

## “These Our Games” – Sport and the Church of Scotland Mission to Kenya, c. 1907–1937

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**Abstract:** In this article I use oral and documentary evidence gathered during recent fieldwork and archival research in the UK and Kenya to explore the ways in which the Church of Scotland Mission to Kenya attempted to use sport to “civilize” and “discipline” the people of Central Kenya. I make a case for the important contributions the topic of sport can make to the study of African and colonial history, and offer a comprehensive critique of the only book-length work which explores the history of sport in colonial Kenya, John Bale and Joe Sang’s *Kenyan Running* (1996).

**Résumé:** Dans cet article, j’utilise des entretiens et des documents collectés pendant ma recherche de terrain et mon travail aux archives au Royaume-Uni et au Kenya afin d’explorer la façon dont la Mission de l’Église d’Écosse au Kenya a tenté d’employer le sport pour “civiliser” et “discipliner” les habitants du Kenya central. Je soutiens que le sport en tant qu’objet peut servir à étudier l’histoire africaine et coloniale et offrir une critique exhaustive du seul livre qui explore l’histoire du sport dans le Kenya colonial: John Bale et Joe Sang, *Kenyan Running* (1996).

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## Introduction: A Great Football Match<sup>1</sup>

On Monday 5 October 1909 Dr. Arthur of the Church of Scotland Mission to Kenya (CSM) took a team of boys from his mission station at Thogoto to Kabete for game of football against the Church Missionary Society. It was, Arthur later reported in the CSM's bulletin for home parishes *Kikuyu News*, "A Great Football Match."<sup>2</sup> The respective mission schools proclaimed a "general holiday (...) in honour of the momentous occasion." Accompanying Arthur and "his boys" were "a goodly following of supporters" including two female CSM missionaries, Mrs. Scott and Miss Stevenson, who "added much to the beauty if not the playing strength of the team." The Director of Public Works for East Africa Protectorate, William MacGregor Ross, travelled up from Nairobi, to referee the game. Before the match, tea was served to the "ladies," the team captains (Arthur and Leakey), and the referee.

The match itself receives scant attention in Arthur's report; the result (Kabete 3 – Kikuyu 2) is mentioned only once. The match was "great" not for anything that happened on the pitch within ninety minutes of play, but because it contributed to no less than the advance of Christian civilization in this part of East Africa. "It was the first time they had ever seen a game of football," Arthur wrote of the spectators; among them were "quite a number highly painted warriors, relics of a day fast giving place (...) to the playing fields of sport, in which manliness, courage, and unselfishness shall add their quota to the formation of true Christian character." Arthur concludes his report thus:

<sup>1</sup> This work was supported by the Economic and Social Research Council grant number ES/J500136/1. Early drafts were presented at the Graduate Interdisciplinary Network in European Studies (GRAINES) Summer School Menton, France in June 2013 and the Inter-Disciplinary.net 3rd Global Sport Conference at Mansfield College, Oxford in August 2014. I would like to thank Alfred Anangwe, Michael Cunningham, Felicity Cunningham, Matthew Carotenuto, Stephen Conway, Madeleine Grieve, John Lonsdale, Tom Molony, Paul Nugent, Brian Stanley, Bernhard Struck, and Michelle Sikes for their support and suggestions.

<sup>2</sup> J(ohn) W. Arthur, "The Great Football Match," *Kikuyu News* 9 (January 1909). *Kikuyu News* was a small journal/magazine produced by the CSM periodically. It ran from 1908 to 1958. The articles in *Kikuyu News* were authored by missionaries in Kenya for "home" (i.e. Scottish) audiences, they consist mainly of monthly and annual reports as well as anecdotes from "the field." A primary function of the journal/magazine was to solicit funds from home parishes. A complete collection of *Kikuyu News*, in the form of eight, leather bound volumes (formerly owned by John Arthur himself) is now held at the University of Edinburgh's Centre for Research Collections, located in the University of Edinburgh Library. To my knowledge this is the only publicly accessible complete collection of *Kikuyu News*. It has not been digitized.

In closing let me say that it is our hope in these our games to stiffen the backbone of these our boys by teaching them manliness, good temper, and unselfishness – qualities amongst many others which have done so much to make many a Britisher, and which we hope to instil into our boys in such a way as to make them strong men indeed. Our belief is that our games may be, when properly controlled, a mighty channel through which God can work to the uplifting of this race. They need to be strengthened in the realm of their physical nature, where Satan so strongly reigns, and how better than by the substitution of their own evil dances by such a game as football, inherent in which are magnificent uplifting qualities.

Sport was an integral component of the CSM's evangelistic enterprise. This was particularly so between 1907–1937, when John Arthur (Figure 1) was part of the mission. As a medical student Arthur broke the University of Glasgow record for 440 yards and captained the rugby team; while studying Tropical Medicine in London he had trials for the Scotland rugby team.<sup>3</sup> During his three decades in East Africa he attempted to climb Mount Kenya eight times. John Arthur, who led the CSM from 1911, was undoubtedly the mission's most renowned (and quotable) proponent of sport, but he was far from unique in his belief that sport could radically remake individuals and societies. Frequently and explicitly – in personal correspondence and in public reports, in home-made fundraising motion picture films and in private reminiscences – CSM missionaries expressed an unshakable confidence in the “uplifting” qualities of activities as seemingly frivolous as hitting balls with bats and running in circles. Nearly every edition of *Kikuyu News* contains updates on mission sports, often whole articles dedicated to particular initiatives or specific events. Sport was a regular feature of CSM life, pursued with intensity and invested with importance.

### ***Kenyan Running – A Critical Review***

In this article I explore the ways in which missionaries of the CSM used sport in their mission to the people of Central Kenya. In some ways, there is little that is remarkable about the CSM's sporting evangelism: as

<sup>3</sup> David Arthur (interview, 16 April 2014). Obituaries of John Arthur, for example A(rthur). R. Barlow, “A Life Well Lived,” *Kikuyu News* 202 (February 1953), rarely fail to mention his sporting achievements. The University of Edinburgh Centre for Research Collections holds a collection of Arthur's papers. The file GEN764 contains mostly obituaries and biographical material. For a chapter-length biography of Arthur: Anne King, “J.W. Arthur,” in: Benjamin Kipkorir (ed.), *Biographical Essays on Imperialism and Collaboration in Colonial Kenya* (Nairobi: Kenya Literature Bureau, 1980), 87–109.

**Figure 1. "J[ohn].W. Arthur [centre] and the Kikuyu First XI," (n.d. c.1910). Source: University of Edinburgh Centre for Research Collections, Arthur Papers, Phot. Ill. 96.**



J.A. Mangan has shown, many missionaries, educationalists, and administrators, elsewhere in Africa and the rest of the world at this time shared Arthur's and the CSM's commitment to sport.<sup>4</sup> However, this research has had a surprisingly limited impact on historians of Africa. There are only a handful of studies which have explored how colonial sports programs operated on the ground, in specific settings at particular times, and how they were received and adapted according to the needs, actions,

<sup>4</sup> Classically, J.A. Mangan, *The Games Ethic and Imperialism* (London: Frank Cass, 1998). See also: J.A. Mangan, "Ethics and Ethnocentricity: Imperial Education in British Tropical Africa," in: William Baker and J.A. Mangan (eds.), *Sport in Africa* (New York: Africana Publishing Company, 1987), 138–171; J.A. Mangan, "Britain's Chief Spiritual Export: Imperial Sport as Moral Metaphor, Political Symbol and Cultural Bond," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 27 (2010), 328–336.

and beliefs of local actors.<sup>5</sup> With the notable exceptions of Stephan Miescher's *Making Men in Ghana* and Markku Hokkanen's study of the "games ethic" in Malawi, missionary sport initiatives in colonial Africa, in particular, have received scant scholarly attention.<sup>6</sup> With a few notable exceptions, moreover, historical studies of sport in Africa have remained confined to "sports studies" or "sports history" where their capacity to have a broader influence on African and/or colonial history is restricted.<sup>7</sup> My aim in this article, then, is not simply to explore the rich sporting history of the CSM but to make a case for the important contributions the topic of sport can make to understandings of the history of colonialism in Africa.<sup>8</sup>

Throughout this article, I draw upon and critique John Bale and Joe Sang's *Kenyan Running*.<sup>9</sup> Published twenty years ago it remains the only book-length scholarly work in which the history of sport in Kenya is explored in any detail. Winner of the British Society of Sports History's annual prize for "the best book in sports history on a British topic or by a British author," *Kenyan Running* is a landmark text in sports history and continues to be widely read and widely cited. Upon publication it was hailed by leading luminary in the field John Nauright as "an excellent example of the virtues of a multidisciplinary approach to the social and cultural study of sport (...) one of the few detailed and sophisticated studies

<sup>5</sup> For example, Phyllis M. Martin, "Colonialism, Youth and Football in French Equatorial Africa," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 8 (1991), 56–71; Laura Fair, "'Kickin' it': Leisure, Politics and Football in Colonial Zanzibar, 1900s–1950s," *Africa* 67 (1997), 224–251; Emmanuel Akyeampong, "Bukom and the Social History of Boxing in Accra: Warfare and Citizenship in Precolonial Ga Society," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 35 (2002), 39–60.

