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**THE STADIUM AND THE CITY: SPORTS INFRASTRUCTURE
IN LATE IMPERIAL ETHIOPIA AND BEYOND**

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The stadium and the city: Sports infrastructure in late imperial Ethiopia and beyond¹

The inauguration of the Haile Selassie I Stadium in Addis Ababa in 1947 marked the beginning of the construction of stadiums in Ethiopia. They became important signifiers of accelerated modernisation after the end of the Italian occupation (1935-1941). Quite similar to developments elsewhere, open fields were turned into formalised sport infrastructures. Already in the 1930s, stadiums had become essential elements of modern town planning in Ethiopia. Later, political officials, town planners and sport enthusiasts endowed them with specific meanings, involving ideas of progress, effective representation of political power and ‘useful’ recreation.

Keywords: Ethiopia, stadiums, sportification, town planning, recreation, modernity

O estádio e a cidade: Infraestruturas desportivas no final e no pós Etiópia imperial

A inauguração do Estádio Haile Selassie I em Addis Abeba em 1947 marcou o início da construção de estádios na Etiópia. Eles tornaram-se sinais importantes da acelerada modernização após o fim da ocupação italiana (1935-1941). Tal como em outros lugares, campos abertos foram transformados em infraestruturas desportivas formais. Já na década de 1930, os estádios tinham-se tornado elementos essenciais do planeamento urbano moderno na Etiópia. Mais tarde, responsáveis políticos, urbanistas e entusiastas do desporto dotaram-nos de significados específicos, envolvendo ideias de progresso, representação efetiva do poder político e recreação “útil”.

Palavras-chave: Etiópia, estádios, sportification, planeamento urbano, recreação, modernidade

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On the occasion of the Ethiopia Football Championship Finals in 1947, the *Ethiopian Herald* commented that:

[t]hese matches would demand in future a larger and more modernly organised place for their meeting. The Addis Ababa stadium which is in the plan stage cannot be constructed too soon to meet the ever growing number in both participants and the lovers of sports in the city (June 16, 1947, p. 3).

Its inauguration later in 1947 marked the beginning of stadium construction in most of the Ethiopian provincial towns over the next three decades. Thus, stadiums have to be understood as an entirely urban phenomenon – in Ethiopia as elsewhere. They were built at a time when started a rapid urbanisation in Ethiopia. Although, according to the Central Statistical Office (1971, p. 1, as cited in Rafiq & Hailemariam, 1987) only 8.5 % (or 1.9 million) people lived in Ethiopian towns in the mid-1960s, the migratory influx steadily grew.

As an indispensable part of the urban design, stadiums became architectural landmarks comparable to train stations. This article locates early stadium construction within the overall attempt to modernise the country which gained momentum after the end of the Italian occupation (1935-1941). The creation of the modern Ethiopian citizen included ideas of intellectual as well as physical improvement and perfection. As discussed elsewhere, the introduction of so-called modern sports such as football, boxing or gymnastics through modern school systems and the reformed armed forces from the 1920s onwards, as well as the body-related work of 'invited' organisations such as the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), became an important aspect of subject formation in the Empire (Bromber, 2013a). The bodies of these modern citizens were annually celebrated in the Haile Selassie I Stadium – the most important sports ground – on occasions such as the track and field competition of the Ethiopian Inter-School Athletic Association or the Armed Forces Sports Day. The finals of such sport events became political statements since they were always attended by His Imperial Majesty Haile Selassie I who was a staunch supporter of the modern, physical culture.

Stadiums also became new places of leisure, of male collectivity – especially through the game of football – and often also of disorder. They provided venues for political acclamation as well as sites to express discontent. As Getahun (2009) emphasised, football matches were always more than just a game. Political conflict, which followed the annexation of Eritrea as the 14th province, was regularly expressed in battles on the football pitch, on the ranks and in after-match-fights of fans, especially, when the *Hamasien* team from Asmara played against teams

of Ethiopian provinces (Bahru Zewde, individual statement, March 22, 2014). Obviously, stadiums in Ethiopia had also become what Gaffney and Bale (2004) described as “unique container[s] of collective emotion which produce[s] experiences that are as varied and complex as the individuals who periodically visit them” (p. 47).

