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OLYMPIC GAMES AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLES: POSSIBLE CHANGE IN GLOBAL SPORT TOWARDS INDIGENOUS SOVEREIGNTIES?

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Abstract
Indigenous peoples have appeared at the Olympic Games since the beginning of the twentieth century not only as participants of contemporary "human zoo" performances, but as competitors in regular sport disciplines. Since then, their presence at these mega-events has varied, in relation to local and transnational politics. Although the idea of sport as a tool for development and change has been widely spread through global NGOs and global events, such as the Olympics, sovereignty

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issues of Indigenous peoples in general remain unsolved. For decades, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) insisted on Rule 50, which banned any sort of political protest during the Olympic Games. Recently, some global sport federations have begun to challenge this rule of the IOC in solidarity with the anti-racist Black Lives Matter movement. This paper seeks to address two main questions: How and if does the presence of the Indigenous peoples shape these largest global sport international events and their organizers? Does the presence of Indigenous peoples at the Olympics lead to potential changes of Olympic discourses related to Indigenous sovereignties? The paper argues that the IOC keeps shaping how Indigenous identities are portrayed, even though Indigenous participants work towards gaining the recognition of Indigenous sovereignties in relation to the Olympic structures.
Keywords: Indigenous peoples; Olympic Games; sport; sovereignty; representation; colonialism
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Introduction

The Indigenous peoples and their representation or absence from the Olympic Games in different periods reflected various ideologies – ethnocentrism, racism, power disputes between capitalist and socialist states, or neoliberalism. However, these Indigenous representations, or simulacra in the Baudrillardian sense,[1] were purposefully presented to various audiences to meet the needs of the predominant ideologies.

Although many outstanding Indigenous athletes look up to participating in the Olympics as the pinnacle of their sporting careers, Indigenous peoples' efforts to gain full recognition and attention for their identities and sovereignties on a global level in the most media-covered sporting competition in the world continues to be limited. One of the main reasons that determines the recognition of Indigenous peoples is the Olympic idea of "political neutrality," which the IOC has enshrined in the Olympic Charter, and which is epitomized by the IOC Rule 50.

In this paper, I look at the Olympic Games in relation to Indigenous peoples, with a deeper emphasis on the IOC Rule 50, using a diachronic perspective. I examine specifically the post-2000 period. I aspire to contribute to debates on structure and agency in social sciences.[2] Drawing on academic texts, media

[1] Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacres et Simulation* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1981).

[2] Michel Foucault, *Surveiller et punir: Naissance de la prison* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1975); Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984); Sherry B. Ortner, *Anthropology and Social Theory: Culture, Power, and the Acting Subject* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006); in relation to Indigenous peoples see Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Young, "Decolonization is not a met-

reports, the IOC regulations, and semi-structured interviews related to lacrosse, I offer a comprehensive picture of the position of Indigenous peoples and their sovereignties within the IOC's operations and discourses related to them.

By using examples of Indigenous peoples from countries other than those of the former British Empire in relation to the Olympics and sport, I extend geographically the knowledge that has been more intensively addressed by academics working on this topic through postcolonial, indigenous and settler colonial studies perspectives in relation to Indigenous peoples in Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the United States.[3] In this text, I also consider as Indigenous peoples those groups that are not necessarily part of settler colonial states, such as the Ainu in Japan or some Pacific Islanders. Therefore, I do not centralize attention on settler colonialism in the text.

Through this analysis of socio-historical contexts, I seek to answer the following questions: How and if does the presence of the Indigenous peoples shape these largest global sport international events and their organizers? Does the presence of Indigenous peoples at the Olympics lead to potential change of Olympic discourses related to Indigenous sovereignties?

Through the involvement of Indigenous peoples in the Olympics in various roles and framings, I show that the structural setting of the IOC determines the position of Indigenous peoples in global sport and thus the discourses that relate to them. Nonetheless, the Indigenous Olympic participants' agency is crucial towards the recognition of Indigenous sovereignties.

To support these claims, the analysis is thematically structured into subblocks that reflect the position of Indigenous peoples in the various networked contexts of the Olympic Movement. First, the presence of Indigenous peoples

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aphor," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education and Society* 1, no. 1 (2012): 1–40; Taiaiake Alfred, *Wasáse: Indigenous Pathways of Action and Freedom* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005); Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017). These aforementioned texts on Indigenous peoples deal with agency more in a form of Indigenous decolonizing perspectives, or "political manifestos" and not specifically in Western theoretical approach to the debate about structure and agency.

[3] Christine M. O'Bonsawin, "Olympism at Face Value: The Legal Feasibility of Indigenous-led Olympic Games," in *Decolonizing Sport*, ed. Janice Forsyth et al. (Halifax: Fernwood Press, 2023), 114–134; Janice Forsyth and Kevin B. Wamsley, "Symbols without Substance: Aboriginal Peoples and the Illusion of Olympic Ceremonies," in *Global Olympics: Historical Foundations and Sociological Studies of the Modern Games*, ed. Kevin Young and Kevin B. Wamsley (Oxford: Elsevier Press, 2005), 227–247; Christopher J. Hallinan and Barry Judd, eds., *Indigenous People, Race Relations and Australian Sport* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014); Bevan Erueti, "Mātauranga Māori at the Olympic and Commonwealth Games," *MAI Journal* 3, no. 1 (2014): 60–73.

and the transformation of their roles and agency within the Olympic Games, through different periods of time with their dominant ideologies, is highlighted. Secondly, the Olympic agendas are presented as a fundamental conception of the IOC's efforts that shapes the IOC relationship with Indigenous peoples and its implications, including those relating to their territories affected by the Olympic Games. Third, I address the IOC's policy of forming athletes into its own "Olympic subjects,"[4] which must submit to the idea of "political neutrality" and the representation of nation-states with a clearly defined identity of the individual that is restricted by the IOC Rule 50. Last, I analyze the role of the Olympic Games in the imagination, representation and discourses to which Indigenous peoples are associated. All these perspectives are interconnected and interact to influence the expression and understanding of Indigenous sovereignties.

From "Human Zoos" to Sport Performances and Activism

The modern Olympic Games were conceived of by the French aristocrat Pierre de Coubertin, who promoted the ancient model of amateur sport (or its interpretation of amateur). He believed that the revival of this sporting competition could contribute to a better understanding between nations, thus eliminating warfare. In 1894, he was instrumental in the birth of the International Olympic Committee (Comité International des Jeux Olympiques) – IOC, which became the main organization for hosting the Olympic Games. The first modern Olympic Games were held in Athens in 1896.[5]

The status of Indigenous peoples since the beginning of the modern Olympics has been conditioned by the contemporary predominant ideologies of Western and colonizing societies. The IOC's approach towards Indigenous peoples continues to disadvantage them, suppresses their sovereignty, and supports settler colonial nation-states' political interests.[6] So, what has been the position

[4] Thomas Carter, "The Olympics as Sovereign Subject Maker," in *Watching the Olympics*, ed. John Sugden and Alan Tomlinson (London: Routledge, 2011), 55–68.

[5] Susan Brownell, ed., *The 1904 Anthropology Days and Olympic Games: Sport, Race, and American Imperialism* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2008).

[6] O'Bonsawin, "Olympism at Face," 114–134; Christine M. O'Bonsawin, "Free, Prior, and Informed Consent: The Olympic Movement's International Responsibilities to Indigenous Peoples in Canada, and Across the Globe," *Journal of Sport History* 46, no. 2 (Summer 2019): 224–221, doi: 10.5406/jsporthistory.42.2.0200; Christine M. O'Bonsawin, "Indigenous Peoples and Canadian-Hosted Olympic Games," in *Aboriginal Peoples and Sport in Canada: Historical Foundations and Contemporary Issues*, ed. Janice Forsyth and Audrey R. Giles (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2013), 35–63; Christine M. O'Bonsawin, "'No Olympics on Stolen Native Land': Contesting Olympic

of Indigenous peoples at Olympic Games? Indigenous participation in the Olympics has varied from objects represented in "human zoos," to athletes, coaches, performers, cultural advisors, and activists.

