

*Katrin Bromber,
Zentrum Moderner Orient
Berlin*

‘Muscular Christianity’¹: the Role of the Ethiopian YMCA Sports in Shaping ‘Modern’ Masculinities (1950s-1970s)

Abstract

The work of the Ethiopian Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA), which commenced in Addis Ababa in the early 1950s and spread to eighteen Ethiopian cities until the early 1970s, revolved around the development of a ‘balanced manhood’ through social, recreational, spiritual and educational activities among boys and young men. Similar to the UK and American templates, it combined inward-looking character development and outward-looking religiosity with the idea of a ‘muscular Christianity’. In the 1930s, the American YMCA linked these aspects with concepts of the ‘modern’ YMCA member as a leader with specific character traits. This approach met with the post-World War II needs for ‘progressive’ citizens and leaders in Ethiopia. Incorporating sports as a morally positive activity became a powerful strategy for the creation of a distinct life style and a legitimate form of self-improving leisure for educated males in Ethiopian cities, notably Addis Ababa.

The following paper discusses the establishment of the Ethiopian YMCA and its contribution to the production of the ‘modern man’ along three lines. The first part places the emergence of the YMCA sports culture within broader developments of physical education in inter-war and post-war urban Ethiopia. In the second part I will look at concrete activities which attempted to channel the energy of young males for the good of the

¹ The term ‘Muscular Christianity’ was coined by T.C. Sanders in 1857. For its use as an analytical tool in the social sciences see Ikoe Abe (2006: 714ff.).

nation. The conclusion will discuss the question in how far these activities built on religious arguments which supported or opposed existing notions of acceptable bodies and perceptions of useful self-improving leisure.

Keywords: YMCA, Ethiopia, modernity, physical education

Physical education and the emergence of the Ethiopian YMCA

At the personal request of the Emperor, who later became its patron, preparations to establish an Ethiopian YMCA started in 1947. In February 1951, the *Negarit Gazeta*, the government publication of official announcements, gave the YMCA complete corporate rights². In 1953, the first branch opened in the Arat Kilo quarter in Addis Ababa³. Ethiopian officials had approached the YMCA World Alliance at a time when the organization had almost completed a substantial shift in its overall objectives as a result of a crisis in the American YMCA missionary movement⁴. One aspect of this change was the emphasis on character-building. Whereas it had formerly taken place in forums such as Sunday Schools, the new approach was heavily informed by educational and psychological theories. The focus on building moral character through religious education was shifted to the building of “specific traits through specific training that then allow for moral behaviour”⁵. Group activity experiences in the YMCA were proposed as the key element for the creation of the ‘modern’ personality. The training to become a ‘modern’ man applied in the first instance to future leaders from the US as well as from the countries in which the movement had established itself. The ‘modernity’, the American officials had in mind, was of course the

² *Wewakema*, T'ik'imt 2002 (E.C. = 2010), 6.

³ From its beginnings in Addis Ababa, the YMCA spread to twenty-three centers in eighteen cities between 1955 and 1968. For further information, see www.africaymca.org/30.0.html (accessed 28 December 2012) and www.special.lib.umn.edu...yusa0035.phtml (accessed 16 February 2013).

⁴ J.T. Davidann 1998.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 155.

‘Western’ type. Everything else was described “suffering from cultural lag”⁶.

In how far the modern Christian, i.e. Protestant, concept of the YMCA stood in stark contrast to the established Ethiopian Orthodox notion of Christianity can be studied in various ways. As this article deals with modern sports and physical education as part of a modernising project in urban centres, it is necessary to note right from the beginning that well established traditional games, such as *Genna*, never became part of the institution’s sports program. If this was explicitly done because these sport practices were linked to Orthodox festivals or because they were perceived as rural and, thus, backward is a matter of debate. As I have argued elsewhere, traditional games never entered the physical education curricula of modern schools, armed forces training institutions, universities or any other formal educational context as well⁷. We might, thus, assume that perceptions of modern sports in the first part of the twentieth century also informed (positive) attitudes towards these bodily practices at the YMCA. In its attempts to ‘modernize’ the world, the YMCA met with an ongoing trend to modernize Ethiopia, which had started in the mid-nineteenth century, but gained full swing in the twentieth century – most notably in the interwar period and after World War II. It was an element in seeing Addis Ababa and other Ethiopian cities as promoters and motors of progress in times of global social optimism which targeted primarily the urban educated strata while mostly ignoring the majority of the population who lived in rural areas. According to the Central Statistical Office in Addis Ababa, only 8.5 per cent of the Ethiopian population lived in urban centres in 1967; most of them in the capital⁸.