Stadiums had their specific evolution that can be analysed as the spatial enclosure of formally open fields which were gradually transformed into measured spaces. Starting with the 1920s, the first part of the article reflects on the beginnings of an urban sports infrastructure. Despite the fact that Ethiopia went through a brief but cruel period of Italian fascist occupation (1935-41), the article argues for further continuity, rather than rupture, in the spatial sportification process of urban centres. In two separate parts the article focuses on the Haile Selassie I Stadium in Addis Ababa and the Baloni-Qañew-Tigray Stadium in Mekelle, the regional capital of Tigray. In doing so, it takes a closer look at stadium construction as part of an increasingly formalised sports infrastructure in Ethiopia between the 1940s and 1970s. As will be shown, both stadiums were built on former playing fields for football which undergirds the argument that the development of football and the construction of modern stadiums go hand in hand. They however differ with regard to their spatial integration into the urban fabric. Whereas the Haile Selassie I Stadium is a good example of how a stadium became part of a modernised imperial city centre, Mekelle shows how the town’s margins, where the Qañew (Baloni) Stadium was located, were linked to the town through sports. This point is driven further by arguing for a temporal shift of the centre to the margins through the growing importance of sports in general, the display of physically fit youth as the “torchbearers of progress” and the growing involvement of high level officials in sports. The multi-functional aspects of these particular stadiums as both, sites to measure physical strength and as venues to display political power will be discussed in part four. How future research on stadiums could involve recent academic literature about architectural landmarks as means of grabbing attention and as important elements in the ‘economy of fascination’ is briefly touched upon in the concluding remarks².

² My study is based on the Amharic daily *Addis Zämän*, the English daily *Ethiopian Herald*, magazines, journals and documents from the Ministry of Interior and the municipalities, which are located in the Institute of Ethiopian Studies (IES), the Ethiopian National Archives (ENA) and the Ethiopian Sport Commission. I used visuals from these Archives and from Surafiel Photo Studio (Mekelle). Interviews were conducted between 2012 and 2014.

From open fields to measured spaces

As elsewhere, stadiums in Ethiopia had their evolution. Open fields increasingly became subject to the spatial-temporal regime which Guttman (1978) and Eichberg (1995) have convincingly characterised as an important feature of sportification processes. As described in more detail elsewhere (Bromber, Krawietz & Petrov, 2014, p. 4), so-called traditional physical activities in Ethiopia (*bahalawi sport*), such as wrestling (*tagal*), which are an integral part of annual festivities as well as daily social practice had their places. These could vary in size, location and time according to season, migratory patterns or other factors. In other cases they have remained stable.

In Ethiopia, as elsewhere, the introduction of new spatial-temporal regimes in physical culture was closely related to the introduction of football in the early 20th century. According to Getahun (2009, p. 411), it was brought by “European diplomats and their dependents” and had a first club-like structure at Teferi Mekonnen School in 1927. The first playing grounds which we might associate with modern sports seem to have been both, permanent and ‘on the move’. As Tola (1986, p. 11) remarked, young sport enthusiasts of the emerging football scene in urban Ethiopia of the 1920s literally carried the goal posts with them. In the absence of playing grounds or due to prevention to use the already existing ones such as those in *Janmeda*, *Medfegna Gibi*, *Filwuha*, *Talian sefer*, *Shola sefer* in Addis Ababa or school compounds, the football players asked owners of appropriate fields for access to those. The author continued that:

[i]n some areas where good playing fields exist, the owners of the land did not permit them to play in it. Whenever the players were found playing in such fields, they were whipped and sometimes imprisoned by Arada Zabagna (city police) (*ibid.*).

The situation seems to have been quite different for the foreign communities, which had made Ethiopia their home. In 1935, approximately 14,500 foreigners lived in Ethiopia of whom 6,000 resided in Addis Ababa. They created their own sports clubs and teams so that from 1924 onwards Armenian, Indian, Greek and Italian football teams played against each other in *Janmeda* (*ibid.*, p. 5). In 1935, the first Ethiopian football club, the legendary St. Georges club, was established.

Although *Janmeda* remained as an important site for sports competitions, the racist policy of segregation during the Italian fascist occupation (1935-1941) affected the sports sector in terms of its spatial configuration. Interracial sports competitions were strictly prohibited. Instead, the Italian government intro-

duced local and regional championships, especially in football and cycling for Africans only. The junior football teams were further segregated into Muslim and Christian, which was the only moment in Ethiopian history when separation in sports was done along religious lines. Already existing clubs, such as St. Georges, were renamed after Italian landmarks in Addis Ababa.