Indigenous peoples' first participation as competitors in the modern Olympics was in the first Games ever held outside Europe, in St. Louis in 1904. It was also the first Olympics ever to include non-white athletes. In St. Louis, the marathon runner Seneca Franklin Pierce is considered the first Indigenous Olympian. The organizers of the Games subsumed the Olympics within the World's Fair and in retrospect, in many cases it is very difficult to determine which activities fell squarely under the Olympic Games.[7]

This giant exhibition included a "human zoo," a common practice at the time, that presented ways of life of people from different parts of the world to entertain and educate the dominant society about pre-industrial forms of life. Performances of "primitives" and their ways of life, including various games, to the "civilized" Euro-American public had also been part of previous world exhibitions held in Europe and the USA. These performances reflected contemporary beliefs about the laws of progress, the evolutionary principle of human development and the superiority of Euro-American civilization.

Since the St. Louis Games, the number of Indigenous Olympians has been increasing. At the first Winter Olympics, held in France in 1924, the same year that Native Americans in the United States were granted citizenship, there were representatives of Indigenous peoples. Anishinaabe Clarence John "Taffy" Abel was the captain of the U.S. silver medal-winning ice hockey team. He also carried the American flag at the opening of the Games for all American athletes yet chose during his athletic career to hide his Native American identity for racist reasons.[8] Similarly, many Indigenous athletes have competed in the Paralympic Games since its inception in Rome in 1960. Moreover, it was not only Indigenous athletes who were at the Olympics and Paralympics, but also coaches and cultural advisors.

However, the involvement of Indigenous athletes at the Olympics has always reflected the national and local policies of the states within which Indigenous

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Narratives and Asserting Indigenous Rights within the Discourse of the 2010 Vancouver Games," *Sport in Society* 13, no. 1 (January 2010): 143–156, doi: 10.1080/17430430903377987.

7 Brownell, *The 1904 Anthropology Days*, 3; Nancy J. Parezo and Don D. Fowler, *Anthropology Goes to the Fair: The 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2007).

8 Dana Hedgpeth, "The first Native American in the Winter Olympics hid his identity to stay safe," *The Washington Post*, February 16, 2022, https://www.washingtonpost.com/history/2022/02/16/taffy-abel-native-american-winter-olympics/.

peoples have lived. They were often subjected to discrimination, marginalization and "social engineering" in the name of progress and assimilation. As a result of the assimilationist policies of many countries, the Indigenous identities of Olympic and Paralympic athletes have also often gone unspoken and unrecognized for a long time.[9]

The political interests of nation states were also expressed in the Olympic movement through the National Olympic Committees. The Olympic Charter declares, "The goal of Olympism is to place sport at the service of the harmonious development of humankind, with a view to promoting a peaceful society concerned with the preservation of human dignity" (Art. 2), while "the enjoyment of the rights and freedoms set forth in this Olympic Charter shall be secured without discrimination of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, sexual orientation, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status" (Art. 6).[10] Yet the history of the modern Olympic Games has shown repeatedly that discrimination – not only on the basis of race,[11] but also on other criteria such as gender or class – has been part of the Games.[12]

One of the most famous cases in relation to Indigenous peoples relates to Jim Thorpe, the legendary Native American athlete, who is the only competitor to date to have won gold medals in both the pentathlon and decathlon at the Olympics. Thorpe is regularly ranked in the top ten of all American athletes in American polls.[13] Upon his return with gold Olympic medals from the 1912 Stockholm Olympics, he was lauded by the American media and was hailed as a national hero. According to Rubinfeld, Thorpe's victory contributed to the propagation of two myths – the physical superiority of Americans and racial

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[9] Alistair Harvey, Gary Osmond, and Murray Phillips, "What a 'forgotten' Torres Strait Island Paralympian teaches us about representation, achievement and history," *The Conversation*, September 2, 2024, https://theconversation.com/what-a-forgotten-torres-strait-island-paralympian-teaches-us-about-representation-achievement-and-history-232587.

[10] IOC, *Olympic Charter* (Lausanne: IOC, 2024), 8–9.

[11] A notorious discrimination case is the exclusion of many athletes from the 1936 Berlin Olympics. See Paul Taylor, *Jews and the Olympic Games: The Clash Between Sport and Politics* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2004).

[12] One example of this can be seen in the absence of women as athletes at the Olympic Games since the beginning. De Coubertin himself did not support their involvement. See Lincoln Allison, "The Ideals of the Founding Father: Mythologized, evolved or betrayed?" in *Watching the Olympics: Politics, Power and Representation*, ed. John Sugden and Alan Tomlinson (London: Routledge, 2011), 18–35.

[13] Ellen J. Staurowsky, "Getting Beyond Imagery: The Challenges of Reading Narratives About American Indian Athletes," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 23, no. 2 (March 2006): 190–212, doi: 10.1080/09523360500478240.

inclusion in the United States. At the time, however, eugenics greatly dominated the U.S. immigration policy, and Native Americans did not have American citizenship.[14] Thorpe did not enjoy his Olympic glory for long. In 1913, the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) accused him of violating the rules of amateur sports because he had played two summers on a semi-professional baseball team. In fact, the prevailing belief in Anglo-Saxon countries was in the morality of gentlemanly sport, which emphasized only athletic success and condemned any other form of reward for athletic performance. Amateur sport was associated with elites and school leavers who could economically afford to play sport in their leisure time in line with the ideology of individual and national development. Professional athletes, who made a living from sport to varying degrees, were viewed with disdain by amateurs. However, from the beginning of the Olympics, despite ongoing discussions on the subject, only amateurs were officially allowed to participate, and the amateurism requirement, although unfulfilled, was not abolished until the second half of the 1980s.[15] Thus, the AAU alerted the IOC and Thorpe's medals were stripped and his record of achievement was expunged. After his death, it became clear that the withdrawal of the medals was in violation of the rules of the 1912 Olympics, and the IOC decided to return the medals in 1982 and to list him as a co-gold medalist 30 years after his death.[16] Then in 2020, a petition was launched by Native American organization Bright Path Strong to recognize Jim Thorpe as the sole winner at the 1912 Olympics, which was strongly supported by 1964 Indigenous Olympic gold medalist, Lakota Billy Mills. In 2022 the IOC voted for and reinstated Thorpe as the only winner.[17]

One very well-known example of an expression of proudness on Indigenous identity is the gesture of Kanien'keha:ka Alwyn Morris, the first Indigenous

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[14] Mark Rubinfeld, "The Mythical Jim Thorpe: Re/presenting the Twentieth Century American Indian," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 23, no. 2 (March 2006): 167–189, doi: 10.1080/09523360500478224.

[15] A major milestone was the 1986 Lausanne Olympic Congress, which lifted the ban on professional athletes in the Olympics. Matthew P. Llewellyn and John Gleaves, *The Rise and Fall of Olympic Amateurism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2016).

[16] "The Final Saga of the Jim Thorpe Restoration," AAU, September 23, 2022, https://aausports.org/news.php?news_id=1987797; James Ring Adams, "The Jim Thorpe Backlash: The Olympic Medals Debacle and the Demise of Carlisle," *American Indian* 13, no. 2 (Summer 2012): 22–26, 32.

[17] "IOC to display the name of Jim Thorpe as sole Stockholm 1912 pentathlon and decathlon gold medallist," *IOC News*, July 15, 2022, https://olympics.com/ioc/news/ioc-to-display-the-name-of-jim-thorpe-as-sole-stockholm-1912-pentathlon-and-decathlon-gold-medallist; "Honors Restored: Justice for Jim Thorpe! Olympic Wins Fully Reinstated by IOC on 110th Anniversary," Bright Path Strong, July 15, 2022, https://brightpathstrong.org/justice-for-jim-thorpe/.