The fact that the Emperor Haile Selassie personally requested the establishment of the institution, despite of the overwhelming power of the Orthodox Church, might indicate that its function within the society were not so much the spread of the gospel, but the

⁶ Ibid., 156.

⁷ K. Bromber 2013a, 88.

⁸ M. Rafiq, A. Hailemariam 1987, 86.

production of mentally and physically strong ‘progressive’ citizens and ‘modern’ leaders. In this endeavour, the emergence of the Ethiopian YMCA has to be studied in relation to other modernizing institutions such as modern schools, military academies or the Scout Movement. Such institutions were perfect sites to exercise what Michel Foucault called the “micro-physics of power”, i.e. specific disciplinary techniques directed at the body to produce subjects and shape their conduct. The “docile body” geared by an “indefinite discipline” worked through a system of surveillance and “did not need arms, physical violence, and material constraints”⁹. Educating citizens to become committed servants of the Imperial progressive visions likewise implied the systematic introduction of modern sports through compulsory physical education classes in schools and military institutions¹⁰. The secondary schools in Addis Ababa were ideal sites to inscribe compliant perceptions of the body into the future elite – the “pioneers of change”¹¹ or the ‘transmission belts’ of Ethiopian modernity in the post-war period. In Addis Ababa, physical education was taught by French and Egyptian teachers at Menelik II School as early as 1907¹². A closer look at mission schools which operated throughout the Empire might prove that physical education as a subject might have started already in the nineteenth century. Studies on the role of cultural sports practices such as *tigil* (wrestling) within the framework of Orthodox religious training, especially in rural settings¹³, would not only enlarge our

⁹ M. Foucault 2015.

¹⁰ Similar to military institutions elsewhere, Ethiopian cadet schools and military academies were a vital component of the educational sector along with government and mission schools.

¹¹ Bahru Zewde’s term refers to the first generation of ‘modern’ intellectuals (Bahru Zewde 2002).

¹² Since the following data focus on Addis Ababa only, it is not representative for Ethiopia as a whole. Further research, especially about mission schools, might shift the introduction of physical education to an earlier period.

¹³ Resedebrī Gebreaninya Gebremedhin, a 78 years old inhabitant from Maryam P’ap’aseyī Village, revealed that he started wrestling in the religious school in Ch’ala (place near Hawzēn) in the 1960s. During the breaks the priests suggested to practice wrestling. One of the priests was acting as

knowledge about religion and physical exercises in a much longer historical perspective but give due importance to “variation-centred models of social transformation”¹⁴. The designation of sport as a compulsory subject in schools did not emerge until the late 1920s and was for the most part restricted to institutions of higher learning¹⁵. Although little is known about the actual content of the classes, photographs from 1935 suggest gymnastics¹⁶.

The post-war period saw a strengthening of physical education on a broader basis. A Department of Physical Education was established within the Ministry of Education and sport was introduced to the primary school curriculum (Grade 1-6). The Ethiopian Inter-School Athletic Association, which had been founded in 1950, organized annual competitions. In the annual intra- and inter-school sport meets young athletes could gain credit points for their schools, which translated into moral and material rewards¹⁷. Roughly at the same period, university colleges designated sport a compulsory extra-curricular activity and created the necessary facilities. According to the *Journal of the University College Sports Day* of 1956, students could choose from volleyball, softball, soccer, lawn tennis, badminton, hockey, archery, fencing, boxing, weight-lifting, and track and field¹⁸. A daily time slot from five to six-fifteen

the referee (*danya*). Resedebrī Gebreaninya, who himself gives religious instruction to a small group of boys, continues with this practice (Interview with Alemesh Gessew and Resedebrī Gebreaninya Gebremedhin, Mar-yam P’ap’aseytī Village 18 July 2012). Social aspects of wrestling in Ethiopia are specifically dealt with in K. Bromber 2013c.

¹⁴ J. G., Ferguson 2008.