Furthermore, since sport was successfully employed as part of the ‘consensus machine’ in fascist Italy (Belloni, 2014; Martin 2004), it does not come as a surprise that news about competitions and articles, which explicitly link the spread of sport to the Italian civilizing mission in Ethiopia, were featured very prominently in the Amharic newspapers. The three to five pages weekly *YäQesar Mengist Meliktegna* (Imperial Government Messenger) reserved up to a whole page for local, i.e. African, sports news which completely left out sport events in the other communities. Since Italy was the bench mark, the weekly also informed its readers about buildings and their use. The Foro Mussolini, which was built between 1928 and 1938 and became the preeminent example of fascist sports architecture, was depicted as a venue for sports as well as a display of youthful militarized manliness (*YäQesar Mengist Meliktegna*, 6 tærr 1931 E.C./ 15 January 1939, p. 4)³.

With the further promotion of football, the monthly *YäRoma Bärhan* (the Light of Rome) published visuals and, what is more, the basic rules of the game and with ideas about its “proper” spatial and temporal configuration (*YäRoma Bärhan*, vol. I no. 5 22 tæqamt 1932/ 28 October 1939, p. 8). The propagandistic emphasis on sport facilities for the African population, especially a large football field, in the newly built *addis lähageročč täwälağočč kätäma* (quarter for the indigenous) served as a political legitimization of racialized sport politics. Yednekatchew Tessema, the father of Ethiopian organised sports, worked at the so-called Sports Office for the Indigenous which was under the auspices of the Directorate for Political Affairs. Yednekatchew remarked that “it was made that we conduct our games in our place with everything separate – separate fields for football, separate spectators, even separate streets for bicyclists” (quoted in Tola, 1986, p. 14). Although high-ranking colonial officials were present, the trophies were conveyed by high representatives of the local nobility who regularly attended the competitions. The same is true for clerics of both the Christian and the Muslim faith. They not only became sponsors to build and equip local sports facilities (their names and the amount of money were explicitly published in the Amharic press) but they also used playing fields as location for drawing attention to religious teaching. With regard to formal education, only the children of notables had access to the so-called government schools. As regularly advertised in the weekly *YäQesar*

³ Ethiopia uses the Ethiopian calendar which explains the seven year difference.

Mengist Meliktegna, pupils were called in on Saturdays or Sundays to do gymnastics in front of the sports office.

Arguably, the steady increase in the rigidity of the temporal and spatial regime in sports with the aim of controlling the urban African population further intensified the process of creating specific locations for doing sports, which had gained momentum from the 1920s onwards. Whereas these locations could be defined as open (sports) fields with a more or less applied temporal-spatial-regime, the systematic introduction of modern sports as subject in schools in the late 1940s; the improvement of the facilities in the reformed armed forces; as well as a promotion of physical fitness through useful leisure boosted the establishment of stable and more regulated localities for doing sports.

Regulation also meant that access to the facilities became regulated, i.e. according to status, profession, ethnic *cum* national background or religious affiliation. After World War II, the Greek, Armenian, Italian or Ethio-British Clubs as well as the 18 Ethiopian YMCA-branches provided sport fields to members. Apart from this, well-known Armenian families, such as the Behesnilians, Djerrahians and the Pojharians, had tennis courts in their private compounds where they used to host matches on Saturdays for invited people (V. Nalbandian, individual statement, February 27, 2014). The Foreign Legations, which had been granted big tracts of land at the southern slopes of the Entoto Mountains by Emperor Menelik in the early 20th century, established their sports facilities, which in the German case has also included (until today) stables and training grounds for all kinds of equestrian sports. It is needless to emphasize that access was, and still is, open to a specific kind of user only.

The preparation of open fields, which would qualify for competition on a larger scale, commenced soon after the end of hostilities in the area. According to the Ethiopian Football Federation (1968) it was “in 1942, [that] stationed at Medfegna Gebi (Artillery Compound), British, Indian soldiers and Italians joined hands to surface the ground at Medfegna Sefer and it was there that the first Ethiopian Football Championship and other competitions began” (p. 60).

Similar to cases elsewhere, the involvement of the army in sports activities mattered to a great extent, since the armed forces provided the most essential means to build a suitable sports infrastructure – strong manpower in military command structures and material resources.

Without any doubt, football was one of the main drivers for stadium constructions, but it did not represent their sole purpose. Stadiums and sport centres became essential elements of modern town planning. Their construction was invested with specific meanings and expectations. These expectations involved

particular notions of ‘useful’ (as well as ‘harmful’) recreation. Stadiums, as part of a rapidly transforming urban sport structure, were inculcated and manifested specific ideas of progress in a period called “Ethiopian modernity”. This period is especially associated with Ras Teferi, later Emperor Haile Selassie I, whose name the first Ethiopian stadium took⁴.



