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FROM IMMIGRANTS TO SPORTS FIGURES: THE CASE STUDY OF THE IOC REFUGEE TEAM IN RIO OLYMPICS 2016¹

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Abstract

This paper examines the experiences of refugee athletes in pursuing their ultimate dream to compete in the Olympics, and explores the challenges and prospects they faced. Relevant data were obtained from secondary sources, such as sports articles and biographies on websites, about refugee athletes competing in the Rio Olympics in 2016. Eleven sports personalities among the refugees from South Sudan, Syria, Democratic Republic of Congo and Ethiopia were studied. They represented the Refugee Team in judo, athletics and swimming. A summative content analysis was conducted to see variations in their sporting motives. The analysis suggests that despite of harsh living conditions in their home countries, refugees' passion to compete in sport was very much alive when they arrived at the host countries. The paper also reveals that host countries like Germany, Brazil, and Luxembourg provided several opportunities for the refugees to venture into sport, but available opportunities are selective due to their status as refugees. Also, their participation in sport is confined to Olympic events only. Today, participation in sport is seen as an avenue for refugees to salvage their pride and dignity apart from seeking better opportunities in life. Indeed, sport is a powerful tool to unite people from different backgrounds and nationalities.

Keywords: Asylum seekers, Refugees, Migration, Olympics, Sport

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1. Introduction

Modern civilization has produced unprecedented pressure on resources and technological capabilities to wage war and damage the environment that has caused massive population movements seeking safety, survival, and improved prospects and opportunities. There are more than 65 million refugees, asylum seekers, and internally displaced persons (IDPs) worldwide today.² In some parts of Africa, Asia and Arab regions for instance, people have no choice but to move elsewhere to seek a better life. Without full preparation, travelling as refugees is not an easy task. At the new host countries, refugees need to adapt to the new culture and new life. For athletes, it is very unfortunate for them too when they have no choice but to become refugees. Being refugees literally means no training, no competition, and no incentives conventionally enjoyed by such professionals. However, a new chapter in the field of sport and refugees' studies was created in 2016 when the International Olympics Committee (IOC) gave permission to refugee athletes to compete in the Olympic Games.

Coming from various nationalities and backgrounds, these athletes represented the team of refugees in a few sports events. This paper thus examines the challenges and prospects of these athletes prior to Olympics 2016 that ultimately brought them to the host nations. The objective of this paper is to explore the challenges and prospects of IOC Refugee Team in sport. The paper begins with a brief introduction followed by the research design. In the literature section, we describe the existing references that used in exploring the subject of refugees in a sport. In the findings section, we elucidate the three substantial findings of this study based on our readings and methods. Under the section of discussion, we highlight the theoretical framework of Parsons³ as well as the push and pull theory relating to refugees' involvement in sport. Finally, we recommend several

² Australian Human Rights Commission, *Asylum Seekers, Refugees and Human Rights: Snapshot Report, 2017* (Sydney: Australian Human Rights Commission, 2018),

https://www.humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/document/publication/AHRC_Snaphot%20report_2nd%20edition_2017_WEB.pdf

³ Talcott Parsons, *The Social System* (London: Routledge, 2013), 45-76.

strategies to improve the participation of these refugees in future Olympics followed by the conclusion.

2. Research Design

This study is descriptive in nature. It relies on secondary sources, examining 34 articles published in English on sports and refugees and relevant data from internet sources, sports-based organizations and United Nations agencies related to humanitarian and refugee athletes, particularly the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). All internet resources identified for this study provided rich data. Data were based on interviews, biographies, and narratives of the refugee athletes. Interviews with the athletes were conducted by Cable News Networks (CNN), the Guardian, UNHCR, and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). Most interviews focused on the motives behind the athletes' participation in sports and challenges faced by them prior to Rio 2016. Data from secondary sources were thematically analysed.

3. Literature Review

Previous studies related to sport and refugees are scarce. Though limited in number, the studies are significant in that they contribute to the body of knowledge, particularly in understanding the issue of sport and refugees. After a thorough analysis of the literature, this study highlights several sport-related issues like sport in development, peace, and inclusion, as well as the Olympic legacy.

3.1 Sport as a Tool for Development, Peace and Inclusion

Sport for development, peace and inclusion is not new, and such concepts were already familiar in the ancient Greek civilization that first invented the Olympic Games. In the modern era however this has been more formally underscored as part of the human rights framework. In addition, the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) of 2015 included sport for peace and development in its agenda.⁴

⁴ Ingrid Beutler, "Sport serving development and peace: Achieving the goals of the United Nations through sport," *Sport in Society* 11, no. 4 (2008): 364, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17430430802019227>.

Due to its universal popularity, sport is employed vastly in the context of development and peace.⁵ It has the power to connect people and communities, and serves as a platform for interactions.