¹⁵ Lakew Yigsitu, 1988, “Ye-Ītyop’ya sport wididdir”, *Ethiopian Interschool Sports Competition Magazine*, 28, dated the introduction of physical education at Entoto Vocational and Technical School at 1925, Empress Menen School at around 1930, and at the Kokebe Ts’ibah Haile Selassie I School at approx. 1931 (cited in Negussē Alemu, 11). For the introduction of sports at Menelik II School, see Bahru Zewde, 2002, 24.

¹⁶ Anon. 1935, 35. The photographs show gymnastic performances on the occasion of the Swedish monarch’s visit to Ethiopia in 1935.

¹⁷ *Journal of the Ethiopian Inter-School Athletic Association*, 1952, 11.

¹⁸ “Sport”, *Journal of the University College of Addis Ababa Sports Day*, 16 March 1956.

p.m. was reserved for sports. University officials used the *mens sana in corpore sano* argument from the 1950s onwards, which would become an important element in the YMCA rhetoric of the early 1970s. The establishment of a YMCA university branch suggests the exchange of knowledge and expertise in the field of sport activities as well as in the ideas about acceptable ‘modern’ bodies.

Educating sport teachers became a goal in the early 1960s and was followed by the offer of a diploma course in physical education at the Haile Selassie I University in 1965. Since the subject clearly lacked appeal, the training of sport teachers was conducted in summer courses. Despite the financial incentives – successful participation resulted in a salary increase of 50 Birr¹⁹ – the project petered out after three years. The main reason might be the negative attitude sport teachers faced in their work places. The body-builder, PE teacher, and sport official Girma Cheru commented on this fact that “[a] sports teacher had the reputation of someone with no qualification. Since he only spends his time with children, he neither needs promotion nor additional courses... In practice, pressure was put on him”²⁰. Although Girma Cheru did not reveal what exactly he meant by pressure, former PE teachers explained in an interview that if classes were cancelled, the PE teacher had to include the affected pupils in his own classes, which were already overcrowded. This situation made systematic physical education and the training of technical disciplines nearly impossible²¹. A fundamental change first occurred in 1970, when the Addis Ababa College of Teacher Education (renamed Kotebe College of Teacher Education in 1976) offered a diploma course in Health and Physical Education²². Links

¹⁹ “Ye-and amet yejīmnastīk memhiran kors,” *Journal of the Inter-School Athletic Association*, 1958/59, 17.

²⁰ Wendimu Negash Desta, “Girma Cheru - g^welmassawī sportenya”, *Yekatit*, 1974 Tahsas (AM), 36.

²¹ Interview with Shifferaw Agonafer (former head of the Sports Department Addis Abeba University), Alemu Mitiku (head of the Ethiopian Boy Scout Association), Zora Yersu (athletics coach, former member of the Ethiopian Olympic Committee), T’ilahun Woldehana (sports teacher) in Addis Ababa, 18 June 2011.

²² Gebreyaw Teshager 1997.

between physical education at university level and the YMCA were formalized in competition, (i.e. inviting the YMCA basketball team to the University Sports Day), personnel (PE students and teachers were members of the YMCA) and the joint use of facilities²³.

An important movement that targeted at the behaviour of young males was the Scout Movement. It was first introduced in Ethiopia around 1933, and opened a school in Addis Ababa the next year²⁴. After having been forced to end its activities during the Italian occupation, the association was revived in Ethiopia in 1948. Scout activities gained a foothold in the schools of Ethiopia²⁵. As Allen Warren has shown, the movement aimed explicitly at developing a “manly character” along the line of Victorian ideas of manliness which combined religion to ideas of the body²⁶. Fik’ru Kīdane’s memoirs describe the implementation of these ideas in Addis Ababa schools after World War II²⁷. Sport, outdoor activities as well synchronized movement (marching) in uniforms served the overall aim to produce young males who are alert, follow orders “like a soldier” and develop a group identity that cross-cut social class and ethnic background. In how far the Scout Movement and YMCA activities overlapped in sport and out-door activities in terms of access to facilities or specialized personnel is still an open question. Interviews with retired sport instructors revealed that the same people were active in both institutions²⁸. In contrast to the ‘soldier’-like personality to be created by the Scout Movement, the YMCA attempted to produce ‘gentlemen’, and above all ‘leaders’.

²³ The first YMCA branch was built vis-à-vis the Technical College (Addis Ababa University College) in Arat Kilo quarter, where the university sports ground was located.