Image 1: Army Sports at Medfegna Gebi, late 1940, courtesy of Library of the Institute of Ethiopian Studies, Addis Ababa

Stadium and modern urban design: Haile Selassie I Stadium in Addis Ababa

Twentieth century’s projections of the modern city included sport centres and, increasingly, stadiums as important elements in the urban design. This very general observation is also true for Ethiopian cities, and especially for Addis Ababa. Number 16 on Le Corbusier’s sketch of “a city for modern times”⁵, a kind of master plan for Addis Ababa, resembles a stadium structure. The first ‘real’ master plan for the capital by Ignazio Guidi and Cesare Valle, two famous Italian architects who experimented in a *tabula rasa* manner not unlike that by Le Corbusier and

⁴ For recent discussions about the term ‘Ethiopian Modernity’ (*zāmānawināt*) see the contributions to the Special Issue of *Northeast African Studies* 13, 1 (2013), especially the article by the Ethiopian philosopher Andreas Eshete.

⁵ Le Corbusier to Roberto Cantalupo, Paris, 19 August 1936, cited in Gresleri (1992, p. 37); for Le Corbusier’s intellectual involvement in Italian city planning of Addis Ababa during the fascist occupation also see Gresleri (2008) and Woudstra (2012).

quite typical for urban planning of the inter-war period, included a *zona sportiva* in the form of a stadium. This is also true for the plans drawn by *the Office for General Town Plan and the Technical Office for the Use of Buildings in Addis Ababa*. Their urban designs show the *Centro Sportivo* as a central element of the new urban centre. Interestingly, the proposed locations for the later built Haile Selassie I Stadium match those which have been specified for sport purposes on the early master plans. The fact that people used to play games on this area, which was well-known by the name of *Cambolodga*, and its flatter topography, compared to its surroundings, might have led the way.

However, the idea of the stadiums as an important feature of a modern 'colonial' Ethiopian town was not restricted to the capital of the *Africa Orientale Italiana*. We can also see it in master plans for the strategic provincial town such as Jimma. Since the Italian fascist occupation ended in 1941, the grand urban designs were not put into practice in their totality – though they left important traces.

Ideas to construct an Olympic sized stadium in Addis Ababa were soon taken up after the end of hostilities (1941) and the return of the emperor from exile. Emperor Haile Selassie, who promoted modern sports to a great extent, had already sensed the fascination of a stadium on his tour to Europe, when he was still known as Ras Teferi. As a video document (Olympic Games, 1924) shows, he and the entire Ethiopian delegation went to visit the opening ceremony of the 1924 Summer Olympics, in Stade Olympique Yves-du-Manoir, in the northwestern suburbs of Paris. According to the Ethiopian Football Federation (1968, p. 60), the Emperor granted the land as *rəst* to the National Sport Confederation of Ethiopia immediately after the war (Tibebu Gorfu, individual statement, May 14, 2014). According to Gorfu (1997, p. 24), responsibilities for the construction were in the hands of the Addis Ababa municipality.

On 2 November 1947 the Emperor laid the foundation stone for the stadium, which later took his name. In his speech, Haile Selassie emphasized his expectations about the location: the stadium will be the place where young Ethiopian athletes will reveal to the world the physical strength of the empire. For him, the building was a signifier for sport as a moral force in order to checkmate human weakness:

The building of this stadium calls the youth of Ethiopia to turn away from all substances that harm the body or limit the intellect, and to care for their health with a clear mind and a clean body. This is their sacred duty.

[...]

We love sport and We want to help Our country to gain a good reputation in this field. Therefore, it is indispensable to know that this can only be achieved by ab-

staining from alcohol and similar things, as well as by avoiding bad behaviour and substances which affect the consciousness (p. 3)⁶.

According to historical photographs and information which was published by the Ethiopian Football Federation (1968, p. 60 and p. 123), the first shape of Haile Selassie I Stadium was a wooden structure with a football pitch measuring 68 x 110 meters, a running track of 400 meters and other athletic facilities. It had a seating capacity of 5000 places and parking space outside. The grandstand was made of wood too and was covered with corrugated iron. A beautifully forged metal fence separated the imperial loge. As Getachew explained in his introduction to the master plan for Addis Ababa (1956, p. 2), the stadium was erected in an area which was later defined as the Filwoha Group. It included the new Imperial Guest House, the Baths, the enlarged Ghion Hotel and the Filwoha Park. Town planners called the area the focal point of the park system. It provided ample space for formal and informal sports. Mesenbet Shenkute, who was among the very active female football players of the early 1970s, remembered that her club – the Etu Melamechi – used to exercise on the back side of the Ghion Hotel in the late 1960s before they moved to the facilities of the Palace School (Mesenbet Shenkute, individual statement, June 11, 2011). The area could, in terms of sports, be extended even further by including the RECE, the recreation centre with its famous bowling lanes, which was associated to the nearby Italian club. The club itself had its own tennis, volleyball and basketball courts (Merkuria Beyene, individual statement, July 3, 2011; P. N. Donikian, individual statement, March 5, 2014).