Canadian athlete who won a gold medal (with Hugh Fisher) in speed double kayak race in Olympics in Los Angeles in 1984. After winning, Morris raised an eagle feather above his head on the podium. Morris used this gesture to pay tribute to his late grandfather, who died before he could see his achievements. At the same time, he wanted to share his victory with all of Canada's Indigenous peoples and to demonstrate his Indigenous identity to Canadians.[18] This act has been compared to the anti-racist, "Black Power salute" of Afro-American athletes Tommie Smith and John Carlos, who famously raised gloved fists above their heads while on the podium in 1968 in Mexico. The "Black Power salute," supported on the podium by white Australian Peter Norman, is considered to be one of the most famous political statements in modern Olympic history.[19]

Another famous case of athlete activism is Catherine Freeman, who became one of the symbols of the 2000 Sydney Olympics. She was the last member of the Olympic torch relay at the opening ceremony. She later won the 400 meters at the same stadium. Freeman was a great critic of the contemporary Australian government, which refused to apologize for the practice of forcibly removing 100,000 Aboriginal children from their families from 1910 into the 1970s. Freeman was supposed to symbolically embody reconciliation between white Australians and Aboriginal peoples. After winning, Freeman carried the Australian and Aboriginal flags during the victory lap. Although the Aboriginal flag, like that of the Torres Strait Islanders, has been recognized in Australia as official since 1995, it is not considered a national flag by the IOC. Any use of a non-approved standard is prohibited during the Olympic Games. Although the Aboriginal flag flew in Sydney in 2000, Aboriginal boxer Damien Hooper was nearly disqualified at the 2012 London Olympics for entering the ring wearing a T-shirt bearing the flag of Aboriginal Australia. The IOC accused him of violating the Olympic Charter, specifically Rule 50, which prohibits political, religious, and racial demonstrations in the Olympic venues.[20] The matter was referred to the

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[18] Christine M. O'Bonsawin, "From Black Power to Indigenous Activism: The Olympic Movement and the Marginalization of Oppressed Peoples (1968–2012)," *Journal of Sport History* 42, no. 2 (Summer 2015): 200–219, doi:10.5406/jsporthistory.42.2.0200.

[19] Jules Boykoff, "Protest, Activism, and the Olympic Games: An Overview of Key Issues and Iconic Moments," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 34, no. 3–4 (2017): 162–183, doi: 10.1080/09523367.2017.1356822.

[20] The Bye-law to Rule 50 states that "no form of publicity or propaganda, commercial or otherwise, may appear on persons, on sportswear, accessories or, more generally, on any article of clothing or equipment whatsoever worn or used by all competitors, team officials, other team personnel and all other participants in the Olympic Games, except for the identification [...] of the manufacturer of the article or equipment concerned, provided that such identification shall not be marked conspicuously for advertising purposes." See IOC, *Olympic Charter*, 95.

Australian Olympic Committee (AOC). According to the AOC, Hooper regretted his act and apologized despite expressing in the media that he was proud to be an Aboriginal man.[21]

However, the willingness of Indigenous athletes to declare their identities to the wider public and to show their opposition to any form of discrimination has increased with the new millennium, especially in its second decade. Many athletes at the Olympics show pride in their identity and try to bring attention to their homelands and their specific issues. In 2014, Yupic Olympian snowboarder Callan Chythlook-Sifsoff, considered the first ever Alaska Native athlete to compete in the Winter Olympics, came out as a lesbian on the global sports broadcaster ESPN and expressed her belief that some of the Olympic athletes would surely protest publicly during the 2014 Sochi Olympics.[22] In Sochi, after winning the gold, Sámi Nordic skier Håvard Klemetsen yoiked to show respect and gratitude for the support of his Sámi community.[23] Expressing his local-cultural identity, taekwondo athlete Pita Taufatofua of Tonga drew media and virtual attention to himself when his oiled body glowed as he carried the Tonga flag dressed only in a ta'ovala – a Tonga skirt – during the opening ceremony in Rio de Janeiro in 2016. By the end of the week, Google had recorded 230 million searches for the keyword *Where is Tonga*, while at the same time there was a huge increase in interest in buying coconut oil from the Pacific islands.[24] Taufatofua stepped out again wearing only a Tonga skirt in the cold weather for the opening of the 2018 Winter Olympics in Pyeongchang, where he was the only Tonga representative – this time in the cross-country skiing event. At that time, he was also already a UNICEF ambassador. However, Taufatofua did not hear any condemnation from the IOC for his attire, despite being repeatedly told that he should wear "appropriate" clothing.[25]

Taufatofua and other Indigenous Olympians are responding to environmental issues. Taufatofua has raised hundreds of thousands of dollars in relief for the

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[21] O'Bonsawin, "From Black Power," 201.

[22] Beth Bragg, "Sochi Report, Alaska edition: Callan comes out, Team Asterisk adds 2 more members," *Anchorage Daily News*, February 8, 2014, https://www.adn.com/national-sports/article/sochi-report-alaska-edition-callan-comes-out-team-asterisk-adds-2-more-members/2014/02/08/.

[23] Eivind Å. Skille, *Indigenous Sport and Nation-Building: Interrogating Sámi Sport and Beyond* (Routledge: Abingdon and New York, 2022), 97.

[24] Susan Chenery, "The incredible story of Pita Taufatofua, Tonga's shirtless Olympic flag bearer," *The Guardian*, January 2, 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2019/jan/02/the-incredible-story-of-pita-taufatofua-tongas-shirtless-olympic-flag-bearer.

[25] Ibid.

people of Tonga whose homes had been destroyed by tsunami after a devastating volcanic blast in 2022. Weightlifter David Katoatau and flag bearer from Kiribati gained media attention in the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Olympics with his dancing and smiling face despite sporting failure. Katoatau dances at all the weightlifting championships, purposely drawing attention to the issue of climate change, which has his country on the brink of total ocean inundation.[26]

Other Indigenous Olympians have been at the forefront of foundations to support education and youth sports, such as Cathy Freeman and Alwyn Morris. Other Olympians, such as Northern Cheyenne Ben Nighthorse Campbell or Gwich'in Roger T. Allen, have entered politics at the local, national, and international levels since the 1980s. In 2013, Olympian Nova Maree Peris became the first ever Aboriginal woman elected to the Australian Parliament. Many Indigenous Olympians and Paralympians have become role models for young people in their communities and nationally. They are influencing younger generations through social media. Yet, a number of Olympians and Paralympians have still not received global attention, as is evident from the absence of their names in one of the first lists of online information, Wikipedia.[27] Nevertheless, it appears that the subalterns are finally starting to speak out loudly through the Olympics.[28]

The IOC Olympic Agendas and Their Impacts on Indigenous Peoples

Individual expressions of athletes' disagreement with certain ideologies, expressions of their collective Indigenous identity, or certain causes, such as the Thorpe case, have gained the attention of the media and the organizers of specific Olympics. However, the IOC only began to address Indigenous peoples as a group in the context of the international community's growing concern for the environment and for Indigenous peoples' rights. These concerns have only

[26] Uri Friedman, "The Saddest Olympic Celebration: What do you do when you're competing for a country that might disappear? You dance," *The Atlantic*, August 17, 2016, https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2016/08/david-katoatau-olympics-kiribati/496175/.

[27] Victoria Paraschak, "# 87: Reconciliation, Sport History, and Indigenous Peoples in Canada," *Journal of Sport History* 46, no. 2 (2019): 208–223; Murray G. Phillips, "Wikipedia and History: A Worthwhile Partnership in the Digital Era?," *Rethinking History* 20, no. 4 (2015): 523–543, doi: 10.1080/13642529.2015.1091566.

[28] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press), 271–313.

been gradually addressed since the 1970s and only developed more intensively since the 1990s.

In 1999, the IOC adopted the Olympic Movement's Agenda 21: Sport for Sustainable Development strategic plan. This plan focused on combining sport with sustainable development and environmental protection, and was based on the United Nations Agenda 21, which was adopted in 1992. Among other issues, the IOC's plan declared its commitment to recognition and promotion of Indigenous populations.[29] The IOC Agenda 21 did not impose any obligation on Olympic organizers, but it did put pressure on host cities to develop collaboration with Indigenous groups. As O'Bonsawin points out, Vancouver, which hosted the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games, became the first ever venue to adopt the IOC Agenda 21 items.[30] The Vancouver Organizing Committee for the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games (VANOC) attempted to implement it by creating the Aboriginal Participation and Collaboration program initiative. This led to an agreement between VANOC and Indigenous partners in Canada. It was the first such arrangement in the history of the Olympic Games and the first time that the IOC recognized an Indigenous group as an official Olympic partner. Yet in 2010, a public campaign – No Olympics on Stolen Native Land! – was launched. It sought to point out that the Games were being held on land in British Columbia that the Indigenous peoples had never surrendered by treaty. In support of Indigenous claims to territory, many Indigenous communities across Canada protested the staging of the Games in Vancouver, and some expressed their opposition by refusing to carry the Olympic torch across their reservations and territories.[31]

However, Indigenous peoples were dropped from the Olympic movement's agenda in 2014 and replaced with "clean athletes" in the Olympic Agenda 2020.[32] Although the IOC claims that the adoption of Agenda 2020 is a milestone in the deeper integration of human rights issues,[33] even its successor Olympic Agenda 2020+5, adopted in 2021, does not explicitly mention Indigenous peoples. Agenda 2020+5 and the IOC Strategic Framework on Human Rights accepted in 2022 work with the concept of "marginalized groups," under which it includes racial and ethnic groups alongside LGBT+, children, migrant workers, and refugees.