²⁴ R. Pankhurst, 1968, 682 and 714.

²⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethiopia_Scout_Association#cite_note-0 (accessed 3 September 2012).

²⁶ A. Warren, 1987.

²⁷ Fik’ru Kīdane, 2009, 44-45.

²⁸ Interviews with Ato Shifferaw Agonafer, Ato Alemu Mitiku (Head of the Ethiopian Boy Scout Association), Zora Yersu, T’ilahun Woldehana (Addis Ababa, 18 June 2011).

Similar to schools and universities, YMCA sport oscillated between compulsory activity and leisure at least in the way it was conceptualized in reports and advertised in the newspapers. It intertwined and dialogued in an interesting way with an emerging urban ‘leisure culture’ which also revolved around concepts of ‘modern’ bodies.

YMCA, urban leisure culture and the image of physical self-improvement

In the first annual report I could get hold of, and which dates from 1962, we can read that “[t]he YMCA is a part of a worldwide movement whose purpose it is to develop leadership, build strong healthy bodies, give opportunities for mental growth and to guide its participants to mental maturity”²⁹. By the 1970s, this theme had been more and more geared towards leadership, ‘modern’ citizenship, communal spirit, and service to the nation on a voluntary basis³⁰. Recreation, and especially sport, was communicated as a means to achieve this goal.

The aim to build strong and healthy bodies resulted in programs and facilities that gave physical development through modern sport a high priority. As the following table shows, the Addis Ababa YMCA dedicated a large part of its annual budget to physical education (for earlier periods and later years the precise data are not given in the reports):

²⁹ YMCA Annual Report 1962, 6.

³⁰ “Merīyachin maselt’an tegbar”, YMCA Annual Report 1967, 4.

Addis Ababa YMCA budget for physical education:

Year	Overall budget in Ethiopia in Ethiopian \$ ³¹	Budget for physical education in Ethiopian \$
1963	103,775,82	8,133,19
1965	133,015,00	10,630,00
1966	144,446,50	11,718,00
1967	314,556,00	11,560,00

Apart from the investment into facilities, the magnetism of sport events becomes apparent in the fact that in 1965, for example, no less than 15,151 boys and young men participated in 296 events. If compared to the 7,505 persons who took part in the 41 religious program events for the same year, we might conclude that it was sport what the YMCA stood for. The pivotal role of sports is further substantiated by the fact that the Physical Education Secretary of the Addis Ababa YMCA was replaced by a Physical Education Committee in 1967, which consisted of eight members (two foreigners) and was led by Hon. Col. Dawit Gebru³².

The importance of sports for shaping the ‘modern’ Ethiopian man was communicated by linking visual material to bodily function. Pictures were published with subtitles or headlines that specified the function which should be associated with the activity. A photograph about gymnastics, for example, was subtitled with a “[f]ew stunts among those that help to discipline the physical condition of the body³³.” Jumping on the trampoline was specified as a help for “the mind and the body [to] work harmoniously³⁴.” Through volleyball, which seems to have been as important as basketball, the young men

³¹ Ethiopian \$ = Ethiopian Birr

³² YMCA Annual Report, 1967, 8.

³³ “Sewinnetin lemegrat kemmiyazut yemegelebabbet timhirtoch t’ik’itochu”, YMCA Annual Report 1970, 5.

³⁴ “Up! Not to the moon, but to help the mind and the body work harmoniously.” (“wedelay ... aydellem wede ch’erek’a! ...gin haylin ksewinnet k’ilt’ifinna gar lemastebabber”), YMCA Annual Report 1969, 6.

should not only support the development of “precision, teamwork and physical skill”, but also to become “the complete man” and, above all, “a good citizen in his community”³⁵.

Citing Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862), an American poet, philosopher, and reformer, that “[e]very man is the builder of a temple called ... his BODY”, the annual report of 1970-71 explained the general aims that the Ethiopian YMCA targeted at with Physical Education:

Physical education in the YMCA is organized to help the young boy meet the demanding requirements of manhood. Learning to play in accordance to rules of good sportsmanship in preparation for the future man to meet successfully the expectations of larger society.

Developing individual skill, team cooperation, an imaginative sense of competition, and qualities of good character are effectively revealed through various organized programs through YMCA Physical Education.