In 1954 the stadium was torn down and replaced by a concrete structure with a seating capacity for 16,000 people, as well as six 250 flux flood lights for night matches. Tibeb Gorfu explained that facilities such as changing rooms for teams and referees were included (Tibebu Gorfu, individual statement, May 14, 2014). In contrast to the lack of information about the builders of the first (wooden) stadium structure, we know that the tender had gone to an Israeli firm called Solel Boneh. According to Dvir (2010), Israel ‘exported’ architecture, especially to Africa and Asia, in order to break diplomatic isolation. This aspect became part and parcel of Israel’s foreign policy under Golda Meir – formerly, the Israeli Foreign Minister during the years 1956-1966 and later, Prime Minister from 1969 to 1974. As Carol (2012, p. 80) remarked, Solel Boneh also constructed in Addis Ababa alone the airport terminal and hangers, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, part of the Haile Selassie I University, military camps, the new Filwoha Baths.

⁶ Translation by the author.

With (re-)construction of a modern stadium in the heart of the Ethiopian capital, the country met the requirements to host major tournaments. The establishment of the African Nations Cup in 1957 offered new possibilities to put the nation on the sportive landscape. In 1962, Ethiopia had been chosen for the game. The country invested heavily into stadium construction, especially in Dirre Dawa and Asmara where some of the matches were played. In 1976, when the 10th African Cup was hosted by Ethiopia, the seating capacity of the Addis Ababa Stadium, as it was now called, was increased to host 36,000 people. In the preparation of the event the government decided to clean up around the stadium.



Image 2: Addis Ababa Stadium during the 10th African Cup, courtesy of Library of the Institute of Ethiopian Studies, Addis Ababa

Therefore under the Agency for Government Houses, the shops around the stadium were constructed and rented out. Over time the ownership was transferred to the Ethiopian Football Federation. The construction goal for these shops was mainly to clean up the surroundings. An additional incentive might have been to generate extra income. Later the running track was modified three times

until the prime minister inaugurated the first synthetic track in the country in 1990 (*Ethiopian Herald*, December 8, 1990, p. 6).

The financing is still a matter to be researched. Tibebe Gorfu (1992, p. 24) mentions the numerous big and small stadiums as well as the playing fields which were constructed from the mid-1940s to the mid-1970s or renovated “with the help of the Government” (*bämängəst* ərdəta). Money was raised through charity events. Voluntary work was done by sport enthusiasts similar to the levelling of the *Medfegna Gebi* (Artillery Compound) in 1942, which I already mentioned above. Charity, improvisation and voluntarism were major sources to keep the newly emerging sports system running. Individuals sponsored equipment and organised transport to the locations where important sport meetings were taking place. To mention one example: in September 1971, *Addis Zämān* (mäskäräm 14, 1964/25 September 1971, p. 5) reported that inhabitants of the town of Gondar had raised no less than 4059 Birr for a new stadium during a dinner gala, which was organised by a committee for the improvement of sports in the Semen and Begemder provinces. The existing municipal stadium near the Fasilidas Bath as well as the Ashewa Meda playground, which were mentioned in the master plan by the Ministry of Interior (1967, p. 10 and p. 38), obviously did not meet the sport enthusiasts’ requirements anymore.

The Haile Selassie I Stadium, after 1974 Addis Ababa Stadium, remains until today the most important sports venue of the capital. This does not mean that there had not been other dreams and plans which had partly been put into practice. The Gulele Stadium, later renamed Abebe Bikila Stadium, deserves to be mentioned here. According to Genet Werkenhe, current general manager of the Abebe Bikila complex, the Emperor granted the land to Ethiopian Sport Commission in the 1960s (individual statement, June 6, 2014). *Addis Zämān* (mägabit 13, 1964/ 22 March 1972, p. 3) reported in spring 1971 about work to level the ground, published plans of how the sports and recreation complex should look like and presented ideas about its use in the future. Dreams to open the stadium already in November 1971 did not come true. It remained to be a football field until 1990, when the stadium was commissioned by the Addis Abeba City administration, to be built with funds provided by FIFA.