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[29] IOC. Sport and Environment Commission, "Olympic Movement's Agenda: Sport for sustainable development," 1999, 42, 45.
[30] O'Bonsawin, "Indigenous Peoples," 53.
[31] Ibid., 57.
[32] O'Bonsawin, "Free, Prior, and Informed Consent," 233.
[33] IOC, *IOC Strategic Framework on Human Rights* (Lausanne: IOC, 2022), 4–7.

Like other marginalized groups, Indigenous athletes are affected by Olympic classifications. Moreover, Indigenous communities, possibly labelled "Olympic related communities,"[34] are also affected by Olympic discourses beyond the Games themselves.

Major protests in relation to human rights in general and Indigenous rights more specifically took place during the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Olympics. A destabilized Brazil sought to limit solutions to demarcate territories belonging to Indigenous peoples guaranteed by the 1988 Constitution as agricultural and mining lobbies pushed to advance their interests in these territories. Brazilian Indigenous peoples and other activists claimed violations of the 1988 Constitution and the 2007 UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). At the same time, many organizations pointed to the increase in the murder of Indigenous people and environmentalists, which were expected to rise to 150 since the previous 2012 London Olympics.[35] Activists sought to gain media attention, undermining the positive multicultural image of the country presented to the global public in preparation for the 2014 FIFA World Cup and the 2016 Olympic Games. For the World Cup, three children, representing Brazil's diverse phenotypical makeup, were selected to release doves of peace during the opening ceremony. Guaraní boy Werá Jeguaka Mirim, after releasing his dove pulled out a hidden banner *Demarcação Já!* [reading Demarcation Now!]. The sign referred to the need for an immediate solution to the demarcation of Indigenous peoples' territories. One of the central themes of the protests, repressively pushed as far away as possible from the event itself, was thus brought right into the center of the event in front of the cameras of the world's media.[36] This consciousness raising act attracted the support of the global public through the media. Similar acts occurred during the 2016 Rio Olympics. On the one hand, the media carried harmonious images of Yawalapiti athlete Kamukaika Lappo carrying the burning Olympic torch, while on the other hand, the media also covered the complaints of the Guaraní-Kaiowá of Mato Grosso do Sul, who have long faced violent raids by border guards and land grabs.[37] The selection of the Yawalapiti group,

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[34] Ibid., 23.

[35] "Olympics host Brazil is the most dangerous country in the world for environmental activism: 150 environmental defenders murdered there since the 2012 Olympics," Global Witness, August 4, 2016, https://www.globalwitness.org/en/press-releases/olympics/.

[36] "Kunumi MC, the indigenous rapper protecting his people's land," *BBC*, January 12, 2018, https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-latin-america-42653619.

[37] "Lighting the way to Rio Games," *The Straits Times*, May 5, 2016, https://www.straitstimes.com/multimedia/photos/lighting-the-way-to-rio-games; Sandra Cuffe, "Olympics begins amid rising violence against Brazil's indigenous people," *Eco-Business,* August 5, 2016, https://www

one of the Indigenous groups inhabiting Parque Indígena do Xingu [the Xingu Indigenous Park], in addition to stereotyping its inhabitants as "typical colorful" Indigenous inhabitants of the Brazilian Amazon, also provided a symbol of Brazil's "humane policy" towards Indigenous peoples. Media attention focused on athletes from this area has heavily obscured many other cases in which Brazilian Indigenous peoples face the threat of genocide and ecocide.

Although the Indigenous peoples are not explicitly mentioned in the latest IOC Agenda 2020+5, they are still explicitly counted on in relation to human rights and inclusion for at least one future Olympics. Organizers for the 2032 Brisbane Games are committed to "[f]acilitate the awareness and participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples [...] within Brisbane 2032 event planning and delivery."[38] Further, the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games Organizing Committee should be the first in Olympic and Paralympic history to deliver a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP).[39] "The Olympic and Paralympic Games Brisbane 2032 will showcase the diversity and talent of First Nations communities leaving a legacy that will continue to shine bright for generations to come."[40] It is common for organizing committees to interpret the social inclusion of Indigenous peoples as representatives of marginalized groups as cultural showcasing, but what is really missing is an emphasis on long-term initiatives in legacy shaping processes created with and led by Indigenous peoples that would aspire to real social change.[41]

Historically, visible Indigenous participation in most Olympics was reduced to cultural performances in the opening and closing ceremonies.[42]

.eco-business.com/news/olympics-begins-amid-rising-violence-against-brazils-indigenous-people/.

38 "Human Rights and Brisbane 2032," IOC, https://olympics.com/en/brisbane-2032/the-games/impact-and-legacy/human-rights/, accessed September 1, 2024.

39 "First Nations and Brisbane 2032," IOC, https://olympics.com/en/brisbane-2032/the-games/impact-and-legacy/first-nations/, accessed September 1, 2024.

40 Ibid.

41 Dilara Valiyeva, Anna-Maria Strittmatter, and Inge Hermanrud, "Inclusion of Indigenous Peoples in Olympic legacy-shaping Processes," *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 59, no. 8 (2024): 1223, 1226, doi: 10.1177/10126902241253856.

42 Helen Gilbert, "'Let the Games Begin': Pageants, Protests, Indigeneity (1968–2010)," in *The Politics of Interweaving Performance Cultures: Beyond Postcolonialism*, ed. Erika Fischer-Lichte, Torsten Jost, and Saskya Iris Jain (New York: Routledge, 2014), 156–175; Janice Forsyth, "Teepees and Tomahawks: Aboriginal Cultural Representation at the 1976 Olympic Games," in *The Global Nexus Engaged: Past, Present, Future Interdisciplinary Olympic Studies – Sixth International Symposium for Olympic Research*, ed. Kevin B. Wamsley, Robert Knight Barney, and Scott G. Martyn (London, ON: University of Western Ontario, 2002), 71–78; O'Bonsawin, "Free, Prior, and Informed Consent," 225; "No Olympics," 144.

These performances tended to express the cultural diversity or multiculturalism of the organizing state. Indigenous peoples, if they were included at all, were usually given the role of representing the first inhabitants of the territory and their cultural characteristics are conceived as part of the distinctiveness of the host country. However, these representations essentially confirm the "exoticism" of the Indigenous peoples and do not reveal much deeper features of social and power relations. They reflect not only the relationship of a particular host state to the Indigenous peoples living within its borders, but also the ties of the members of the IOC to individual states (or their National Olympic Committees) and, at the same time, their attitudes towards Indigenous peoples in general. These are also reflected in the very willingness and extent of the host state's potential involvement of Indigenous peoples in the overall choreography and self-representation.