<sup>6</sup> Markku Hokkanen, "'Christ and the Imperial Games Fields' in South-Central Africa – Sport and the Scottish Missionaries in Malawi, 1880–1914: Utilitarian Compromise," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 22 (2005), 745–769; Stephan Miescher, *Making Men in Ghana* (Bloomington IN/Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2005), esp. 72–76. Interestingly, in each case, it is Scottish and/or Presbyterian missions that are the focus of investigation. See also: Hamad Ndee, "Western Influences on Sport in Tanzania: British Middle-Class Educationalists, Missionaries and the Diffusion of Adapted Athleticism," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 27 (2010), 905–936.

<sup>7</sup> In addition to the above, some notable works which have brought sport into the mainstream of African history include: Phyllis M. Martin, *Leisure and Society in Colonial Brazzaville* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Laura Fair, *Pastimes and Politics: Culture, Community, and Identity in Post-Abolition Urban Zanzibar, 1890–1945* (Athens OH: Ohio University Press, 2001); Peter Alegi, *African Soccerescapes: How a Continent Changed the World's Game* (London: Christopher Hurst, 2010).

<sup>8</sup> An aim similar to that which informs the contributions in the 2013 special issue of the *Journal of Global History*. Matthew Taylor, "Editorial – Sport, Transnationalism, and Global History," *Journal of Global History* 8 (2013), 199–208.

<sup>9</sup> John Bale and Joe Sang, *Kenyan Running: Movement Culture, Geography and Global Change* (London: Frank Cass, 1996).

of sport and society in Africa.”<sup>10</sup> Chris Jenkins, in *African Affairs*, called it “an excellent monograph” which “will be of interest to a wide readership including (...) specialists in African Studies.”<sup>11</sup> However, the impact *Kenyan Running* has had on historians of Kenya can only be said to be slight and the work has failed to ignite a body of scholarship on the history of sport in Kenya. This article represents the first attempt to systematically and explicitly scrutinize Bale and Sang’s arguments.

*Kenyan Running* carries a bold claim: “When athletes from countries like Kenya reject their indigenous body cultures in favour of those of Europe or America they have, in a sense, been collaborating with imperialism.”<sup>12</sup> Bale and Sang’s chief aim is to problematize the global success of Kenya’s distance runners, a phenomenon typically received uncritically by the mainstream media and sports fans. The authors do this by historicizing sport in Kenya. For Bale and Sang, sport, by which they mean “modern sport” or “achievement sport,” is “an essentially Western phenomenon:” it developed in a late-nineteenth century industrializing, imperializing, “European core” before “radiating outwards (...) to the rest of the world.”<sup>13</sup> Modern sport is based on a “centimetre-gram-second model” and characterized by competition, standardization, and regulation. Its development in Kenya has seen “the relatively unrestricted and free movement of the pre-colonial period (...) replaced by the corset of running as racing with its starting and finishing lines and its geometrically arranged lane markings.”<sup>14</sup>

Bale and Sang argue that “traditional Kenyan movement culture (...) has been exterminated; it has been the victim of cultural genocide.”<sup>15</sup> In their analysis of “traditional Kenyan movement culture,” the authors acknowledge that in the wrestling, spear-throwing, and high-jump contests which were a part of initiation ceremonies “pre-modern Kenya did possess many forms of movement culture which *were* physical and competitive (italics added).”<sup>16</sup> They also point out that “for some physical games measurements were made and victory given considerable significance” and that in some cases “prizes were awarded, high performances were demanded, and, to an extent, planned, physical training was required.”<sup>17</sup> However, prior to colonization it was a “sensual African body culture” which prevailed: physical contests took place in “open spaces,” used natural features such as trees or rivers to mark boundaries

<sup>10</sup> John Nauright, “*Kenyan Running: Movement Culture, Geography and Global Change* by John Bale and Joe Sang,” *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 32 (1997), 94–95.

<sup>11</sup> Charles Jenkins, “Review of *Kenyan Running: Movement Culture, Geography and Global Chance* by John Bale, Joe Sang” *African Affairs* 96 (1997), 296–298.

<sup>12</sup> Bale and Sang, *Kenyan Running*, 170.

<sup>13</sup> Bale and Sang, *Kenyan Running*, 18.

<sup>14</sup> Bale and Sang, *Kenyan Running*, 98–99.

<sup>15</sup> Bale and Sang, *Kenyan Running*, 169.

<sup>16</sup> Bale and Sang, *Kenyan Running*, 49.

<sup>17</sup> Bale and Sang, *Kenyan Running*, 49.

or finish lines, and occurred spontaneously or were part of the rhythms of life-cycles or seasons.<sup>18</sup> This Arcadian freedom was crushed when Europeans arrived in Kenya and began to use sport “as a form of social control.”<sup>19</sup>

In the longest chapter of the book, indicatively titled, “Between Folk Games and Modern Sport,” Bale and Sang consider the period between 1900 and 1950. For them, this is the key phase in the transition “from the traditions of tribal folk activities to those of globalised modern sport.”<sup>20</sup> It was “a liminal period (...) neither here nor there, betwixt and between” as initially folk games and modern sport co-exist; but ultimately the latter “replaced” the former.<sup>21</sup> Bale and Sang’s emphasis is on the colonization of Kenya, in particular, the authoritarian and disciplinarian sports programs of the colonial administration, the military, and the police. They show that the colonial administration used sport “as an alternative to tribal dancing which was deemed sexually explicit, lascivious and hence undesirable” and as a means of creating “a fit workforce.”<sup>22</sup> Bale and Sang draw particular attention to the use of “drill” in the training of the police and infantrymen; drill, they claim emphasized “the straight body in straight lines with no room for individual expression” and exemplified a “hygienist mode of body culture which contrasted with the more sensuous and fluid movement culture of the indigenous people.”<sup>23</sup>

For Bale and Sang the history of sport in Kenya is about European dominance over Africa. It is a domination that continues today: “Political independence for Kenya did not involve a decolonisation of the body and little has been done to revive the nation’s traditional folk-games.”<sup>24</sup> The “success” of Kenya’s distance-runners, for Bale and Sang, is little more than “a classic example of cultural imperialism.”<sup>25</sup> Herein lie both the strengths and weaknesses of *Kenyan Running*. The chief value of *Kenyan Running* is its claim sport is a historically particular phenomenon: a “body culture” that is neither natural nor necessary but has been produced out of concrete circumstances. The authors invite us to see sport – too often conceptualized as politically-neutral and value-free – as a highly problematic cultural activity, intimately connected to the circulation of power. The story of global sport, they rightly claim, cannot be separated from the history of colonialism. However, Bale and Sang conceptualize historical change in colonial Africa in a way which most historians would

<sup>18</sup> Bale and Sang, *Kenyan Running*, 97, 101.

<sup>19</sup> Bale and Sang, *Kenyan Running*, 76.

<sup>20</sup> Bale and Sang, *Kenyan Running*, 47.