The most ambitious dream was put forward by 1956 by the Abercrombie Master Plan. According to Getachew (1956), Sir Patrick Abercrombie, *Président d’Honneur de l’Union Internationale des Architectes*, and his group envisioned the Olympic Games in Africa:

In addition to the normal playing fields distributed through the urban area, it is a great advantage for a city to have a great unimpeded space for games. There is a fine piece of level ground suitable for this purpose on the South side of Dessie Road nearly opposite the British Embassy. It is well connected by means of the “C” Ring Road, The East and West Connection and the “B” Ring Road to the populous parts of the City. In addition to its use to make up the required acreage for normal games, this ground, which is capable of enlargement, could form a magnificent setting for a great display or for the Olympic Games. In this connection it is suggested that a huge stadium to seat at least 100,000 might be constructed on the higher ground further east along the Dessie Road from which there would be a wonderful view. This has been done recently at Lisbon, in a somewhat similar situation (p. 71).

Although this dream has not come true – neither the construction of the stadium nor the Olympic Games in Africa – it still continues until today, as demonstrated by the model for the Addis Ababa National Stadium and Sports Village designed by LAVA (2012). In light of the fact that most of the federal states’ capitals already have a brand new stadium, Addis Ababa has to come up with an extraordinary impressive landmark in order to win the national game attention grabbing.

At the city’s margins: Baloni-Qañew-Tigray Stadium in Mekelle

In the 1950s and 1960s, nearly every provincial capital built a small stadium or a playing field according to the FIFA-regulations, often surrounded by a 400m athletic track. The seating capacity varied to a great extent. According to Gorfu (1997, p. 24), some of these playing fields, amongst them Qañew Meda in Mekelle, the regional capital of Tigray, were fenced by an outer wall for regulating the in-and-out flow of movement during the late 1960s.

In contrast to Haile Selassie I and later Addis Ababa Stadium, which is part of the city centre, modern sport infrastructure in Mekelle started at its margins on Qañew Meda. The location was already known for sports activities with a small football field and a tennis court, which had been built by and for the Italian community in the 1930s. It was called *Baloni* which is the word for the ball made of used cloths and remains to be the informal name of the stadium until today. Officially the stadium was known as *Qañew Astadiyum* – after the royal horse *Qañew*. After the Ethiopian revolution in 1974 which put an end to the Empire, the stadium was renamed Tigray Stadium.

Historical photographs from 1959/60 indicate that Qañew stadium was initially not completely walled and equipped with seats but used the natural environment for both purposes. Furthermore, the first grandstand had the shape of a tent and resembled the early grandstand structure in places such as *Janmeda*, the royal race court in Addis Ababa. The tent structure was also replicated in other stadiums such as that of the provincial capital of the Sidamo province. In Mekelle, the new grandstand made of concrete and corrugated iron is visible on pictures from 1963 onwards which also display the official name of the stadium.

Until 1986, when a grass pitch had been installed, the football games were played on soil, which turned into mud during the rainy season. The stadium included changing rooms built into the earth and ticket offices located in the West wall which were later demolished due to road constructions in the 1990s (ticket offices) and to the construction of the Milano-Hotel (changing rooms).