Although Indigenous peoples have been included to varying degrees in the opening ceremonies at the Olympic Games in Canada, Norway, the USA, Australia, and Brazil, this is not guaranteed. The 2020 Tokyo Olympics, postponed due to pandemic COVID-19 to 2021, intended a performance by the Ainu, the Indigenous peoples from Hokkaido. Japan has long considered itself an ethnically homogeneous state, and the Ainu have been severely discriminated against for over 100 years. It was not until 2019 that Japan officially recognized them as its Indigenous people. Although the Ainu were expected to perform at the opening ceremony, the organizers of the 2020 Tokyo Games announced in 2020 that the Ainu dance was dropped from the program. After lengthy negotiations, the Ainu dances were performed in the opening ceremonies at the Sapporo venue of the Tokyo Olympics, where some events were controversially moved from Tokyo.[43]

Olympic Agendas can contribute to transforming policies and discourses. In the context of the 2024 Paris Olympics, the IOC has boasted of achieving gender equality as a result of meeting the goals of Agenda 2020 that positioned gender equality as a priority.[44] Therefore, the removal of Indigenous peoples from these IOC Agendas highlights that although the IOC declares an interest in supporting

[43] Kanako Uzawa, Jeff Gayman, and Fumiya Nagai, "Japan," in *The Indigenous World 2022*, ed. Dwayne Mamo (IWGIA, 2022), 220–233; Yumi Oba, "Japan's Indigenous people to perform at Olympics, after being dropped from the opening ceremony," *SBS Japanese*, August 3, 2021, https://www.sbs.com.au/language/japanese/en/article/japans-indigenous-people-to-perform-at-olympics-after-being-dropped-from-the-opening-ceremony/ge2h8ebh0.

[44] "#GenderEqualOlympics: Paris 2024 making history on the field of play," *IOC News*, July 28, 2024, https://www.olympics.com/ioc/news/genderequalolympics-paris-2024-making-history-on-the-field-of-play.

marginalized groups, alternative collective identities for the "Western world" do not have a full place in it. Therefore, Indigenous peoples are left with the role of entertainment performers, if they fit into the unifying representation of national identities of individual states.

Nation-states and the Indigenous Identities in Olympic Contexts

What does the participation or non-participation of Indigenous athletes in the Olympic Games tell us about the Indigenous sovereignties and about the Olympic movement as an ideological current enabling social change, which was one of the main intentions of its founder de Coubertin? The current principle of representation is based on the representation of individual states, not nations in the ethnic sense. In the early days of the Olympic Games, however, various nations were represented at the Games, as evidenced by the establishment of the Czech Olympic Committee in 1899/1900. Their efforts enabled Czech athletes to participate in the Olympics under variously defined identities that evoked their ethnic distinctiveness during the days of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.[45] Over time, however, the Olympic requirement for representation of nation-states became established as a result of the consolidation of nationalism in conjunction with a state-based territorial framework. According to Quijano, the nation-state is the colonial European product that has disrupted pre-existing political structures and indigenous forms of governance and replaced them with systems based on European models of centralized power, in which the nation dominates as an expression of identity and loyalty of the state.[46] Indigenous peoples, in the role of active athletes in the Olympics, are thus limited by the requirement to declare their identity only in relation to the specific internationally recognized state entity they supposedly represent – an entity whose practices and unresolved treaty obligations towards groups living within its borders they may not agree with, and to which they may not consider themselves citizens.

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[45] Czechs were part of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy until 1918, when the independent Czechoslovak Republic was established. At the 1912 Olympics, the Czech national team could march with a small distance behind the Austrian team with a sign with the French inscription *Autriche Tchéques* and two flags – the Czech lion and the Austrian black and yellow colors. In case of victory of the Czech athlete, both flags – the Austrian-Hungarian and the Czech red and white – were to fly. For more on this topic see Marek Waic, *Tělovýchova a sport ve službách české národní emancipace* (Praha: Karolinum, 2014), 140–178.

[46] Aníbal Quijano and Michael Ennis, "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America," *Nepantla: Views from South* 1, No. 3 (2000): 533–580.

Thus, for many outstanding Haudenosaunee/Iroquois lacrosse players, the required choice of representing either the USA or Canada may mean a voluntary non-participation in the greatest global sporting event, where lacrosse returns in 2028. This politics of refusal has been practiced by the Haudenosaunee people who are divided by state border between the USA and Canada, and who have been expressing their resistance not merely to colonial structures, but are instead deeply embedded in ongoing, active practices of sovereign life that exist beyond colonial borders.[47]

However, the current conceptualization of the athlete with only one possible identity, and that is in relation to the state they represent, also means for those who feel proud to be its citizens the suppression of the other layers of their identity. Thus, any declaration of attachment to the identity of a particular Indigenous group – for example, the Aboriginal flag worn by Hooper, which does not necessarily conflict with the self-identification of the athlete in question as a citizen of the state being represented – is considered by the IOC's criteria to be a political gesture that is incompatible with the established order, and thus threatens the conceptualization of nation-states as a fundamental criterion for participation in the Olympic Games. The potential penalties for breaching the criteria are high. As the responsibility for infringement of them tends to be shifted to specific National Olympic Committees, athletes' potential "political activism" may play a role in the consideration of their selection to the national team, regardless of their sporting performance. This was the case for the 1968 Black Power salute sympathizer, Australian Peter Norman, who was not selected by his NOC for the 1972 Olympics despite having qualifying times.[48]

The rules of representation, with the necessity of belonging to a particular internationally recognized state, tend to perpetuate the existing order in which powerful states, such as the United States, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand that have subjected many groups to colonization and humiliation, form and

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[47] Audra Simspon, *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life Across the Borders of Settler States* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014); *Lakros – to je způsob života/Lacrosse It's a Way of Life*, directed by Lívia Šavelková, Tomáš Petráň, and Milan Durňak (2011, 63 min; Czech Republic, bilingual); *V domovině lakrosu/In the Homeland of Lacrosse*, directed by Lívia Šavelková and Milan Durňak (2024, 110 min; Czech Republic).

[48] Steve Georgakis, "Sprinter Norman receives apology 44 years later," *SBS*, October 13, 2012, https://www.sbs.com.au/news/sprinter-norman-receives-apology-44-years-later. Similarly, the outstanding Czechoslovak gymnast Věra Čáslavská fell out of favor with the ruling communist establishment after she protested the occupation of Czechoslovakia by Soviet troops in August 1968 by turning her head away from the Soviet flag and looking at the ground during the Soviet anthem on the same Olympics as Norman in Mexico City 1968.

maintain the rules of the Games.[49] However, a certain exception to the established IOC order is Taiwan, which the IOC allows to perform under the name of Chinese Taipei and whose anthem may not be played. Another major exception to national representation in recent times was offered by the IOC by allowing a team made up of refugees mostly from Syria, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, and South Sudan to compete for the first time in the 2016 Olympics. The refugee team was also part of the 2020 Tokyo Games and the 2024 Paris Games.[50] The one-off exception of flying the Aboriginal flag at the 2000 Sydney Olympics, alongside the Australian flag, which was intended at the time to symbolize Australia's quest for reconciliation, demonstrates the reluctance of the Olympic movement to engage in decolonization and the pursuit of the ideals of humanism.[51]

Recently, however, pressure to transform the IOC's rigid rules have also arisen from representatives of these settler colonial nation states. Since 2023, top U.S. and Canadian officials such as U.S. President Joe Biden, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Canadian Minister of Sport and Physical Activity Carla Dawn Qualtrough have successively expressed support for Haudenosaunee lacrosse participation in the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics.[52]

Whether the Haudenosaunee Nationals, formerly Iroquois Nationals, will be allowed to play in the Olympics remains unclear. According to the Olympic Charter and the IOC's 2023 statement, they do not meet the conditions for participation.[53] But the matter is not yet definitively decided. The specific statuses of the IOC refugee team, as well as Palestine, Puerto Rico, and Hong Kong, which are participating in the Olympics, could inspire the IOC possible inclusion of the Haudenosaunee. As early as 2015, Oren Lyons, one of the founders of the Haudenosaunee Nationals, and one of the Indigenous leaders who helped to establish the Working Group on Indigenous Populations, an advisory body to

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[49] O'Bonsawin, "From Black Power," 215.

[50] "Refugee Olympic Team," IOC, https://olympics.com/en/olympic-refuge-foundation/refugee-team, accessed August 6, 2024.

[51] O'Bonsawin, "From Black Power," 215.

[52] Lexie Schapitl, "Biden backs an Indigenous lacrosse team for the 2028 Olympics. It's an uphill fight," *NPR*, December 7, 2023, https://www.npr.org/2023/12/06/1217564234/biden-indigenous-lacrosse-olympics; John Chidley-Hill, "Canada's sport minister supports Haudenosaunee bid to play lacrosse at 2028 Olympics," The National Post, December 6, 2023, https://nationalpost.com/pmn/sports-pmn/canadas-sport-minister-supports-haudenosaunee-bid-to-play-lacrosse-at-2028-olympics; Justin Trudeau (@JustinTrudeau), "Canada supports the Haudenosaunee Nationals," *X*, February 16, 2024, 12:04 p.m., https://x.com/JustinTrudeau/status/1758266093678838268.