<sup>21</sup> Bale and Sang, *Kenyan Running*, 69. The authors are quoting Victor W. Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors; Symbolic Action in Human Society* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1974), 232.

<sup>22</sup> Bale and Sang, *Kenyan Running*, 76.

<sup>23</sup> Bale and Sang, *Kenyan Running*, 72.

<sup>24</sup> Bale and Sang, *Kenyan Running*, 63.

<sup>25</sup> Bale and Sang, *Kenyan Running*, 64.

contest: all power and agency is located in a monolithic “Europe” and an undifferentiated mass of Europeans effortlessly spread their fully-formed and universally agreed-upon culture to a docile “Rest-of-the-world.” There are no contests, struggles, or disagreements. Indeed, at one point Bale and Sang explicitly state: “The passive reaction of the recipient culture” meant “early twentieth century proselytisers quite straightforwardly imposed athletics.”<sup>26</sup> Not without irony, Bale and Sang are in full agreement with imperialists like John Arthur that games like football and athletics are “*our* games;” by playing them, Kenyans automatically become “Britishers.”

Bale and Sang present history schematically. Events unfold with an inevitable teleology, becoming more rational, more secular, and more “European” over time. In their narrative there is no room for contradiction or ambiguity. It is perhaps for this reason that missionaries receive very little attention in *Kenyan Running*—there is no evidence in the footnotes or bibliography to suggest that the authors consulted any of the extensive missionary archives in Nairobi, Edinburgh, Birmingham, or London. The three pages dedicated to missionary sport is justified on the basis that “missionaries were not always interested in teaching athletics.”<sup>27</sup> Bale and Sang find the school drill at mission stations interesting because it “aided and abetted (...) the maintenance of imperial rule.”<sup>28</sup> Less useful to their argument are missionaries’ carnivalesque sports days and the “culture of laughter” which pervaded them, and the missionary emphasis on sport for “welfare” rather than for competition. These are mentioned but not explored; the implication is that they are mere “anomalies” in the overall movement from folk-games to modern sport.

The problems with *Kenyan Running* are in no small part attributable to the authors’ method. The bulk of their evidence is published material authored by European colonizers. There is a smattering of archival material, but most of their argument has been made from books that can be accessed from most major British libraries.

Moreover, with the exception of Jomo Kenyatta’s *Facing Mount Kenya* and some works by Ngugi wa Thiongo, they do not use texts authored by Kenyan people. Nor do they use oral testimonies as evidence in their historically-oriented chapters. Bale and Sang are convinced the history of modern sport in Kenya can only be told from what they call a “global” perspective. This is a valid premise but in attempting to locate their story in a global narrative, they elevate their analysis above the level of the local and everyday. This prevents them from penetrating the contests, struggles, emotions, and actions of real people.

The result is an abstract and overly theoretical account in which all Europeans, by virtue of being European, have undiluted power; and all

<sup>26</sup> Bale and Sang, *Kenyan Running*, 168.

<sup>27</sup> Bale and Sang, *Kenyan Running*, 75.

<sup>28</sup> Bale and Sang, *Kenyan Running*, 72–75.



Africans, by virtue of being African, can only ever be victims, collaborators, or at best “resisters.”

These weaknesses are especially problematic given the subject matter is sport: an intensely subjective and experiential activity. One problem facing any scholar who approaches the topic of sport is the challenge of producing an account which both meets the theoretical and empirical sophistication required by an academic audience *and* goes some way, at the very least, to take into account the highly subjective experiences of athletes and fans. A question which Bale and Sang cannot answer is “why do people play sport?” Indeed, it is a question with which they do not even engage: Bale and Sang make little attempt to understand sport from the perspective of its primary actors, expressing little empathy with them, even on occasion outright hostility. Thus they ask, as they draw their argument to a close: “Can racing around a standardised 400m synthetic track 25 times, routinely metronomised in a concrete stadium, be regarded as progress? (...) what sense is there in striving oneself to run in circles faster than any other?”<sup>29</sup>

### Sport at the Station

The example that follows is based on the notion that global history need not necessarily entail such a sweeping, macro, approach.<sup>30</sup> I address broader issues of sport and colonialism by scaling down the analysis to specific sites of activity, to particular times, and to specific actors. I explore, in detail, the history of the CSM’s attempt to use sport to “civilize” and “discipline” the bodies and minds of the people of Central Kenya. In addition to some of the published texts cited by Bale and Sang, I draw upon recent fieldwork and archival research in and around Edinburgh, London, Nairobi, and the three former centers of CSM mission work in Central Kenya: Thogoto, Tumutumu, and Chogoria.<sup>31</sup> Broadly speaking I make three arguments. First, Bale and Sang are mistaken to marginalize the importance of missionaries in the history of sport; of all of the colonizers it was missionaries who sought the most far reaching changes for indigenous body cultures and made the most thoroughgoing attempts to spread new forms of recreation. Second, sport is an important topic for historians of colonial Africa not simply because it was a means by which colonizers

<sup>29</sup> Bale and Sang, *Kenyan Running*, 170.

<sup>30</sup> Jacques Revel, “Microanalysis and the Construction of the Social,” in: Jacques Ravel and Lynn Hunt (eds.) *Histories: French Constructions of the Past* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 1996), 492–502; Bernhard Struck, Kate Ferris and Jacques Revel, “Introduction: Space and Scale in Transnational History,” *The International History Review* 33 (2011), 573–584.

<sup>31</sup> Interviews were conducted during four weeks of research in Nairobi and Chogoria between June and July 2013 and twelve weeks of research in Nairobi and Nyeri between September 2014 and December 2014. Audio copies are available upon request.

sought control, but because it was a site of contest, struggle, and exchange. With particular attention on the chaotic and irrational aspects of missionary sport, I question the rigidity of Bale and Sang's chronology of the diffusion of sport. Third, and most importantly, I argue that the topic of sport in general, and missionary sport in particular, can deepen our understanding of modalities of colonial power. At mission stations sport was undoubtedly used as a form of social control but at the same time, it was frequently experienced as individually empowering and enjoyable.

The foundation of the mission enterprise was the mission station. The CSM had three stations – Thogoto (founded in 1898), Tumutumu (founded in 1909), and Chogoria (founded in 1918) – each with satellite churches, out-schools, and dispensaries.<sup>32</sup> The stations were large both in terms of acreage and population. Thogoto, by far the largest, was 3,000 acres and included vast coffee and potato plantations.<sup>33</sup> In 1925 Thogoto station had 150 boys in permanent residence, 716 attending the “central school” located on the site and 1,281 church members; there were 3,456 *athomi* (mission scholars [literally “readers’]) attending out-schools of Tumutumu; Chogoria had 200 people attending the central mission school.<sup>34</sup> On each site there were hospitals, schools, dormitories, industrial workshops, farms, and – of course – playing fields.

The stations were deliberately set apart from white settlements, located in the African reserves. Situated on hilltops with large stone buildings, mission stations were deliberately intended to radically interrupt the indigenous landscape. “On entering the mission estate one is struck at once with *the contrast* to what one sees outside its boundaries” said Horace Philp in 1910.<sup>35</sup> The CSM characterized the space beyond the station as dark, unknown, chaotic, even dangerous; inside meanwhile was bright, spacious, knowable, and rational.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>32</sup> For histories of the Church of Scotland Mission to Kenya see: Derek R. Peterson, *Creative Writing: Translation, Bookkeeping, and the Work of Imagination in Colonial Kenya* (Portsmouth NH: Heinemann, 2004); Robert Macpherson, *The Presbyterian Church in Kenya: An Account of the Origins and Growth of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa* (Nairobi: Presbyterian Church of East Africa, 1970); Brian G. McIntosh, “The Scottish Mission in Kenya, 1891–1923,” PhD thesis, University of Edinburgh (Edinburgh, 1968). None of these works explore the role of sport in the mission.

<sup>33</sup> University of Edinburgh Centre for Research Collections, Arthur Papers, GEN 762.137, “Church of Scotland Mission Estate at Kikuyu & Sale Thereof” (19 October 1926).

<sup>34</sup> “Annual Report,” *Kikuyu News* 92 (June 1925).