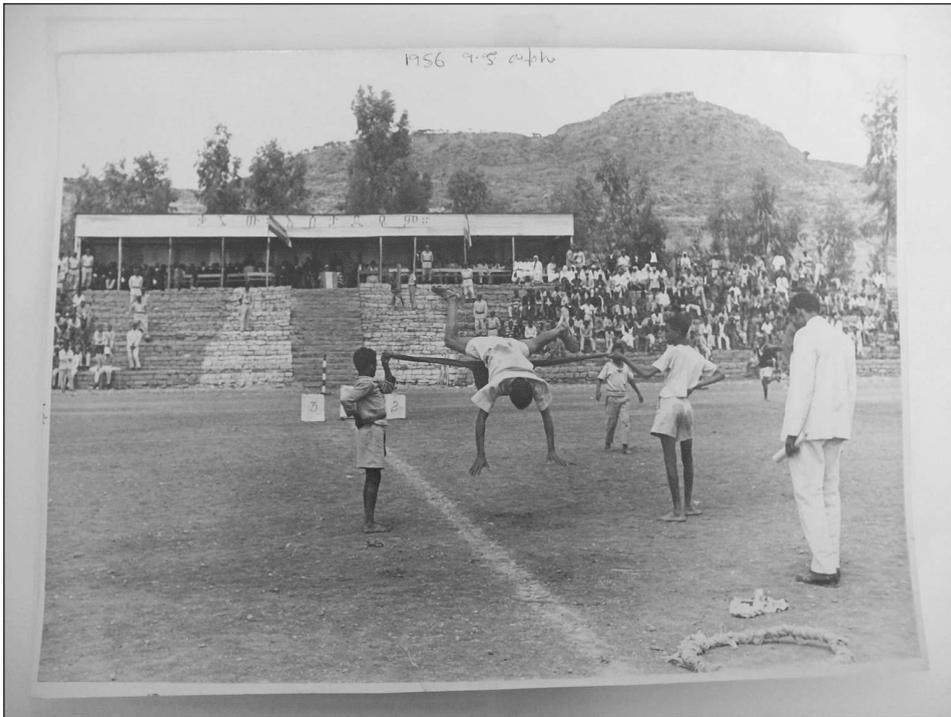


Image 3: Qañew Stadium in Mekelle in 1963, courtesy Photo Surafiel

Concerning the spatial aspects, the Ethiopian Inter-School Athletic Association (1967/68, p. 23) reported that spectators of the regional school competition in Mekelle, who were watching the sport event from a higher place, i.e. the grand

stand as well the hill behind the stadium at its southern front, were absolutely fascinated. This case indicates that the stadium was not restricted to its outer walls. With the introduction of electricity in bigger towns, such as Mekelle, electricity pools functioned as good locations for watching football matches and other sport events. Despite the dangers – accidents were reported in the newspapers – they provided options for enjoying sports without having to spend 50 cents on a ticket.

Near the stadium, there is Hatsey Yohannes Preparatory School which was established in 1952 and included from the very beginning sport fields and equipment. Together with the tennis court, which was turned into a *multipurpose field* for volleyball, handball and basketball in 1978/79, and the Hatsey Yohannes Preparatory School sports facilities, the stadium area formed the sport nucleus at the margins of Mekelle⁷. During Sundays' football matches or the Annual Track and Field Competition of the regional branch of the Ethiopian Interschool Athletic Association, this area definitely turned the city's margins into a centre of attraction.

In 2012, the stadium, which is located near Enda Yesus Campus, was handed over to Mekelle University. According to Abbay Media (2008), the new Mekelle stadium with a seating capacity for 35,000 will cost 220 million birr. Already under construction, it is growing into a landmark located much closer to the centre of power in Hawelti and is part of an architectural complex which reminds of what Wippel, Bromber, Steiner and Krawietz (2014, part IV, pp. 233-284) have described as "Dubai elsewhere", i.e. the Dubai architectural model and its application in Africa and in the Middle East.

One structure – many functions

By the late 1950s, stadiums in Ethiopian urban centres were already serving several functions. They not only provided space for sports training and competition. Lucrative athletic performances for amusement purposes attract thousands of visitors into the building. In May 1950, for example, a group of Egyptian and Sudanese wrestlers, including champions such as Nazmi Mikhail (Egypt), entertained the public in the stadiums of Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa. Famous heavy athletes such as Hagos Body, Alemayehu Feyisa or Abraham Amära displayed their muscular strength in Qañew stadium in Mekelle. Apart from athletes, uni-

⁷ I am deeply indebted to Abreham Tewelde, athlete, referee and sports enthusiast, for showing and explaining to me the localities mentioned. He generously shared his time to compare historical photographs of the Surafiel Photo Studio to the current structure of the place in March and July 2013.

formed contingents of the Boy Scouts, Girl Guides and the armed forces paraded on the tracks. This is also true of young graduates and members of the socialist youth organization which gave a display of their determination before going to the *Zemecha* – the campaign for mass education which was launched in October 1974 (Milkias 1980, p. 54).

As elsewhere, stadiums in Ethiopia became venues to display Ethiopia as a strong and modern nation. Especially the latter found its expression in constructing stadiums in a way that they could serve big celebrations that are associated with the display of coordinated movement by a substantial number of people. The Haile Selassie I Stadium is a good case in point. It is located at the cross roads of the old and the new emblematic axis of the capital – the Churchill Road and Bole Road. Churchill Road, formerly Churchill Street, links the newly built municipality to the city centre. Marching units passed by monuments, ministries and other symbolic elements of state power such as the Commercial Bank. Furthermore, athletes marched through an area, which, by its architectural style, could be called the modern part of the town. Before the re-construction of the stadium, it had a north gate, where the formations went into the stadium and could pass by the tribune. The guests, who in all major events also included the Emperor, his dignitaries and VIPs from abroad, were able to receive units of the Army or schools' sports teams before they started with the actual competitions. On the occasion of Victory Day 1966, for example, a brochure from the Ministry of Information (1966) explained the use of the stadium as follows:

some 3000 schoolchildren, one third of them girls, should steal the show on the second day of the festivities by an impressive sports performance at the Haile Selassie I Stadium in the presence of the Emperor.