[53] Schapitl, "Biden backs."

the Geneva-based United Nations Human Rights Commission, claimed that if lacrosse returns to the Olympics, the Haudenosaunee from whom lacrosse originated must be "the No. 1 team" there.[54]

To fulfill Olympic Charter, Article 2, the IOC can take an approach similar to that of individual sports federations that recognize the contribution of Indigenous peoples to the specific sport. This is particularly evident in those cases where originally Indigenous activities have been turned into sport. These include World Lacrosse (WL), which has recognized Haudenosaunee/Iroquois as a team at its World Championships since 1988, or the International Surfing Association (ISA), under which Hawaiian surfers can represent Hawaii and not necessarily the USA.[55] However, the IOC has adhered to its regulations. When surfing was introduced to the Olympics in 2021, Carissa Kainani Moore, who became the first woman to win an Olympic gold medal in surfing, had to compete for the USA, despite regularly representing Hawaii under ISA rules.[56] So far, the IOC is not structurally supportive of Indigenous peoples.

However, Indigenous peoples' multilayered identities, as illustrated by the case of Cathy Freeman in the 2000 Sydney Olympics, can be seen from another perspective: not as the pragmatic impact of the "social engineering" of a particular state's policy towards its Indigenous populations, but as a certain crucial moment of specific "local" relations and the possibility of their adjustment also on an international, i.e. transnational, global scale. If we accept the thesis that events of such a scale as the Olympics become strategic symbols to communicate a paradigm shift indicating the arrival of a new era and at the same time marking a renewal at the highest possible global visibility,[57] then the presence of Indigenous peoples at these events can also be perceived in a different way. The appearance of thousands of Indigenous Australians at the Sydney opening ceremony also marks a belief and possibility in the readjust-

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[54] Oren Lyons, interview with author, September 25, 2015. *V domovině lakrosu / In the Homeland of Lacrosse*, directed by Lívia Šavelková and Milan Duňák (2024, 110 min; Czech Republic, bilingual).

[55] "ISA Member nations," The International Surfing Association (ISA), https://isasurf.org/become-a-member/member-directory/#country_H, accessed October 6, 2024.

[56] Alina Bykova, "Indigenous Hawaiian Wins Gold in Tokyo at First-Ever Olympic Surfing Event," *Native News Online*, July 29, 2021, https://nativenewsonline.net/currents/indigenous-hawaiian-wins-women-s-gold-in-tokyo-at-first-ever-olympic-surfing-event.

[57] Andrew Smith, "Theorising the Relationship between Major Sport Events and Social Sustainability," *Journal of Sport & Tourism* 14, no. 2–3 (2010): 109–120, doi: 10.1080/14775080902965033; David Black, "The Symbolic Politics of Sport Mega-Events: 2010 in Comparative Perspective," *Politikon* 34, no. 3 (2007): 261–276, doi: 10.1080/02589340801962536.

ment of prevailing relations, not only by Indigenous peoples but also by many members of the majority society who fundamentally disagree with the practices of colonization.[58]

How protests are suppressed are also a crucial statement about the practices of power in relation to the Olympics. Although protests against the Olympics may have transnational features,[59] I would argue they are always glocal, not only in terms of the activists themselves, but also when they are regulated or totally suppressed by the host states.[60] The protests by Indigenous peoples and other activists against the 2010 Olympics in British Columbia are not identical to the protests against the 2008 Olympics in China, in which many Tibetans and their supporters were severely repressed by state authorities. Pointing to human rights abuses in China and criticism of the awarding of the Olympics to that state, or rather to the Chinese Olympic Committee, also for Winter Olympics in 2022, leading to the diplomatic boycott of many states, was then countered with the IOC argument that the Olympic Games are non-political.[61] Olympic opening ceremonies and Olympic protests take on specific local meanings associated with pride, resistance, and the expression of local and global arrangements through media transmission to other parts of the world. For many of the colonized, those meanings can signify a similar hope and similar experiences.

The IOC Rule 50 and the "Political Neutrality" of Sport

We can also look at the Olympics through the concept of governance. Although the Olympic Games declare themselves to be non-political, this is not in line with practice. The IOC claims sovereignty over global sport by

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[58] Gilbert, "'Let the Games," 156–175. The term "Indigenous Australians" is used in this paper to refer to Aboriginal Peoples and Torres Strait Islanders.

[59] O'Bonsawin, "The Olympics Do," 227–255; Helen Jefferson Lenskyj, *Olympic Industry Resistance: Challenging Olympic Power and Propaganda* (Albany: SUNY, 2008); M. Patrick Cottrell and Travis Nelson, "Not just the Games? Power, protest and politics at the Olympics," *European Journal of International Relations* 17, no. 4 (December 2010): 729–753, doi: 10.1177/1354066110380965.

[60] I see glocalization in accordance with Roudometof as "globalization refracted through the local, where the local is not annihilated, absorbed, or destroyed by globalization, but where global and local shape the final outcome [...] and therefore the result is heterogeneity." See Victor Roudometof, *Glocalization: A Critical Introduction* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), 65.

[61] Wangpo Tethong, "The 2008 uprising and the Olympics," *Tibetan Review*, June 22, 2018, https://www.tibetanreview.net/the-2008-uprising-and-the-olympics/; "Human rights groups urge IOC to move the 2022 Winter Olympics out of China," *CBC News*, September 9, 2020, https://www.cbsnews.com/news/china-olympics-human-rights-groups-urge-ioc-to-move-2022-winter-games-tibet-hong-kong-uighurs/.

determining how it shall be organized, experienced and ruled, thus making Olympic participants distinct own Olympic subjects separate from one's national citizenship.[62] This is fundamentally at odds with the IOC idea of the "neutrality of sport."

Although the ideology of sport's neutrality is part of many international sports federations, in the Olympic movement, "neutrality" reaches the form of dogma, which is fed by ideological endogamy, a refusal to accept new perspectives, epistemological isolation, and institutional narcissism.[63] The IOC spell of understanding that "sport is neutral" and "not political" has been carried throughout interpretations of the Olympic movement for a very long time and has been reinforced by Olympic Movement researchers affiliated with Olympic Studies Centers and the International Olympic Academy.[64] Quite simply, the Olympic Games are "the most quintessentially political sporting event the world has ever known."[65] Boykoff characterizes them as a form of sportwashing, that is, "phenomenon whereby political leaders use sports to appear important or legitimate on the world stage while stoking nationalism and deflecting attention from chronic social problems and human-rights woes on the home front."[66]

The IOC, with its emphasis on the apolitical nature of the Olympic movement, has recently come under increased pressure to rethink what is perceived as political activism. In the wake of the protests following the death of George Floyd in the United States in 2020 and the subsequent Black Lives Matter movement, many international sport federations were calling for the IOC Rule 50 to be scrapped and for athletes to be able to openly express their views.[67] In 2020, however, the president of the IOC, Thomas Bach, claimed that violations of Rule 50, of which he highlighted kneeling, gestures such as those of Tommie Smith and John Carlos, patches, or symbols, or disrespecting an opponent on the podium,

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62 Carter, "The Olympics as Sovereign," 55.

63 Luis Javier Ruiz Cazorla, José Luis Chinchilla Minguet, and Iván López Fernández, "Rhetoric and Power: The Idealism and 'Philosophy of Life' of the Olympic Movement," *Quest* 63, no. 4 (2011): 352–365, doi: 10.1080/00336297.2011.10483686.

64 Ibid., 354.

65 Jonathan Grix and Mark James, "The politicisation of sport and the principle of political neutrality: a contradiction in terms?" *The International Sports Law Journal* 24 (July 2024): 68–77, here 71, doi: 10.1007/s40318-024-00273-w.

66 Jules Boykoff, "Toward a Theory of Sportswashing: Mega-Events, Soft Power, and Political Conflict," *Sociology of Sport Journal* 39, no. 4 (December 2022): 342–351, here 342, doi: 10.1123/ssj.2022-0095.