<sup>35</sup> Horace Philp, “First Impressions of Kikuyu,” *Kikuyu News* 19 (May 1910).

<sup>36</sup> For analyses of the architecture of colonial mission stations and the use of time therein, see: Miescher in *Making Men in Ghana*, 48–83; Peterson, *Creative Writing*, 42–45 (on Tumutumu station); John M. MacKenzie, “Missionaries, Science, and the Environment in Nineteenth-Century Africa,” in: Andrew Porter (ed.), *The Imperial Horizons of British Protestant Missions, 1880–1914* (Grand Rapids MI: WB Eerdmans Pub), 106–130.

According to the missionaries, village life was “heathen” but not diabolic; the people lived not so much *in sin* but *without sin*; in a dimly perceived spirit world with little sense of moral responsibility and little ability to recognize the self, a necessary precursor to having a personal relationship with God.<sup>37</sup> The task of Christian mission, as the CSM saw it, was to awaken (or, we might say, manufacture) the individual subject which, it was believed, lay dormant within each Gikuyu villager: “The power of the Gospel, together with training of mind and body (...) [will] uplift them in thought and conduct, and (...) call forth God-given abilities which have lain buried in ignorance during unknown centuries,” reasoned Arthur Barlow.<sup>38</sup> The mission station (see Figure 2) facilitated the CSM’s attempt at subject formation: with meticulously planned daily timetables and tightly managed, highly visible spaces the CSM hoped “to fill up their day and develop them on every side.”<sup>39</sup> Sport was a key component in this enterprise.

It is possible to discern three different forms of sport at the station: drill, games, and sports days. Here, Peterson Muchangi, who attended Tumutumu school in the 1920s describes the drill:

Now, the trumpet would go a few minutes before eight. By eight sharp you must be lining up ready to go to the prayers, into the church. Then, I don’t remember how many minutes, we prayed, then to class rooms (...) There was a time and a place for exercise (...) we did that kind of drilling: “turn right,” “about turn,” and so and so on like soldiers (...) ha ha you see (...) and that is part of physical training (...) that is the time when you learn “about turn,” “about whatever,” jumping, you know, holding your arms like that and bowing – “up,” “down,” – that’s what really we called the “P.E.” [physical exercise].<sup>40</sup>

The drill was an important feature of the school timetable, often the first activity of the day. It remains an abiding memory of most who attended CSM mission schools: many of my respondents began speaking about it before they knew of my interest in sport. Most described it in a similar way to Muchangi, relating it to a specific time, comparing it with military

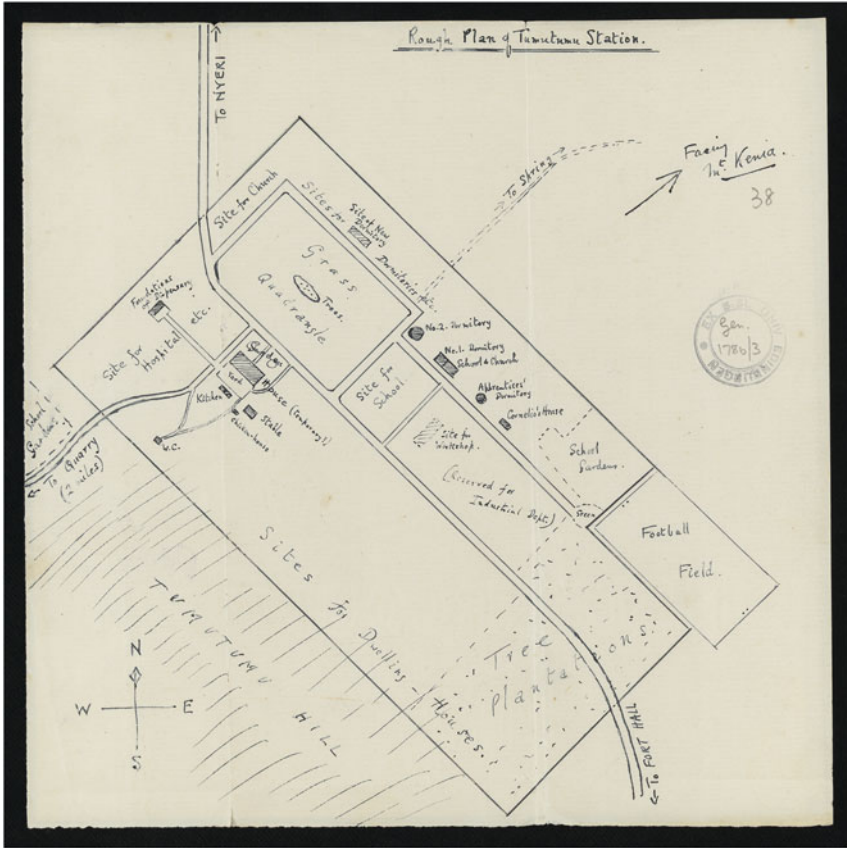
<sup>37</sup> Derek Peterson, “Colonizing Language? Missionaries and Gikuyu Dictionaries, 1904 and 1914,” *History in Africa* 24 (1997), 257–272, esp. 260; Peterson, *Creative Writing*, esp. 35–59; John Lonsdale, “Kikuyu Christianities,” in: David Maxwell (ed.), *Christianity and the African Imagination: Essays in Honour of Adrian Hastings* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 157–198.

<sup>38</sup> Arthur Barlow, “The Kikuyu People,” in: Chas. W. Hutcheson and W.B. Stevenson (eds.), *Kikuyu: 1898–1923. Semi-Jubilee Book of the Church of Scotland Mission, Kenya Colony* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood, 1923), 9–29, 29.

<sup>39</sup> University of Edinburgh Centre for Research Collections, Arthur Papers, GEN 762.7, John Arthur to his Mother (22 February 1907).

<sup>40</sup> Peterson Muchangi (interview 21 November 2014).

**Figure 2. "Rough Plan of Tumutumu Station," (c.1909). Note the proposed site for the football field at the eastern end of the station.**  
 Source: University of Edinburgh Centre for Research Collections, Barlow Papers, GEN 1786/3.



training, and either demonstrating to me the sequence of maneuvers or adopting a different tone of voice to declare “right, left, up, down, turn.” Two films which detail everyday life at Chogoria station made in 1931 and 1933 by CSM missionary A.C. Irvine wonderfully illustrate the importance of drill for the CSM. These silent black-and-white films, which together run over ninety minutes, contain extended footage of mission-children attempting to follow their instructor’s sequence of exercises.<sup>41</sup> Of all the sports

<sup>41</sup> The two silent black and white films, “Chogoria” (1931) and “Chogoria Missionary Centre” (1933), are held at the British Film Institute archive, Stephen Street, London ID numbers 10981 and 540654. See: <http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/228> and <http://www.colonialfilm.org.uk/node/413> (accessed December 2014).

initiatives at the mission, drill was the most utilitarian. Nevertheless its purpose was not simply to improve physical fitness; as one missionary explained, the point of the drill was “to teach neatness, punctuality, and prompt obedience.”<sup>42</sup>

“The simple education given will enable them to read the scriptures and equip them for a better, healthier, happier life, for it embraces, besides the three R’s, *hygiene, drill, and football.*”<sup>43</sup> While drill often opened the school day, games often closed it. Games – as we saw in Arthur’s match report – were thought of in loftier terms than drill, as a form of moral instruction that worked “wonders in teaching unselfishness and team work.”<sup>44</sup> They could be competitive and some of the football tournaments and athletics meetings John Arthur organized must be considered among some of the earliest organized sports competitions in Kenya. (For an early CSM photograph of a game of football in play see Figure 3, below). While drill was a routine and anonymized form of physical exercise, games brought the characteristics of individuals to the fore. In serious competitions, missionaries could be ebullient in their praise of certain individuals: after the Empire Day sports of 1911 Barlow said: “The competitors made a very good display. The heroes of the day were Kahuho, our oldest boarder, as a runner, and Muriuki at the high jump.”<sup>45</sup>

As well as being part of the curriculum and taking the form of organized competitions, games were also encouraged simply as a form of recreation. Gikuyu “had to be reached and turned from (...) the lazy, somewhat sensuous lives in which they passed their days (...) new methods of recreation had to be inculcated,” said Arthur.<sup>46</sup>

It pleased the missionaries to see their scholars break out into an impromptu game of football as they considered it a proper way to release energy which might otherwise be expended in activities deemed nefarious. Marion Stevenson’s biographer writes of an occasion when, upon witnessing a ball game, Stevenson rejoiced “that they had this healthy outlet for their energies (...) [an] outlet in great contrast to the evils of village life which all too soon sullied their young minds.”<sup>47</sup>

<sup>42</sup> B. Robertson, “A Visit to Kikuyu,” *Kikuyu News* 17 (March 1910), 4–6.