The YMCA continues to operate the Volleyball and Basketball Federations, the games being first invented by the YMCA during its early history around the world. In some communities around the nation the YMCA also organizes city-wide competition in other sports such as football, ping-pong and badminton. The YMCA Tennis Team has been a consistent winner in local tournaments³⁶.

Apart from games and team sports, it was body building which became very fashionable among young men who trained at the YMCA³⁷. Thus, every report contains pictures about body building in various branches throughout the country. Historical photographs from Mekelle YMCA indicate that it was this kind of physical exercise which linked YMCA athletes to a vibrant urban leisure culture and a general trend to display muscular bodies. The biography of the legendary heavy weight champion Seifu Mekonnen, who was part of the YMCA bodybuilding team in the late 1960s, comments on this issue:

³⁵ YMCA Annual Report 1967, 13.

³⁶ YMCA Annual Report 1970-71, 7.

³⁷ The 1970-71 YMCA Annual Report explicitly mentioned that “[y]outh are interested in body building”.

Relatively speaking, in a short period of time, he became a star. With a celebrity like status he used to be invited to all private parties and clubs in the city. His stature and strong persona gave every social gathering the mantle of peacefulness and no invitee ever dared to disrupt a party when Tibo was present. Although Seifu enjoyed going out to parties often he was also conscious of his health and his well-being. He never abused substances and avoided drinking alcohol, smoking cigarettes and taking drugs³⁸.

The expanding media scene supported the body building trend. Magazines such as the monthly *Menen* published photographs of YMCA bodybuilders along with news of the Ethiopian victory in the African Cup of Nations in 1962³⁹. From 1968 on, the Amharic daily *Addis Zemen* regularly reported on body building itself, including visuals. The newspaper discourse also reveals that ‘body work’ of this period was an umbrella term for other, however related forms of sport, i.e. boxing, wrestling and weightlifting. Respective articles used body building as a synonym for weightlifting. When the Nigerian body builder Jeseme Hanson, ‘the Samson of Africa’, came to Addis Ababa in 1971 and boasted that there are no equal competitors, the local media published several articles in which weightlifters, including those training in the YMCA, who publicly challenged the Nigerian for open competition⁴⁰. Arguably, the occasion also served to portray ‘muscle work’ as something admirable and brought weightlifting to the limelight.⁴¹

With regard to body building and modern media, Girma Cheru, who trained numerous young men in Addis Ababa schools, at the Military Academy in Harar, and at the YMCA is a very interesting personality. Apart from his appearance in the print media, he began to feature as the “sports teacher of the nation” through regular sports programs on the radio and, what is more important, on Ethiopian TV which was established in 1964⁴². Today people

³⁸ <http://www.seifutibo.org/Biography.html> (accessed 28 December 2011).

³⁹ *Menen*, January 1963, 9.

⁴⁰ Especially his comment that he would be able to lift 500 kg seemed raised serious doubts.

⁴¹ K. Bromber, 2013b.

⁴² The initial purpose for establishing the ETV was to highlight the founding meeting of the Organization of African Union (OAU), which took place that

remember Girma Cheru for his instructions during the children's program *Yelijoch Gīzē* ('Children's Time'), when they "used to follow his instructions [...] while doing the exercises on the living room carpet. Let us unleash our bodies! Dub, Dub, one, to three, four!"⁴³ He not only became a living example for a well-built body, but also an inspiration for many to start body building. Teshome Tesfaye, who won the Ethiopian bodybuilding title five times, called Girma Cheru a source of inspiration as important as Arnold Schwarzenegger⁴⁴. During the opening ceremony of the annual sports festival of the Ethiopian Sports Federation in North America in 2009, Girma Cheru was received by "the whole stadium jumping up and down with his trademark "*Dub, dub! Dub dub!*"⁴⁵

In contrast to the overall positive media display, body builders such as Girma Cheru also met with difficulties. In an interview with the weekly *Yekatit* in 1982, Girma Cheru narrated: "Landlords expelled us from the training sites [because they thought] that [I] would break through the wall, [I] would gather dodgers. Hence, they expelled me from six places"⁴⁶. To counter this negative public attitude, he organized shows. In the vicinity of churches right after religious services, groups of young athletes demonstrated weight lifting and acrobatics and, thus, presented their "beautiful bodies"⁴⁷ to the audience. Later he also included musical performances and shifted the shows from open-air sites to the Hager Fikir Theater, the Cinema Ras, and other halls. In how far the YMCA as an institution

year. (Gebremedhin Simon Gebrets'adik, Ethiopia AMDI research report 2006; <http://www.bbc.co.uk> [...] [amdi_ethiopia.shtml](http://www.amdi.ethiopia.shtml) (accessed 12 July 2011).

