers: A New Historical Source for Colonial Kenya and the Kamba

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Abstract: The Jeremy Newman Papers are a new source for the study of colonial Kenya. The collection includes a variety of assorted documents, but most importantly, the transcripts of thirty-one interviews carried out by Newman in Machakos District in Kenya's Eastern Province in 1973 and 1974. Newman interviewed thirty members of the Kamba ethnic group – and one European settler – all of whom were born between approximately 1895 and 1920. The interviews range widely, touching on topics such as education, European settlement, politics, trade, the First and Second World Wars, Mau Mau, and especially the destocking episode of 1938.

Résumé: Les papiers de Jeremy Newman sont une source nouvelle pour l'étude de la période coloniale au Kenya. La collection inclut un recueil de documents variés et, plus important encore, les transcriptions de trente-et-un entretiens menés par Newman en 1973 et en 1974 dans le district de Machakos de la province Est du Kenya. Newman interviewa trente membres du groupe ethnique Kamba et un colon européen, tous nés approximativement entre 1895 et 1920. Les entretiens concernent des sujets aussi divers que l'éducation, la colonisation européenne, la politique, le commerce, la première et la deuxième guerre mondiale, Mau Mau, et en particulier l'épisode de déstockage de 1938.

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This report describes a new source for the study of colonial Kenya called The Jeremy Newman Papers.¹ Whilst undertaking doctoral research in 2004, I came across Jeremy Newman's short but important book entitled *The Ukamba Members Association*, published in Nairobi in 1974. The book is a synthesis of an important but now largely forgotten moment in Kenyan history, usually described as the "destocking episode." In 1938, the British colonial government confiscated several thousand head of cattle belonging to the Kamba, a Bantu-speaking ethnic group living in central-eastern Kenya.² The stock removal was focused on the north-west region of the Kamba land unit, and spurred by colonial concern about land degradation. The government had demanded that Kamba in the area brand a small proportion of their cattle, leaving the remainder to be sold (for a quarter of market value) as slaughter stock to a newly-built meat-processing factory near Athi River.

In response, a fledgling political party called the Ukamba Members Association organized an extraordinary act of protest. Kamba leaders gathered together between 2,000 and 3,000 men, women, and children, and guided them thirty miles to a location near the racecourse in Nairobi, where they staged a "sit-in." For six weeks, supporters restocked the protestors' supplies of food from farms at home, while pressure built on the colonial administration, much of it engineered by Jomo Kenyatta in London. Eventually, the government was forced to capitulate and return the cattle. But things did not return to normal:

¹ I am grateful to John Lonsdale for first bringing this collection to my attention, and Jeremy Newman for his permission to make it accessible online.

² On the Kamba, see, for instance, Katherine Luongo, *Witchcraft and Colonial Rule in Kenya, 1900-1955* (New York, Cambridge University Press, 2011) or Myles Osborne, "The Kamba and Mau Mau: Ethnicity, Development, and Chiefship, 1952-1960," *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 43-1 (2010), 63-87.

³ Between 1971 and 1976, scholars produced a significant amount of work on the episode. See J. Forbes Munro, *Colonial Rule and the Kamba: Social Change in the Kenya Highlands, 1889-1939* (Oxford, The Clarendon Press, 1975), 224-246; Fay Gadsden, "Further Notes on the Kamba Destocking Controversy of 1938," *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 7-4 (1974), 681-687; Bismarck Myrick, "Colonial Initiatives and Kamba Reaction in Machakos District: The Destocking Issue, 1930-1938," in: John Lonsdale (introd.), *Three Aspects of Crisis in Colonial Kenya* (Syracuse, Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, Syracuse University, 1975), 1-23; Jeremy Newman, *The Ukamba Members Association* (Nairobi, Transafrica Publishers, 1974); Leon Spencer, "Notes on the Kamba Destocking Controversy of 1938," *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 5-4 (1972), 629-636; Robert Tignor, "Kamba Political Protest: The Destocking Controversy of 1938," *African Historical Studies* 4-2

despite the detention of the protest's leader, Samuel Muindi Mbingu, resistance continued into 1939.³

What was particularly notable about Newman's work was that he had interviewed several of the most prominent participants in the episode, including Isaac Mwalonzi and Nduba Mwatu, a sergeant-major in the King's African Rifles. Considering the quality of Newman's work, I was surprised that I had never come across any further publications, nor indeed his doctoral thesis, which he was in the process of writing when he published his book. I therefore wrote to John Lonsdale, a Fellow of Trinity College at the University of Cambridge where Newman had studied, to enquire. I was disappointed to learn that Newman had never finished his degree: an Australian by birth, he had left Cambridge to join the diplomatic service. Before leaving, however, he had deposited a set of thirty-one transcribed interviews with Lonsdale, as well as a variety of papers.