<sup>43</sup> National Library of Scotland, Irvine Papers, Acc. 12801/21, “A.C(live). Irvine, “Circular Letter: February 1934.”

<sup>44</sup> I.G. Scott, *A Saint in Kenya: A Life of Marion Scott Stevenson* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1932), 112–113.

<sup>45</sup> Arthur Barlow, “Tumutumu Notes,” *Kikuyu News* 30 (September 1911), 14–15.

<sup>46</sup> University of Edinburgh Centre for Research Collections, Arthur Papers, GEN 765.46, J(ohn).W. Arthur, “30 Years in Kenya: Emancipation of A People, Address to Cupar Rotarians by Dr. Arthur of Dunbog,” *The News* (4 March 1939).

<sup>47</sup> Scott, *A Saint in Kenya*, 209.

Likewise Horace Philp celebrated his boys' decision to play football and other "games of skill" instead of "their native forms of amusement" which are "associated with the vilest songs and viler deeds of which we cannot even speak."<sup>48</sup>

Sometimes missionaries played sport with their Gikuyu charges. Instances of this are rare, and appear to be a feature of earlier, rather than later, mission work; not one of my respondents, most of whom were born in the 1920s and 1930s, recalled a missionary ever playing games with them. A few examples can be found in John Arthur's letters to his mother during his first year of missionary work in 1907. In one letter about his houseboys Wangata and Gobe, for example, Arthur claimed to, "always play games with them from about 4 to 5.30. We have been having drill, shots at goal and through-the-mill. The latter takes on tremendously and is an excellent introduction for rugby."<sup>49</sup> In another he writes of having played "a game of soccer with the native workers, about 8 a side. We had a pretty hot game and as I had already done my twelve miles, I was quite glad when it was over."<sup>50</sup> Arthur Barlow, also played sport with *athomi*. At the 1910 Christmas celebrations at Kikuyu, for example, Barlow "played but having marched the 26 miles from Tumutumu the same day did not feel very vigorous."<sup>51</sup> Barlow gives us a glimpse of the fact that mixed games may have provided a chance to invert the existing racial power structures: commenting on "the old African method of showing no mercy whatsoever to the defeated," Barlow, who was on the losing team, wrote: "I was pained (...) by the treatment the Kikuyu spectators gave us, 'slanging' us rather badly: special derision was directed at myself, particularly by the senior teachers."

CSM sport rarely conformed to the "centimetre-gram-second" model integral to Bale and Sang's argument; and it rarely (if ever) took place on "carefully prepared running track[s]."<sup>52</sup> "Modern sports" like football and athletics were accompanied by a host of other less orthodox activities such as tennikoits, tug-of-war (see Figure 4), obstacle racing, and a high jump contest in which the contestants, with a running jump, had to clear a rope held up at each end by two people.<sup>53</sup> The clearest expression of the fact that missionary sport rarely conformed to Bale and Sang's disciplinary model were sports days (see Figures 4 and 5). These, moreover,

<sup>48</sup> Horace Philp, "Kikuyu," *Kikuyu News* 32 (December 1911).

<sup>49</sup> University of Edinburgh Centre for Research Collections, Arthur Papers, GEN762.17, John Arthur to his mother (22 April 1907).

<sup>50</sup> University of Edinburgh Centre for Research Collections, Arthur Papers, GEN762.20, John Arthur to his mother (21 May 1907).

<sup>51</sup> University of Edinburgh Centre for Research Collections, Barlow Papers, GEN 1786/2, Arthur Barlow, "Circular Letter No. 2" (28 February 1911).

<sup>52</sup> Bale and Sang, *Kenyan Running*, 63 and 98.

<sup>53</sup> A tennikoit or tenniquoit is a small rubber ring. Though many different games were played with the rubber ring, it seems that the most common form

were by far the most spectacular display of missionary sport, took up the most time, and drew the largest crowds. Contrary to the implication of Bale and Sang's teleology, which sees sport becoming increasingly serious and secular over time, the size and significance of these occasions did not diminish between 1907 and 1937. If anything they got bigger and more spectacular with each year.<sup>54</sup>

"The usual sports took place on Boxing Day and were a great success," reported A.C. Irvine, superintendent of Chogoria station, in his annual report of 1933:

We sent round invitations to all the chiefs, and seventeen, that is all but two, came, many being accompanied by retainers in full war-paint, feathered head-dresses, eyes ringed with blue, red and white, carrying shields, spears and swords. There were over 2,000 people present. Events began at 10.30. At 1 p.m. the chiefs were treated to gramophone records and tea.<sup>55</sup>

Sports days took place on the major days in the colonial missionary's calendar: Christmas, New Year, Easter, Empire Day, and St. Andrews' Day. Their tone was celebratory; their aim was to showcase, or "invent," the traditions of both Europe and Africa.<sup>56</sup> Native dress was encouraged and "native sports" occupied an important place on the schedule. "The native events in the sports were the most popular," it was said after the 1927 Christmas games at Tumutumu, "the men were pleased to show their skill in shooting with bow and arrow or throwing the knob-kerry and casting the spear."<sup>57</sup>

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at CSM mission stations involved individual contestants attempting to throw it over a post in the ground. For a statement on the popularity of tennikoits see: Mrs. West, "Kahuhia Normal School," *Kikuyu News* 148 (June 1939). In tug-of-war two opposing teams take either end of a rope. With each team facing one another, the contest involves each team attempting to pull the rope a certain distance in their direction. In an obstacle race contestants had to complete a running circuit while overcoming obstacles (such as climbing over or under beams) along the route. An example is described below.

<sup>54</sup> For another description of a sports day in colonial Kenya: John Lonsdale, "State and Peasantry in Colonial Africa," in: Raphael Samuel (ed.), *People's History and Socialist Theory* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), 106–117, 113–114.

<sup>55</sup> National Library of Scotland, Irvine Papers, Acc. 12801/21, "A.C(live). Irvine – Circular Letter: February 1934."

<sup>56</sup> Terence O. Ranger, "The Invention of Tradition in Colonial Africa," in: Eric J. Hobsbawm and Terence O. Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1984), 211–262.

<sup>57</sup> Scott, *A Saint in Kenya*, 263. A knobkerry is a form of club used traditionally as a weapon, primarily for hunting animals.

Sports days verged on the bizarre. A 1910 event included a race which required competitors to go “through a box, then over a trestle covered in brushwood, under the tennis net lengthways, through two suspended barrels, and lastly under one of the school floor mats, pegged down, and with a liberal coating of flour.”<sup>58</sup> Typical sports included pillow fighting, pole climbing, and banana eating competitions.<sup>59</sup> Eclectic events were matched by eclectic prizes: sheep, pieces of soap, handkerchiefs, spoonfuls of salt.<sup>60</sup>

### The Struggle for Sport

The “Third Annual Sports [Day]” which took place on New Years’ Day 1909 were, apparently, “the best of all three.”<sup>61</sup> The original plan was to start at 12.30, but “as usual the people were rather slow at gathering.” Among the guests was Chief Kinanjui who brought with him 150 followers, who “watched the sports to the end.” The main event was the obstacle race. They were “under the control of a European and an older boy” but their attention lapsed, giving rise to an “infinitely funny” episode. It is recalled here by Belle Scott:

We suddenly saw a wild rush without any apparent objective round the track of Kenanjui’s young maidens. Dr Scott at once suggested to draw the tape and make it a race. This they successfully did, but to their horror and to my great amusement they were in a moment swamped by unsuccessful candidates gripping their arms and clothes as desirous of recognition.<sup>62</sup>

Because the women’s bodies were coated in the customary red ochre, Dr. Scott “emerged from the mob as if they had been dipped in a paint pot.”<sup>63</sup> Kenanjui, we are told, laughed at “us and our strange ways.”<sup>64</sup>

It is not true that “early twentieth century proselytisers quite straightforwardly imposed athletics.”<sup>65</sup> Even in situations in which they seemingly occupied positions of control, the missionaries’ power to enforce sport was not absolute: the guests were late; the “maidens” initiated the race; the missionaries were laughed at. Bale and Sang argue that owing to its rule-bound nature, sport is a counter example to Robert Young’s dictum that

<sup>58</sup> J(ohn) W. Arthur, “Sports at Kikuyu,” *Kikuyu News* 10 (March 1909).