⁴³ "*Sewinnetachinin innaftata, dub dub and, hulett, sost, arat.*" Dub, dub stands for the sound made while marching or jumping (<http://www.bernos.com/blog>[...]girma (accessed 11 July 2011).

⁴⁴ Alemayehu Seife-Selassie, "Flexing one's way into unchartered territory", *The Subsaharian Informer. The Pan-African Newspaper*, (<http://www.ssinformer.com>[...]spotlight/2009/july/31/eth_a&e_31_07_09_001.html (accessed 11 July 2012).

⁴⁵ www.horizonethiopia.com[...]Itemid=20 (accessed 11 July 2011).

⁴⁶ Wendimu Negash Desta, "Girma Cheru – g^welmassawī sportenya", *Yekatit* 1974 Hidar (E.C.).

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 32.

was involved in these shows or even used them for their own ends is still a matter to be researched. What we know from images is that roughly at the same time the famous heavy athlete Alemayehu Feyisa from Mekelle YMCA participated in sport shows at Baloni Stadium⁴⁸. Young YMCA sportsmen of the Abebe Bikila Bodybuilding Club in Addis Ababa performed bodybuilding and weightlifting in smaller settlements while en route to the town of Nazrēt. In doing so they did not only raise the funds for their travel, but ‘educated’ the rural population ‘muscular male beauty’⁴⁹. It is also an open question in how far the YMCA secretary Michel Yowasef, who came from Egypt, took an active role in promoting body building within the organization. The way in which Egyptian ideas about human perfectibility through sports, especially bodybuilding and weight lifting, might have influenced developments in Ethiopia would be a suitable site to study Egyptian-Ethiopian knowledge transfer in the field of popular culture⁵⁰.

Concluding remarks on the religious character of the YMCA’S sports discourse

As the reading of the YMCA Annual Reports from 1962-72 and newspaper articles suggests, there was no argumentative link between sport as a means to build healthy ‘muscular’ bodies and religion. Instead, sport was conceptualized within a broader discourse about progress in Ethiopia and ‘modern’ citizenship. The display of scantily clad muscular male bodies could also be found on the cover of annual publications such as the *Inter-School Athletic Association*, the *Armed Forces Sports Day* or the *University Sports*

⁴⁸ I am very grateful to Surafiel Photo Studio in Mekelle and Mekelle YMCA Branch for giving me access to their photo-collections. I thank the sport scientist Mulugeta Hagos from Addis Ababa University who identified the persons and discussed with me their involvement in the YMCA and Mekelle’s leisure culture.

⁴⁹ ‘Benazarēt. 30 wet’atoch yekibdet mansat tir’it asayyu’, *Addis Zemen* meskerem 17, 1963 E.C. (September 27, 1970), 4.

⁵⁰ For the role of sports in forming ideas of progress in Egypt and the ‘bodies’ necessary for relevant projects to implement them, see Jacob 2011.

Day. Similar to institutions of higher education, the YMCA discourse on sport went beyond the rhetoric of *mens sana in corpore sano*. It was linked to the nation through an emphasis on leadership qualities that embraced the need for moral and bodily control. In doing so, it served the Emperor's vision that "[h]e who would be a leader must pay the price of self-discipline and moral restraint. This contains the correction and improvement of personal character, the checking of passions and desires, and the exemplary control of one's bodily needs and drives."⁵¹

Since the YMCA had successfully established itself in urban areas, activities linked up with general trends of urban youth culture which also focused on progressive visions of a strong muscular male body. YMCA's physical education programs served the promoting of modern sports as a useful pastime and as a means to produce strong, and what is more, disciplined future citizens. Since sport appeals to most children, it could be successfully instrumentalized in programs such as the *operation better boys* which became the first street worker program in Africa and operated in the Arat Kilo, Piasa, Maych'ew Square and Aware areas⁵². Not only the facilities, but also the successful participation of the YMCA teams in competitions must have been attractive to the boys. Hence, individual and communal crises was turned into a chance for both, future leaders, who worked as volunteers, and the street boys. Despite these and other activities, which aimed at the disadvantaged strata amongst young males in Addis Ababa, the main target of the YMCA remained the educated urban male class and not the uneducated migrants from the country side who poured into the city. These might have been more involved in the emerging informal soccer scene of the capital.