With one exception, the interviews – the most valuable part of this collection – were carried out in what was then Machakos District in Kenya's Eastern Province.⁴ They include the testimony of informants born between approximately 1895 and 1920 (including several chiefs and prominent persons), and relate to topics including agriculture, clan membership, education, European settlement, politics, and trade. In the interviews, informants recall major historical moments in Kenya's history, such as the First and Second World Wars and – to a lesser extent – the Mau Mau rebellion. The greatest strength of these interviews, however, lies in their coverage of the destocking episode.

In 2010, I contacted Jeremy Newman in Athens, where he was the Australian Ambassador to Greece. He gave permission to archive these papers at the University of Colorado-Boulder. The papers may be accessed online at <http://libcudl.colorado.edu:8180/luna/servlet/login>, although access is restricted: scholars should write a short email to Dave Hays at arv@colorado.edu, explaining their interest. They will then receive a password that will permit viewing.

The Jeremy Newman Papers are divided into three parts: Interviews, Papers, and Miscellaneous. I have avoided excising or editing any parts of the collection. More detailed information follows below, and all dates that appear on the interview transcripts, as well as in the file names in the online collection, are in the format dd-mm-yyyy.

(1971), 237–251; Robert Tignor, *The Colonial Transformation of Kenya: The Kamba, Kikuyu and Maasai from 1900 to 1939* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1976), 331–354.

⁴ During the 1990s, the Government of Kenya divided Machakos District into two, leaving a smaller Machakos District (in the north), and Makueni District (in the south).

Part I: Interviews

Interview Subject	Date*	Location
1. Anne Joyce	n.d.	Kilima Kiu
2. Nzile Ndaa	n.d.	Mbitini
3. John Mbeva	11 February 1973	Mbooni
4. Peter Mukoma	September 1973	Nunguni market
5. Ishmael Mwakabi Mwendwa	16 June 1973	Tala market
6. Paulo Muthiani wa Musau	30 June 1973	Tala market
7. Elijah Mutambuuki	1 July 1973	Tala market
8. Paulo Kitungi	20 November 1973	Nairobi
9. P. Kitia	25 Nov. 1973	Sengani, near Tala market
10. Elijah Mbondu	26 November 1973	Tala market
11. John Muiya Kivati	10 December 1973	Tala market
12. Kavula Muli	12 December 1973	Matungulu
13. Mukonzo	4 January 1974	Kee, Kilungu
14. Kimuyu Mandi	8 January 1974	Mukaa
15. Isaac Mwalonzi	17 January 1974	Ngelani
16. Kiviva Musyoki	10 February 1974	Ithemboni, Mbooni
17. David Kaindi	13 February 1974	Mbooni
18. Canon Mute	1 March 1974	Ukia
19. Mary Muendi	5 March 1974	Ukia market
20. William Muisyo Mulinge	8 March 1974	Ikuua, Ukia
21. Cosmas Musau	13 June 1974	Kikoko, Kilungu
22. William Mwabu	20 June 1974	Kasikine, Kilungu
23. Somba wa Nthenge	9 August 1974	Ndunduuni, Mbitini
24. Kimanthi Kyambo	26 August 1974	Kikambuani, Kangundo
25. Nduba Mwatu	31 August 1974	Ngelani, Iveti
26. Elijah Mutaki	1 November 1974	Kiliku, Mbooni
27. Mwinzi Mala	2 November 1974	Tawa market
28. Zachayo Mulandi Ngao	2 November 1974	Kiteta
29. John Mutua	3 November 1974	Kiteta
30. Musau Mwanja	5 November 1974	Tawa market
31. Solomon Kyengo	8 November 1974	Kiteta

Part II: Papers

1. "Authority, incongruity, & organisational patterns: some problems & themes in the study of the Kamba of Machakos and Kitui" (20 pages) – paper for discussion at Trinity College, University of Cambridge, 15 December 1972.
2. "First steps in rural capitalism: Machakos before the 2nd World War" (32 pages) – draft chapter, n.d.

3. "Some aspects of the results of British administrative techniques and attitudes in the Machakos District of Kenya, 1889-1954" (66 pages) – History Tripos examination, June 1972.

Part III: Miscellaneous

1. "Agricultural planning and social change in Ukambani during the late colonial period" (6 pages) – proposal for a book or possibly dissertation, c. 1975.

2. "The failure of Mau Mau politics in Machakos District: a background exploration" (2 pages) – handwritten and incomplete, n.d.

3. Assorted notes (both typed and handwritten – 6 pages) on J. Forbes Munro, *Colonial Rule and the Kamba: Social Change in the Kenya Highlands, 1889-1939* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1975) and Martin Hill, *The Harambee Movement in Kenya: Self-Help, Development, and Education among the Kamba of Kitui District* (London, Athlone Press, 1991).

4. J. Forbes Munro, "The economic and social basis of Kamba protest, 1938-1939" (17 pages) – paper presented at the Seminar on the Societies of Eastern Africa at the School of Oriental and African Studies, 22 February 1973.

5. G.C.M. Mutiso, "Mwethya: the socio-historical basis and uses of collective action in Machakos District" (8 pages) – draft paper, July 1971.

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———, *The Colonial Transformation of Kenya: The Kamba, Kikuyu and Maasai from 1900 to 1939* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1976).