<sup>59</sup> Captured in the Irvine films – see note 41.

<sup>60</sup> Scott, *A Saint in Kenya*, 136.

<sup>61</sup> J(ohn) W. Arthur, “Sports at Kikuyu.”

<sup>62</sup> Mrs. (I.G.) Scott, “Kenianjui,” *Kikuyu News* 10 (March 1909).

<sup>63</sup> Scott, *A Saint in Kenya*, 136.

<sup>64</sup> Mrs. (I.G.) Scott, “Kenianjui.”

<sup>65</sup> Bale and Sang, *Kenyan Running*, 168.



Figure 3. "Football at Tumutumu," (c.1910).

Source: University of Edinburgh Centre for Research Collections, Barlow Papers, GEN 1786/3.



“a culture never repeats itself perfectly away from home:” “the cultural landscape of sport does, of necessity.”<sup>66</sup> But missionaries frequently found, to their dismay, that this was not the case. When, for example, George Grieve’s Kikuyu School team were eliminated from the Arthur Cup, he wrote a scathing match report complaining “Reuben Kinanjui played a good game but for fighting was suspended (...) James Waithaka is young and a good player, but he must learn to play “clean” he was responsible for his team’s defeat.”<sup>67</sup> The CSM were acutely aware of the fact that the meanings they wanted to instill through sport were not automatic, but had to be

<sup>66</sup> Robert Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Culture, Theory and Race* (Routledge: London and New York, 1995), 174, cited in: Bale and Sang, *Kenyan Running*, 98.

<sup>67</sup> University of Edinburgh Centre for Research Collections, Grieve Papers, GEN766/4, *Kikuyu School Bulletin* 1 (June 1925).

**Figure 4. "Tug-of-War at the Third Annual Sports, New Years' Day," (1909). Source: University of Edinburgh Centre for Research Collections, Arthur Papers, Phot. Ill. 92.**



worked out, asserted, and enforced: "they must learn to play 'cleaner' football than they do," Grieve ended his match report, "'dirty' football never pays and gives the team a bad name." The problem of explaining the rules was of course compounded when the missionary instructor concerned could not speak the local language. "The boys have not been awfully keen on the drill lately," reflected Arthur in one letter, "there have been a number of reasons for this, among which may be mentioned the difficulty of learning the drill under English terms."<sup>68</sup>

<sup>68</sup> J(ohn) W. Arthur, "The Boys" Brigade Company," *Kikuyu News* 17 (March 1910).

**Figure 5. "Pole-Climbing at the Third Annual Sports, New Years' Day," (1909). Source: University of Edinburgh Centre for Research Collections, Arthur Papers, Phot. III. 92.**



Linus RuKenya Kubai who was born near the CSM's Chogoria station in 1925 but did not become a Christian told me that though the station was seen as "separate" from the village, there was little the missionaries could do to enforce this and there was much movement between the two. Even "followers of Irvine" (as he called them) continued to participate in village dances:

So here now you see there are two groups. The one that followed and the other group (...) Even those with Irvine (...) they will learn from there to come and entertain. So they are not fully there. They belonged to two groups, eh? Maybe in the morning (...) some are here, others are there. But when it comes to go to the dance (...) they go back to the song, to the tradition (...) maybe until the following day or so. And at the same time the same people who are there, in the tradition, some would also move from them to join the (...) other party of Clive Irvine (...) So they also exchange. Some from there to here (...) others from here to there.<sup>69</sup>

Mission-educated African teachers were more responsible for the spread of sport and games in Kenya than white European missionaries. Between 1907 and 1937 the number of Scottish missionaries at each of the three CSM stations rarely exceeded ten. As John Lonsdale has pointed out, “many black Christians scarcely met a white missionary, and were decreasingly less likely to do so [during the twentieth century].”<sup>70</sup> It was Africans who taught Waruhiu Itote (Mau Mau “General China”) at his CSM out-school at Kiangurue; and it was a Gikuyu man called “Kamau” who had been educated by the CSM who “introduced soccer to Stoton,” the Rift Valley Primary School to which Mugo Gatheru went.<sup>71</sup>

The methods of out-school teachers did not always please the CSM missionaries. In 1928 an inspector of a Tumutumu out-school reported: “There is still an uncomfortable lack of discipline in the place. Instead of real football they punt a ball about; dormitory discipline seems lax: I saw male teachers joining in the girls’ games.”<sup>72</sup> On a visit to an outstation at Muthambe in 1934, Irvine was alarmed to discover “the games side had been neglected (...) Jonathan had not realised that to leave football outside of the day’s program would be very unwise.”<sup>73</sup> As the number of out-schools increased, supervision became increasingly difficult for the CSM: at a teachers’ meeting in 1936 W. Scott Dickson, superintendent at Tumutumu, was shocked when it was reported back to him that many of his out-schools “had no facilities for football.”<sup>74</sup>

<sup>69</sup> Linus RuKenya Kubai (interview 10 July 2013).

<sup>70</sup> Lonsdale, “Kikuyu Christianities,” 158.

<sup>71</sup> Waruhiu Itote, “*Mau Mau*” *General* (Nairobi: East African Institute, 1967), 16–19; Reuel Mugo Gatheru, *Child of Two Worlds* (London: Heinemann, 1964), 35.

<sup>72</sup> Kenya National Archives, AV/7/7/7, “Supervisor of Technical Education to E.E. Biss.”

<sup>73</sup> National Library of Scotland, Irvine Papers, Acc. 12801/21, “A.C(live). Irvine – Muthambe (1934).”

<sup>74</sup> Tumutumu Parish Archive, Tumutumu, “W. Scott Dickson to District Commissioner of Nyeri – Re: Space for Playing fields (5 September 1936).”

## Sport and Colonialism

Few Europeans in colonial Kenya shared the missionaries' enthusiasm for spreading sport among the African population. For most whites Kenya represented not "an ideal place for the propagation of the Gospel of Christ among the African people," but a "White Man's Country:" "a *tabula rasa*, an almost untouched and sparsely inhabited country, where we can do as we will."<sup>75</sup> Most expatriate settlers lived geographically and socially apart from the indigenous population, in white townships and white reserves. There they created for themselves a most lively sport and leisure scene: there were "more farmers' associations, cricket clubs, golf clubs, women's institutes, gardening societies, masonic lodges, dining clubs per head of the white population in Kenya than in any other community in the world."<sup>76</sup> The impulse behind these clubs and societies was of course not to alter indigenous life, but to create and affirm social bonds between whites.<sup>77</sup> Membership and participation was racially exclusive, they worked to assert rather than disrupt divisions between Europeans and Africans. For most whites, sport was important but only among their own community. Nairobi's marquee sporting events, the bi-annual "Race Weeks," were for settlers and officials only.<sup>78</sup> Planters and farmers who had relocated to Kenya in search of profit, felt little need to promote sport for Africans. On some farms in the Rift Valley sport was even banned for African workers on the grounds that it wasted energy needed for labor.<sup>79</sup>

Bale and Sang grossly overestimate the extent to which Kenya's colonizers were unified by a desire to transform indigenous "body cultures." Many whites were, in fact, actively hostile to the idea. A strong strand of white opinion held "that African society should be kept separate from European society and should be encouraged to follow a separate plan."<sup>80</sup> This attitude gained traction during the inter-war years when fears of social disintegration caused by so-called "detrribalized natives" became acute; Eric Dutton, private secretary to the Governor between 1925 and 1930, spoke

<sup>75</sup> University of Edinburgh Centre for Research Collections, Arthur Papers, GEN763.10, J(ohn). W. Arthur, "Kibwezi Jubilee, 1891–1941,"; Charles Eliot, *The East Africa Protectorate* (London: Edward Arnold, 1905), 103.