67 Cliff Brunt, "Athletes act: Stars rise up against racial injustice in 2020," *AP News*, December 30, 2020, https://apnews.com/article/breonna-taylor-election-2020-nfl-race-and-ethnicity-nba-192cec690b8e54d0c2464e17bd836437.

could lead to athletes being excluded from the Olympics. He justified these sanctions on the need to preserve the Olympics as a non-political event, and said athletes are free to express their views within their own social media profiles.[68]

However, social pressure has led to a "softening" of Rule 50 despite the IOC's conservative approach. The emphasis on social movements as agents of social change rather than politics became an important IOC argument for modifying its stance. IOC Agenda 2020+5 acknowledges the significance of social movements such as Black Lives Matter or #MeToo – where athletes have been central to promoting positive societal change in and through sport.[69] In 2021, before the actual Tokyo Olympics, the IOC updated Rule 50 to allow athletes to express their views before the start of competitions, provided these expressions are not disruptive and respect other competitors. Nevertheless, the Rule 50 continues to prohibit protests during medal ceremonies, on the podium, on the field of play, or during official Olympic events such as the Opening and Closing Ceremonies.[70]

This decision was based on research conducted by the IOC Athletes' Commission. The survey involved over 3,500 athletes, representing 185 different National Olympic Committees and all 41 Olympic sports, and with the highest proportion of responses from Chinese athletes.[71] Thus, the Indigenous numerical representation as Olympic athletes, like other numerically small groups, did not have a major opportunity to influence the shape of the edited version of Rule 50 through the IOC Athletes' Commission survey. Further, the IOC specified that athletes' opportunities to express their opinions were in official press conferences, through social and traditional media, and at mixed zones in competition venues.[72] Nevertheless, it remained in force that there are still sanctions for violating Rule 50 and the Olympic Charter, with each specific case to be decided

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[68] Graham Dunbar, "IOC president defends rules limiting Olympic protests," *AP News*, January 10, 2020, https://apnews.com/article/winter-olympics-olympic-games-sports-general-sports-2020-tokyo-olympics-b931c8a5ed379bcc59c922b2d8cb8e2f; "Rule 50 Guidelines," IOC, January 2020, https://www.olympic.org/-/media/document%20library/olympicorg/news/2020/01/rule-50-guidelines-tokyo-2020.pdf.

[69] IOC, "Olympic Agenda 2020+5: 15 Recommendations" (Lausanne: IOC, 2021), 32.

[70] "IOC Athletes' Commission's Recommendations on Rule 50 and Athlete Expression at the Olympic Games fully endorsed by the IOC Executive Board," *IOC News*, April 21, 2021, https://olympics.com/ioc/news/ioc-athletes-commission-s-recommendations-on-rule-50-and-athlete-expression-at-the-olympic-games.

[71] "Athlete Expression consultation. IOC Athletes' commission report" (April 2021), IOC https://olympics.com/athlete365/app/uploads/2021/04/IOC_AC_Consultation_Report-Athlete_Expression_21.04.2021.pdf, 15; "IOC Athletes' Commission's recommendations on Rule 50."

[72] "IOC Athletes' Commission's Recommendations on Rule 50".

by their respective National Olympic Committee, International Sport Federation, and the IOC.[73]

The need to show support for oppressed peoples did not stop the silver medalist American track and field athlete Raven Saunders from potentially getting into trouble, as she raised and crossed her arms on the podium in Tokyo. Subsequently, the IOC initiated an investigation to determine if the gesture violated the Rule 50. The U.S. Olympic Committee stood up for her, saying there was no violation of Olympic rules as it was a "peaceful expression in support of racial and social justice [that] was respectful of her competitors." Subsequently, the IOC suspended its investigation on Saunders' gesture.[74] In Tokyo, more athletes expressed their support for racial equality. For example, several women's soccer teams took the knee before their games.[75] While the Australian women's soccer team did not kneel, they chose to support the marginalized in another way. With two Indigenous athletes in their team, they unfurled the Aboriginal flag before their match and took a team photo to express their support and solidarity with Indigenous Australians.[76]

Although Rule 50 was softened in 2021, Afghan Refugee athlete Manizha Talash was disqualified at the 2024 Paris Games for displaying the words "free Afghan women" on her outfit during her Olympic break dance competition.[77] The IOC's investigations into Rule 50 violations at recent Olympics in the cases of Sanders and Talash are telling of the IOC's attitude towards potential expressions of opinion, even by potential Indigenous Olympians.

The changed IOC Rule 50 in its actual form is an unlawful infringement of Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) because it is

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[73] "Rule 50 Guidelines," 10.

[74] "Raven Saunders' gesture on Olympic podium legal, U.S. committee says," *CBS News*, August 2, 2021, https://www.cbsnews.com/news/raven-saunders-gesture-olympic-podium-legal-us-committee-says/.

[75] The gesture of kneeling as a protest against racism came to prominence in 2016 when San Francisco 49ers quarterback Colin Kaepernick began kneeling during the American national anthem. He wanted to highlight what he described as the ongoing oppression of black people in the United States. See Analis Bailey, "On this day four years ago, Colin Kaepernick began his peaceful protests during the national anthem," *USA Today*, August 26, 2020, https://eu.usatoday.com/story/sports/nfl/2020/08/26/colin-kaepernick-started-protesting-day-2016/3440690001/.

[76] AAP, "Claim Australian soccer players 'refused' to kneel is an own goal," *AAP*, July 23, 2021, accessed August 20, 2024, https://www.aap.com.au/factcheck/claim-australian-soccer-players-refused-to-kneel-is-an-own-goal/; Samantha Lewis, "Matildas strike balance in search for team identity in Olympics opener," *The Guardian*, July 22, 2021, https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2021/jul/22/matildas-strike-balance-in-search-for-team-identity-in-olympics-opener.

[77] "Refugee B-Girl disqualified for message at Olympics," *BBC*, August 9, 2024, https://www.bbc.com/sport/olympics/articles/cgm7v44wg0wo.

an interference with athletes' freedom of expression.[78] Instead, the IOC should revisit if there is any need for the Rule 50 at all. At the same time, the ambivalence of the IOC's contradictory approach to human rights is evident. One of the IOC requirements states that, "Any expression must also be compliant with the laws of the host nation."[79] However, Rule 50's banning on certain forms of expression creates ambiguity when the host nation's laws regarding freedom of expression may actually be either more restrictive or more lenient than Rule 50 itself. It is unclear which framework takes precedence. Essentially, the line between promoting activism and engaging in political acts is blurry, and the punishments imposed for breaching Rule 50 are disproportionate to its stated aim of preserving the political neutrality of sport.[80]

The Olympic movement has not reflected domestic and international law concerning Indigenous peoples for many decades. In particular, the right to free, prior, and informed consent for activities that impact Indigenous communities and their territories is absent. The right to free, prior, and informed consent is one of the key principles enshrined in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. As O'Bonsawin argues, the IOC "has historically moved freely onto Indigenous territories, as experience in Canada [...], demonstrating minimal regard for the rights of Indigenous peoples, who too often, become unwillingly indentured to the movement."[81] She maintains that the IOC's power structure is highly elitist, comprising approximately 100 voting members, with the impacts of its decision-making affecting millions of Indigenous peoples.[82]

Imagination and Representation of Indigenous Peoples at the Olympics Spectacle

The Olympics are a spectacle,[83] but local interpretations of that spectacle may vary. What meanings do glocal audiences attach to the transmitted images of Indigenous peoples in the Olympics, and in what discourses? One of the

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[78] Mark James and Guy Osborn, "Athlete Activism at the Olympics: Challenging the Legality of Rule 50 as a Restriction on Freedom of Expression," in *Interdisciplinary Studies in Human Rights 10: Sports and Human Rights*, ed. Véronique Boillet, Sophie Weerts, and Andreas R. Ziegler (Cham: Springer, 2024), 189, 203, doi: 10.1007/978-3-031-56452-9_8.
[79] Ibid., 195.
[80] Ibid., 206.
[81] O'Bonsawin, "Olympism at Face," 122–123.
[82] Ibid., 132.
[83] Guy Debord, *La Société du spectacle* (Paris: Buchet/Castel, 1967).