The healthy, mentally and spiritually strong 'gentlemen' who voluntarily served the nation through a religious institution, might be seen as the counter-model to a politically informed vision of progress, which expressed itself through student bodies wearing bell-

⁵¹ Haile Selassie, 1967, 15.

⁵² *Young Men's Christian Association of Ethiopia, Operation Better Boys* (not dated, no page) (IES Library 267.3 YOU).

bottoms and Afro hairstyles, and who marched in protest just next to the YMCA headquarter in the Addis Ababa of the 1960s and 1970s. In this respect it would be interesting to know if sport became a space for an exchange of ideas or a battle ground for ideologies. As the memoirs of activists in the Ethiopian student movement suggest, the YMCA also served as one of their training sites for both ideological and physical preparation – Marxist-Leninist reading circles and courses in Far Eastern martial arts – to overthrow the Empire.⁵³ Most presumably both revolutionary student bodies and muscular YMCA (Christian) bodies might have clashed with diverse local forms of acceptable bodies which did not have vanished that easily through urbanization and the opening up to foreign influences.

References

- Anon., 1935, *Das ist Abessinien*, Leipzig: Goldmann Verlag.
- Bahru Zewde, 2002, *Pioneers of Change in Ethiopia: The Reformist Intellectuals of the Early Twentieth Century*, Oxford: James Currey.
- Bahru, Zewde (ed.), 2010, *Documenting the Ethiopian Student Movement: An Exercise in Oral History*. Addis Ababa: Forum Social Studies.
- Bromber, K., 2013a, “Improving the Physical Self: Sport, Body Politics, and Ethiopian Modernity, ca. 1920-1974”, *Northeast African Studies* 13(1), 71-100.
- Bromber, K., 2013b, “Muscularity, Heavy Athletics, and Urban Leisure in Ethiopia, 1950s-1970s”, *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, forthcoming.
- Bromber, K. 2013c, “Wrestling in Ethiopia between Sportization of National Heriatge and Dynamic Youth Culture”, *ITYOPIS – Northeast African Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities* 2, forthcoming.
- Davidann, J.T., 1998, *A World of Crises and Progress: The American YMCA in Japan 1890-1930*, London: Associated University Presses.

⁵³ Bahru Zewde, 2010.

- Ferguson, J.G., 2008, “Global Disconnect: Abjection and the Aftermath of Modernism”, in: P. Geschiere, B. Meyer, and P. Pels (eds.), *Readings in Modernity in Africa*, Oxford: James Currey, 8-16.
- Fik’ru Kīdane, 2009, *Ye-Pīyasa Lij*, Addis Ababa: no publisher.
- Foucault, M., 1977, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, London: Penguin Books Ltd.
- Gebreyaw Teshager, 1997, *The Historical Development of the Health and Physical Education Department in Kotebe College of Teacher Education*, BE thesis, Kotebe College of Teacher Education.
- Haile Selassie, 1967, “UAAC 6th Graduation, 17 July 1959”, in: Ministry of Information (ed.), *Selected Speeches of His Imperial Majesty Haile Selassie First 1918-1967*, Addis Ababa, 12-18.
- Ikoē Abe, 2006, “Muscular Christianity in Japan: The Growth of a Hybrid”, *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 23(5): 714-38.
- Jacob, W.C., 2011, *Working out Egypt: Effendi Masculinity and Subject Formation in Colonial Modernity, 1870-1940*, Durham/London: Duke University Press.
- Pankhurst, R., 1968, *Economic History of Ethiopia*, Addis Ababa: Haile Selassie University.
- Rafiq, M. and A. Hailemariam, 1987, “Some Structural Aspects of Urbanization in Ethiopia”, *Genus* 43 (3,4), 183-204.
- Warren, A., 1987, “Popular Manliness: Baden Powell, Scouting and the Development of Manly Character”, in: J.A. Mangan and J. Walvin (eds.), *Manliness and Morality: Middle Class Masculinity in Britain and America, 1800-1940*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 199-218.