<sup>76</sup> John Lonsdale, "Mission Christianity and Settler Colonialism," unpublished paper, 4, cited in: Renison Muchiri Githige, "The Mission State Relationship in Colonial Kenya: A Summary," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 13 (1982), 110–125, 110.

<sup>77</sup> Ranger, "Invention of Tradition," 217–219.

<sup>78</sup> Elspeth Huxley, *White Man's Country: Lord Delamere and the Making of Kenya* (London: Macmillan, 1935), 253.

<sup>79</sup> Gatheru, *Child of Two Worlds*, 10.

<sup>80</sup> Norman Leys, *Kenya* (London: Hogarth Press, 1924), 237.

for many administrators and settlers at this time when he expressed his belief that “the native was a better man as a man before we touched him.”<sup>81</sup> In this politically fraught climate, criticism was frequently directed at missionaries who were accused of threatening the stability of the colony. On the one hand, the advance of Christianity, literacy, and other so-called “European” cultural forms was said to inflate the confidence of an indigenous population who should be subservient. As early as 1910, trader John Boyes had expressed his belief that “the primary mistake, from which most trouble springs (...) is the assumption, to which all missionaries seem to be officially compelled to subscribe, that the African is, or can be made by education, the moral and intellectual equal of the white man.”<sup>82</sup> Lord Cranworth likewise wrote: “[I]t has been my sad experience (...) to find (...) that as soon as a native is ‘converted’ (...) he frequently becomes an exceedingly idle and troublesome fellow.”<sup>83</sup> The missionaries’ forthright and uncompromising commitment to restructuring even the slightest details indigenous life, meanwhile, was considered unnecessarily confrontational and was criticized for inviting unneeded political turbulence.<sup>84</sup> For this reason, when missionaries called for the colonial government to legislate against the Gikuyu custom of female circumcision in 1927, they met the trenchant opposition of not only sections of Gikuyu society but Europeans as well.<sup>85</sup>

The colonial administration was far from the unified and coherent force portrayed by Bale and Sang. Caught between the conflicting desire to, on the one hand, transform the rural population into a modernized, productive, and industrious workforce and, on the other, maintain social order by preserving “traditional” “tribal” structures, and all the while lacking capital and personnel, the colonial administration did not pursue the spread of sport with anything like the same degree of

<sup>81</sup> E.A. Dutton to Lord Frederick Lugard (1932), cited in: Garth A. Myers, “Colonial Geography and Masculinity in Eric Dutton’s *Kenya Mountain*,” *Gender, Place & Culture* 9 (2002), 23–38, 32.

<sup>82</sup> John Boyes, *John Boyes King of the Wa-Kikuyu* (edited by C.W.L. Bulpett) (London: Methuen, 1911), 311, cited in: Dane K. Kennedy, *Islands of White: Settler Society and Culture in Kenya and Southern Rhodesia, 1890–1939* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 1987), 162.

<sup>83</sup> Bertram Francis Gurdon, *A Colony in the Making, Or, Sport and Profit in British East Africa* (London: Macmillan, 1912) 25, cited in: Kennedy, *Islands of White*, 25.

<sup>84</sup> Kenya National Archives, MSS/3/600, “Church of Scotland Kikuyu (2 July 1926).” See also: Githige, “The Mission State Relationship,” 123.

<sup>85</sup> University of Edinburgh Centre for Research Collections, Arthur Papers, GEN763.2, Church of Scotland Mission, “Memorandum Prepared by the Kikuyu Mission Council on Female Circumcision” (1 December 1931). See also: Ronald Hyam, *Empire and Sexuality the British Experience* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), 189–199.

intensity as the missionaries.<sup>86</sup> Indeed, outside of mission stations it was not until the third decade of the twentieth century that there were any significant attempts to promote sport among the masses. Many will agree with Matthew Carotenuto's observation that "prior to the 1920s, organized African sporting opportunities of any kind were limited. It was not until the establishment of the Arab and African Sports Association (AASA) in the mid 1920s that organized sport took off."<sup>87</sup>

Before the Second World War the colonial government had neither the resources nor the inclination to encourage sport among the civilian population to any significant degree. Sport was, however, a key feature of the training of the military and the police. It is these sports programs upon which Bale and Sang base most of their claims. They were of a remarkably different character to missionary sports programs: disciplinarian and authoritarian, their chief aim was to produce an obedient and healthy workforce. Contrary to what we have seen of sport at the mission station, Timothy Parsons writes "there was nothing particularly complex about the training of infantrymen."<sup>88</sup> Games, sports days, and competitions – major elements of the missionary enterprise – were not common in police and military training until the late 1930s.<sup>89</sup> Until then, the primary emphasis was on drill. Police Officer C.I. Sempill explained in 1928 why this was the "best" form of physical exercise:

The basic feature of the course is drill (...) it is undoubtedly the ground work which makes so much possible (...) it is through the drill that the recruit is first taught alertness, how his muscles and mind are keyed up to concert pitch, and learns how best to concentrate. He would present a far greater problem to train without drill, little as it may have to do with Police work proper. It is also the best medium for inculcating discipline.<sup>90</sup>

In government schools a similar attitude to physical education seems to have prevailed. For example, in a letter to the Director of Education in which he advocated a "standardised form" of drill for all government schools

<sup>86</sup> Bruce Berman and John Lonsdale, *Unhappy Valley: Conflict in Kenya & Africa* (London: James Currey, 1992), esp. 75–126.

<sup>87</sup> Matthew Carotenuto, "Grappling with the Past: Wrestling and Performative Identity in Kenya," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 30 (2013), 1889–1902, 1893. See also: Wycliffe W. Njororai, "Colonial Legacy, Minorities and Association Football in Kenya," *Soccer & Society* 10 (2009), 866–882, 869.

<sup>88</sup> Timothy Parsons, *The African Rank-and-File: Social Implications of Colonial Military Service in the King's African Rifles, 1902–1964* (London: James Currey, 1999), 111.

<sup>89</sup> Parsons, *The African Rank-and-File*, 111.

<sup>90</sup> C.I. Sempill, "The Making of an East African Policeman," *Police Journal* 1 (1928), 671–672.

based upon the training of the Kings African Rifles, G.W.B. Huntingford, Principal of Nandi Industrial School, expressed his opinion that while “football and other games are of the greatest value as training and should not be neglected. The finest disciplinary training, however, is on the parade ground.”<sup>91</sup> The 1922 Education Commission Report, meanwhile, asserted that “the primary object of Education should be to develop physical and mental energy and efficiency.”<sup>92</sup>

For the CSM, by contrast, *physical* transformation through sport was only a means to an end. The CSM spoke not only of *muscle* and *concentration*, but of *spirit* and *character* too; they sought to create neither athletes nor healthy workers but self-possessing, self-disciplining, self-knowing Christians. “We firmly believe,” said William Blaikie, physical education instructor at the CSM Kikuyu Boys school, “that all this physical training with its emphasis on fitness and clean-living is of real importance from the point of view of character building, and our confident hope is that our boys may grow up to be stronger, keener and better disciplined Christians because of it.”<sup>93</sup>

Megan Vaughan notes that in colonial discourse “there was a strong strand of thinking which held that Africans were hardly capable of being individuals at all.”<sup>94</sup> An exception, Vaughan shows, were Christian missionaries who were “deeply concerned” with the creation of new, individualized, identities.<sup>95</sup> Her observations readily apply to sport in colonial Kenya. While the physical exercise programs in the military and the police force were specifically designed to inculcate the communal identity said to be “natural” to the African, the missionaries emphasized the cultivation of “character.”<sup>96</sup> There was a powerful individualizing ethos to the CSM’s sports programs. Talented and successful school athletes were singled out for praise, rewarded with prizes on school speech days, and had their photograph, short biography, and sporting triumph, featured in *Kikuyu News*.<sup>97</sup> The mission encouraged sporting ability as a “source of the self:” something an individual possessed, should feel a degree of pride about, and should nurture through practice and hard work.<sup>98</sup>

<sup>91</sup> Kenya National Archives, AV 1/250, “Physical Training.”