dominant and long-standing global discourses is the primitive/civilized dichotomy in defining modernity. This discourse accentuates the dialectical feature of characteristics – one excludes the other. Thus, the representation of cultural performances in opening and closing ceremonies can signify for many viewers the existing "primitiveness" of Indigenous peoples, while an athlete's specific sporting performance in "modern branded sportswear" may signify their successful integration and civilization, or the total loss or rejection of Indigenous identity – an effort that has been made by a number of states. Thus, by denying the right to multi-layered self-identification during all phases of Olympics, the "Indigenous" remains confined to these two categories. It is this dialectic that explains why many reporters in 2000 wondered how the former Taiwan Indigenous Olympic silver medalist athlete C. K. Yang could have become a *tâng-ki* cleric at the Temple of the Imperial Seal, who performs various self-inflicted injuries as part of his healing activities and in trance while exorcising evil spirits. The understanding of the athlete as an individual who strives to enhance performance and cultivate the body in a completely rational manner and using all available scientific knowledge, was at odds with the seemingly incomprehensible and self-degrading approach to the body and the irrationally structured time and application in the sphere of society that could conjure up notions of traditionalism, superstition and "backwardness." However, given the local situation in Taiwan at the time, *tâng-ki* was not an expression of a "relic from the past," but a manifestation of Taiwan's modernization, as Taiwanese nationalism could be expressed through it.[84]

Yet, Indigenous sovereignties at the Olympics must be seen in decolonizing processes that challenge stereotypical forms of knowledge. Despite considerable initial difficulties, there has been some ground gained already. Sámi athletes and Sámi sport, such as reindeer racing and lassoing, discussed with a bid to host the Olympics in Norway in 2018 and exhibited during the opening ceremony in 1994 Lillehammer Olympics, have recently been instrumental in changing mainstream understandings and representations of the Sámi people.[85] Other examples include the New Zealand national Olympic team, which has been open since 2004 to the Maori experience through the work

[84] Andrew D. Morris, "The Olympic decathlete who became a shaman: C. K. Yang and the masculine body in modern Taiwan," *East Asian Journal of Popular Culture* 5, no. 1 (April 2019): 25–41, doi: 10.1386/eapc.5.1.25_1.

[85] Eivind Å. Skille, Michael P. Sam, and Steve J. Jackson, "The contested terrain of sport, media & indigenous representation: a case study of Sámi sport organisation in Norway," *European Journal for Sport and Society* 21 (July 2024): 1–18, doi: 10.1080/16138171.2024.2382951.

of cultural advisors such as Amster Reedy or Trevor Shailer,[86] as well as its interaction with one of the Indigenous hosts of the Vancouver Olympics in 2010, the Squamish Nation. The mutual recognition took the form of a special blanket ceremony.[87]

It would be very interesting to know more about these interactions, which are not usually mentioned in academic texts. Nevertheless, these interactions may highlight the need for dignified mutual recognition as well as respecting the passage of time in relation to various events. Yet, in the neoliberal set-up of the Olympic Games with a fixed order of embedded activities in a defined time and space in its program, the organizers of the precise activities can hardly be expected to give space to the ritualized greetings according to Indigenous diplomatic protocols in the fully sufficient time required. However, the initiation of any discussion that allows for an understanding of Indigenous protocols beyond the Olympic spectacle may be one of the initial steps in decolonization processes leading to the affirmation of Indigenous sovereignties.

Conclusion

Whatever the global or glocal discourses, and rigidity of the IOC, it is necessary to consider the very agency of individual Indigenous athletes, as well as of participants performing in cultural programs and in their role as organizers, who also become global actors thanks to the enormous media attention. Even with the input of Indigenous Olympians, incremental changes are occurring at the conservative IOC as we could see with Jim Thorpe's restoration.

Indigenous agency and its role in the decolonization process is not only driven by the athletes themselves, but also by the cultural advisors who work within the national teams. Their experience and knowledge help to promote Indigenous sovereignties. With the inclusion of Indigenous representatives into the organizational and power structures of the IOC, which has so far taken place only at national levels, modifications of those structures through Indigenous agency might become more possible. To date, however, the IOC's practice has tended to be superficial acknowledgments that fail to engage with Indigenous sovereignties

[86] Waatea Team, "Inspiring tohunga Amster Reedy dies," *Waatea*, September 18, 2014, https://waateanews.com/2014/09/18/inspiring-tohunga-amster-reedy-dies/; Dale Husband, "Trevor Shailer: Our Rio team – and our Māori dimension," *E-Tangata*, July 23, 2016, https://e-tangata.co.nz/korero/our-rio-team-and-our-maori-dimension/.

[87] Erueti, "Mātauranga Māori," 66–67.

and self-determination to which many scholars have pointed out in the relationship of various colonial institutions to Indigenous peoples in general.[88]

If the Olympic Movement is committed to Olympism, it is crucial that its main body, the IOC, truly gives equal space to all, including Indigenous peoples. In this respect, it is important that the IOC really takes into account the 2007 UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The cases where the IOC can prove its commitment are the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics in relation to the Haudenosaunee and lacrosse, and the 2032 Brisbane Olympics, whose organizers have an ambitious plan for its legacy.[89] With the "Sport as an Enabler of Sustainable Development" resolution adopted by the United Nations in 2024 that "supports the overarching mission of the Olympic and Paralympic Games to be a unifying force, bringing the world together in peaceful competition with no discrimination whatsoever,"[90] we will see whether the IOC's stated desire for diversity and dignity will translate into a much more welcoming IOC approach to Indigenous peoples. Further, for many Indigenous peoples, the withdrawal of the IOC Rule 50 would allow them to declare a multi-layered identity that does not necessarily reflect a desire for separatist aspirations and the disruption of state entities.

It is evident that the IOC's major changes in its approach to its own rules do not come widely from within but gradually by being pushed by athletes and their media followers and activists who are putting pressure on the rigid IOC structures. Although the presence of Indigenous peoples influences the Olympic Movement and the Olympic and Paralympic Games, Indigenous peoples do not yet have the economic power to assert themselves in the neoliberal environment shaping and simultaneously being shaped by the IOC vis-à-vis the major Olympic sponsors on which the IOC depends for its operation.

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[88] Simpson, *As We Have Always Done*; Tuck and Young, "Decolonization is not a metaphor"; Quijano and Ennis, "Coloniality of Power."

[89] The 2032 Brisbane Olympics and Paralympics organizers declare a plan to establish an idyllic relationship between Indigenous and majority populations by 2042: "In 2042, success would mean that we are united, celebrating our shared history, and live in a country where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are recognized, their contribution valued, and communities have the same social and economic opportunities as all Australians." See "Elevate 2042: The Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games Legacy Strategy" (State of Queensland: Department of Tourism, Innovation and Sport, 2023), 15.

[90] IOC, "Sport unites all 193 Member States at the UN General Assembly – 'Sport as an Enabler of Sustainable Development' resolution adopted by consensus," *IOC News*, November 12, 2024, https://www.olympics.com/ioc/news/sport-unites-all-193-member-states-at-the-un-general-assembly-sport-as-an-enabler-of-sustainable-development-resolution-adopted-by-consensus.

It would be easy to conclude that the current Olympic Games and Indigenous representation reflect the still dominant colonial and neoliberal thinking associated with the so-called Western culture, to which the birth of the modern Olympic movement is linked. Indigenous peoples can, of course, choose between the politics of recognition and the politics of refusal and completely ignore the Olympics as a Western colonial product from which they want to distance themselves and "really decolonize." From a certain perspective, however, it would probably be unstrategic not to use the media interest in this glocal sporting event to present and influence discourses concerning Indigenous peoples and their sovereignties. New media and social networks offer alternative exotic consumption of the Olympics via the simultaneous fulfilment of Debord's spectacle and Baudrillard's simulacra of ethnocentric multiculturalism. However, several questions remain unanswered. For example, how do members of different Indigenous groups themselves perceive the media images of those performing in the cultural parts of the program or of individual athletes? To what extent do the Olympic Games and their simulacra mediated by global transmission help to articulate the Indigenous sovereignties and how are they understood by various audiences? How do these media-transmitted images affect Indigenous peoples' sovereignties around the world at local and global levels? It remains an open question to which multidisciplinary research can offer various interpretations. And, as has been argued, Indigenous sovereignties need to be viewed comprehensively.