Some 10,000 invited guests and over 50,000 uniformed students of the various schools in Addis Ababa jammed the stadium to watch these flowers of the post-Victory period and citizens of tomorrow make a spectacular display of gymnastics and other related performances. Organized by the Sports and Scouts Department of the Ministry of Education and Fine Arts, the 2 1/2 hr spectacle delighted parents and spectators alike, and was a testimony on how much attention has been paid and is being paid by the Government of instilling the spirit of sportsmanship into that section of the population on whose mental and spiritual maturity and development depend the progress and advancement of tomorrow's Ethiopia (p. 12).

Performances in the stadiums followed a strict choreography – a rigid time schedule and a clearly defined spatial order. The report of the Inter-School Athletic Championships of the Tigray Province (1967, p. 24) in Qañew Stadium,

for example, lists a minutely calibrated programme of competitions and acrobatic entertainment shows, where individual and collective performances were on display. Perfection was the order of the day. A temporal-spatial regime confined sportive bodies in uniform dress to display body techniques in a regulated or symmetrical manner. The same report hints, however, at the fact that this ideal remained an ideal. Shortage of equipment, coaches, physical education teachers, demanding weather conditions and the human tendency of resisting perfection might have run counter to any kind of perfection.

The two examples above already describe how stadiums served more than simply a sporting purpose. Often combined with sports related performances, stadiums were used as stages of political power, as an outlet for political dissent or, as described in Bromber (2013b), as a venue for sports-related amusement such as heavy athletic shows within an emerging consumer culture. They carried specific ideas of modernity, progress, urbanity as well as contested notions of urban leisure. Stadiums were both places to instil order and perfection as well as spaces of potential disorder. In contrast to the *Estadio Nacional Julio Martínez Prádanos* in Santiago de Chile (1973), the national stadium in Conakry (2009), or the Syrian football stadiums in Baniyas and Daraa (2011), there is no case reported in which an Ethiopian stadium was ever used as a prison or place of torture.

By way of conclusion

The article used Haile Selassie I Stadium in Addis Ababa and Baloni-Qañew-Tigray Stadium in Mekelle in order to discuss aspects of stadium evolution and functionality in Ethiopia. Both cases showed that open fields which emerged as playing grounds for football in the early 20th century where turned into larger regulated structures. Whereas Haile Selassie I Stadium was built from the ground as part of a well-planned representative city centre, Baloni-Qañew-Tigray Stadium simply was a fenced area at the margins of the provincial capital, partly using the slopes as natural border. In this case we might rather speak of “development” of a place through gradual spatial regulation than of building a stadium as such. As shown, both stadiums are part of sports infrastructural nuclei which included more down scale facilities such as schools, recreation centres or hotels. With the construction boom starting in the 1990 in all major Ethiopian towns, many of the small playgrounds disappeared. Furthermore, schools do not always have a sportsground. Current educational necessities are usually met with the architectural solution of vertical progress; i.e. multistory buildings on small

plots. This situation adds to the existing shortage of qualified teachers and sports equipment.

In terms of function, both stadiums were more than venues for training and competition. They were and still are social spaces for producing consent to political projects of progress, such as the modernization of Haile Selassie's era or demonstrations for socialist educational development. Major national as well as continental tournaments were always both a display of muscular as well as political strength. However, in lucrative athletic shows in the past and cultural displays on major holidays stadiums also became places of amusement beyond sports proper. Today, the extraordinary architectural design which is advertised on billboards, brochures and animated video clips has generated a new competition of grappling attention inside and outside Ethiopia. Thus, new research on current stadiums construction may discuss these hyper-modern landmarks as elements of what Heiko Schmid has called of "economy of fascination". He convincingly argued for Las Vegas and Dubai (Schmid, 2009) that fascination itself becomes a recourse and attention a rare commodity. In Ethiopia there might soon evolve a competition between the federal states about which capital has the best stadium. With their futurist architecture designed by internationally renowned architectural bureaus Ethiopian stadiums have the potential for city branding as it happens all over the globe (Bromber 2014, pp. 119-130).

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