<sup>92</sup> Kenya National Archives, PC/Coast/1/4/9, “Report of the Education Commission.”

<sup>93</sup> W. Blaikie, “Physical Training – Part II,” *Kikuyu News* 136 (June 1936).

<sup>94</sup> Megan Vaughan, *Curing Their Ills: Colonial Power and African Illness* (Cambridge: Polity, 1991), 203. See also 1–28 and 200–207.

<sup>95</sup> Vaughan, *Curing Their Ills*, 23–24. See also 55–76.

<sup>96</sup> Timothy H. Parsons, *Race, Resistance, and the Boy Scout Movement in British Colonial Africa* (Athens OH: Ohio University Press, 2004), 123.

<sup>97</sup> See for example: Blaikie, “Physical Training – Part II.”

<sup>98</sup> Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).



It is notable that attempts by the CSM to coerce *athomi* into organized games of sport, while frequently thwarted by minor acts of insubordination, never met any serious resistance. In this respect sport is remarkably different from other components of the mission's enterprise. Not only did the mission's politically spectacular campaign against female circumcision incite rebellion and cost some of the CSM's parishes their entire congregations, so too, as Kenneth King and Derek Peterson have shown, did their seemingly banal school gardens scheme face substantial opposition.<sup>99</sup> Here, the mission's attempt to teach their *athomi* thrift, planning, and organization by providing them with each with a small plot of land faced the protests of students and their families who interpreted it as little more than a means of soliciting their labor for free. As I scoured the missionary archive and pressed my respondents, I was left with the impression that sport was the least controversial component of the CSM's work. In fact, it was often cited as the most enjoyable. Certainly this was the case for Charles Muhoro Kareri, the first African Moderator of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa (PCEA), who was a CSM student in the 1910s and 1920s:

The final thing that attracted me [to the CSM] was the playing of football (...) There was a time that our team went to play against whites from the plantations and the government (...) The whites put on shoes in order to defeat our team, while our people played barefoot. But our team still won.<sup>100</sup>

A chief aim of the CSM's sport was to give individuals a sense of personal achievement and empowerment. It was undoubtedly intended to serve as a form of social control but, with the cultivation of self-disciplined Christian individuals as its goal, and based on intimacy and affection, this mode of social control was not a simple form of "domination." Missionary sport was at times overtly disciplinarian and authoritarian but more often it was, or at least missionaries intended it to be, enjoyable.

In their attempt to produce particular kinds of Christian subjects, missionaries sought to affect deeper, more enduring, changes in Kenya's

<sup>99</sup> Kenneth King, "The Politics of Agricultural Education for Africans in Kenya," in: Bethwell Ogot (ed.), *Hadith 3: Proceedings of the 1969/70 Conferences of the Historical Association of Kenya* (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1971), 142–157; Derek Peterson, "'Be like Firm Soldiers to Develop the Country: Political Imagination and the Geography of Gikuyuland,'" *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 37 (2004), 71–101.

<sup>100</sup> Charles Muhoro Kareri, *The Life of Charles Muhoro Kareri* (edited with an introduction by Derek R. Peterson) (Madison: African Studies Program University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2003), 23. For a similar sentiment expressed by a former Presbyterian mission scholar in Ghana see: Miescher, *Making Men in Ghana*, 73.

indigenous population than the country's other colonizers. Paradoxically, this is a point on which both critics *and* defenders of colonial missionaries often agree. For Thomas Beidelman, for example, colonial missionaries were:

the most (...) thoroughgoing facet of colonial life (...) Missionaries invariably aimed at overall changes in the beliefs and actions of native peoples, at colonization of heart and mind as well as body. Pursuing this sustained policy of change, missionaries demonstrated a more radical and morally intense commitment to rule than political administrators or business men.<sup>101</sup>

For most of my Presbyterian respondents in Thogoto, Tumutumu, and Chogoria, meanwhile, the CSM's attempt to win hearts and minds as well as bodies distinguished the benevolent missionary from the self-interested colonizer. For the Very Reverend John Gatu, former Moderator of the PCEA, "the *mzungu* [white person] was only interested in the African being his laborer on the farm, the missionary on the other hand was interested in bringing up the African."<sup>102</sup> Likewise for Bedilego M'ribu M'muthaera and Julius Ndubi Maligi, two members of Chogoria parish, "missionaries were near the people, they tried to become friends with us but (...) the government's interest was to rule only."<sup>103</sup>

More interesting and important than the rather stale question about whether colonial missionaries and their sports programs were "good" or "bad" is the way in which missionary sport indicates the multiplicity of ways in which colonial power functioned in Kenya. For it has been comprehensively shown that in colonial Africa in general, and in the "racially-charged, settler dominated landscape"<sup>104</sup> of colonial Kenya in particular, there were few colonial "contact zones"<sup>105</sup> which had any chance of providing enjoyment or a sense of personal empowerment. As Florence Bernault puts it: "In Africa, the endurance of white rule depended on asserting social

<sup>101</sup> Thomas O. Beidelman, *Colonial Evangelism: A Socio-Historical Study of an East African Mission at the Grassroots* (Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, 1982), 5–6. See also: John L. Comaroff and Jean Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: The Dialectics of Modernity on a South African Frontier* (Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 1997).

<sup>102</sup> John Gatu (interview 15 October, 2014).

<sup>103</sup> Bedilego M'ribu M'muthaera and Julius Ndubi Maligi (interview 9 July 2014).

<sup>104</sup> Carotenuto, "Grappling With the Past," 1891.

<sup>105</sup> Borrowed from Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 2008), esp. 7–9. Pratt defines "contact zones" as "social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination," 7.

and political divides between colonisers and Africans rather than crafting integrative ruling strategies.”<sup>106</sup> And as Lynn Thomas has demonstrated: “Colonial power in Kenya alternated between extreme brutality and minimalist control.”<sup>107</sup> What happened on missionary football pitches and on sports days constitutes a rare example of a colonial attempt to produce disciplined bodies and minds that was not simply authoritarian and oppressive.

## Conclusion

Bale and Sang wrote *Kenyan Running* at a time when it was commonly felt among scholars of sport that “sports history” – which typically dealt with biographies of sporting icons and histories of great sporting events – was approaching its end; “atheoretical,” even “anti-intellectual,” it could not provide the same insights as the interdisciplinary “sports studies” which drew from political theory, sociology, and cultural studies.<sup>108</sup> Through a critical reading of archival material, by closely attending to a specific time and place, and taking seriously the lived experiences, struggles and uncertainties, of historical actors, in this article, I hope to have demonstrated that historians can still make important contributions to the study of sport. At the same time, I hope to have shown that the topic of sport in general and the topic of missionary sport in particular, can make significant contributions to historical study of colonial Africa. They promise fertile areas of research for Africanists: a variety of colonial projects used sport in a variety of ways, frequently investing it with importance, frequently pursuing it with intense commitment; references to sport in colonial archives, colonial films, and published books are ubiquitous in colonial archives; and experiences of sport are often some of the most prominent and frequently recalled memories of everyday life in colonial Africa.

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<sup>106</sup> Florence Bernault, “The Shadow of Rule: Colonial Power and Punishment in Africa,” in: Ian Brown and Frank Dikötter (eds.), *Cultures of Confinement: A Global History of the Prison in Asia, Africa, the Middle-East and Latin America* (London: Christopher Hurst, 2007), 55–94, 73.

<sup>107</sup> Lynn M. Thomas, *Politics of the Womb: Women, Reproduction, and the State in Kenya* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 175.

<sup>108</sup> John Nauright, “‘The End of Sports History?’ From Sports History to Sports Studies,” *Sporting Traditions* 16 (1999), 5–14.

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