The cross-cutting nature of sport has made it special. Most importantly, it empowers, motivates and inspires people.⁶ Correspondingly, it is not easy to start a new life in a new place.⁷ The traumatic moments and experiences which refugees have experienced may fundamentally challenge⁸ their ability to live normal lives,⁹ such as persecution, displacement, loss, grief, and forced separation from family, home and belongings.¹⁰ Thus, for these refugee athletes, involvement in sports has a significant meaning in their lives. Over the years since the 1970s, sport has evolved in line with peace and human development, as illustrated in Table 1.

Studies have found that sport is used as a tool for social integration and inclusion,¹¹ especially among students of marginalized groups (minorities) like Cambodians and Rohingyas¹² who have lived in host countries for generations.¹³ Sport with special reference to refugees indeed entails moral support and propagates education,¹⁴ improving self-esteem (and improvement),¹⁵ protecting

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Alexander Cárdenas, “Peace Building through Sport? An Introduction to Sport for Development and Peace,” *Journal of Conflictology* 4, no. 1 (2013): 26, <https://doi.org/10.7238/joc.v4i1.1493>.

⁷ Louise Oliff, *Playing for the Future: The Role of Sport and Recreation in Supporting Refugee Young People to ‘Settle Well’ in Australia* (Victoria: The Centre of Multicultural Youth, 2008), 35-42.

⁸ Sports Think Tank, “Introduction to Sport for Development and Peace,” accessed November 15, 2018, 6, <http://www.sportsthinktank.com/uploads/sport-for-international-devt.pdf>

⁹ Cárdenas, “Peace Building through Sport?,” 26.

¹⁰ Oliff, *Playing for the Future*, 12.

¹¹ Baidruel Hairiel Abd Rahim, and Nurazzura Mohamad Diah, “Sport as a Tool for Social Inclusion: A Study of Minority Student in Pekan Pahang” (presentation, Pekan International Education Conference, Pekan, Pahang Malaysia, Augusts 2015), <https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.16452.48006>.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Jim Parry, “Physical Education as Olympic Education,” *European Physical Education Review* 10, no. 1 (1998):156, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1356336X9800400206>.

¹⁵ Ibid.

identity and unity of community, and facilitating social inclusion.¹⁶ In addition, managing migrants and refugees requires appropriate strategy, as part of which young people may particularly benefit from using sport and recreation, although there is limited empirical data supporting the link between sport and socialization.¹⁷ Therefore, more studies need to be conducted in this area.

3.2 *Olympic Philosophy of Sport and Participation: Coubertin's Legacy*

In ancient times, sports and physical activities were developed as mechanisms to develop fighting skills, strength, and physical toughness,¹⁸ and the ancient Greek city states displayed the prowess of their athletes¹⁹ as a point of civic pride for in festivals such as the Olympic Games, and the cultural role of sport continued to develop but never popular under the Romans.²⁰ While the Greek vision of sport was one of beauty and finesse,²¹ the Romans emphasized moral aspects of games, such as character-building virtues including loyalty, solidarity, discipline, and moral and social excellence.²²

The modern Olympic Games (first held in 1896) were established on the same principles as the ancient games: on ethics, an elite, the character of chivalry, truce and periodicity, young adults,

¹⁶ Susan E. Vail, "Community Development and Sport Participation," *Journal of Sport Management* (2007): 578-583, quoted in James Skinner, Dwight H. Zakus and Jacqui Cowell, *Development through Sport: Building Social Capital in Disadvantaged Communities* (Sport Management Review, 2008), 253-275.

¹⁷ Oliff, *Playing for the Future*, 25.

¹⁸ Domhnall MacAuley, "A History of Physical Activity, Health and Medicine," *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine* 87, no. 1 (1994): 32-33, <http://www.pubmedcentral.nih.gov/articlerender.fcgi?artid=1294279&tool=pmcentrez&rendertype=abstract>

¹⁹ Graham Scambler, *Sport and Society - History, Power and Culture* (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2005), 7-47.

²⁰ Don Kyle, "Directions in Ancient Sport History," *Journal of Sport History* 10, no. 1 (1983):15.

²¹ Scambler, *Sport and Society*, 7-47.

²² Tim J. Cornell, "On War and Games in the Ancient World", in *The Global Nexus Engaged : Past, Present, Future Interdisciplinary Olympic Studies (Sixth International Symposium for Olympic Research)*, ed. Robert Knight Barney, Kevin B. Wamsley and Scott G. Martyn (Richmond St London: University of Western Ontario, 2002), 30, <http://library.la84.org/SportsLibrary/ISOR/ISOR2002e.pdf>

beauty, and *poesy ad peage*.²³ However, it should be noted that there are fundamental differences from the ancient model, particularly as the games have developed since the 20th century.²⁴ For instance, the modern Olympics are not associated with any particular religion, whereas the cultic activities of Greek religion were integral to the original games, and there is more emphasis on inclusivity, equality, fair play, tolerance²⁵ and sportsmanship in the modern games while the ancient version was heavily predicated on physical strength, power and tradition.²⁶ The most fundamental similarity is the cult of athletic excellence and a cosmopolitan ethos. People from all over the Hellenic 'world' attended contests at Olympia, Delphi, Nemea, and the Isthmus, while the modern Olympics essentially includes competitors from every part of the globe.²⁷

In the modern era, the name of Baron Pierre De Coubertin is equated with the whole system of the Olympics. Coubertin was influenced by a few ideologies while promoting the idea of Olympism.²⁸ Born French, he was heavily influenced by the French, Anglo-American, Anglo-Saxon, some Internationalist and Ancient Greek traditions that shaped his ideology about the Olympics.²⁹ The spirit of the Olympics covers the mind, soul and body.³⁰ It is aimed at educating and cultivating people via sport.³¹ Since the Greek era,

²³ Pierre de Coubertin, "Coubertin's Lesson: The Fundamentals of the Philosophy of the Modern Olympics," *Bulletin Du Comite International Olympique* 56, (1935): 54, <https://digital.la84.org/digital/collection/p17103coll1/id/27204/rec/1>

²⁴ Norbert Müller, *Olympic Education* (Barcelona: University of Barcelona, 2010), 11-16.

²⁵ Heather L. Reid, "Olympic Sport and Its Lessons for Peace." *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport* 33, no. 2 (2006):209–211, <https://doi:10.1080/00948705.2006.9714702>.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 208.

²⁷ Clarence Augustus Manning, "Professionalism in Greek Athletics," *The Classical Weekly* 11 (1917):74.

²⁸ Conrado Duránte, "Peace in the Ideology of Baron Pierre de Coubertin," *Olympic Review* (2001): 45-47.

²⁹ Reid, "Olympic Sport and Its Lessons," 207–208.

³⁰ Sigmund Loland, "Coubertin's Ideology of Olympism from the Perspective of the History of Ideas," *OLYMPIKA: The International Journal of Olympic Studies* IV 4 (1995):55-62.

³¹ Reid, "Olympic Sport and Its Lessons," 205–211.

sport has been all about bodily strength, heavily related to masculine virtues³² and linked to the idea of Olympism, as advocated by Coubertin, but as noted above, the 21st-century Olympics are greatly concerned with social inclusivity.³³

Table 1: Timeline for Sport for Peace and Development (SPD)

1978	Sport and physical education as a fundamental human right
1979	Right of women and girls to participate in sport
1989	Every child's right to play
1991	The unique role of sport in eradicating poverty and promoting development
1993	UN General Assembly revives the tradition of the Olympic Truce
2001	UN Secretary-General appoints a Special Adviser on Sport for Development and Peace,
2003	The UN Inter-Agency Task Force on Sport for Development and Peace
	First Conference on Sport for Development and Peace (SDP)
	First International Next Step Conference brings together SDP experts and practitioners
	First UN General Assembly Resolution on SDP
2004	SDP IWG is established
	European Commission launches European Year of Education through Sport
2005	UN Proclaims International Year for Sport and Physical Education
	EU recognizes the role of sport to attain the MDGs
	World Summit expresses its support to SDP
2006	UN Secretary-General sets out the UN Action Plan on SDP

³² Loland, "Coubertin's Ideology of Olympism, 63-66.

³³ Cornell, "On War and Games in the Ancient World", 30.

	African Union launches the International Year of African Football
	SDP IWG launches its Preliminary Report Sport for Development and Peace: From Practice to Policy
2007	First African Convention recognizes the power of sport to contribute to education
	EU White Paper on Sport acknowledges the increasing social and economic role of sport
2008	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities enters into force, reinforcing the right of people with disabilities to participate on an equal basis with others in recreation, leisure and sporting activities
	Final report Harnessing the Power of SDP: Recommendations to Governments
2009	The activation of TWG (Thematic Working Group) Sport, Child and Youth Development
2010	European Regional Meeting
2011	The activation of TWG Sport and Gender, Sport and Peace
2012	Thematic Meeting
2013	Institutional Review
2014	The activation of TWG Sport and Person with Disabilities
2015	Discontinuation of secretariat services
2016	The inclusion of Refugee Team in Olympic Games, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

Source: Data of SPD from "Introduction to Sport for Development and Peace", Sports Think Tank, accessed November 15, 2018, <http://www.sportsthinktank.com/uploads/sport-for-international-devt.pdf>.

4. Findings

The findings of this study are divided into two. The first part reveals the demographic description of the refugee athletes. The second part is the summative content analysis based on the secondary data (interviews conducted by various parties). Based on Table 2, five

male and six female refugee athletes competed in Rio 2016. Among these 11 personalities, ten competed in the Olympics and one in the Paralympics. These athletes were aged between 16-37 years old. The data also reveal that these athletes came from conflict areas of African and Asian continents. In terms of sports typology, these athletes competed in the athletics, aquatics and judo events. Additionally, apart from those who trained in Kakuma Refugee Camp Kenya, the remainder were scattered in Europe and South America.

4.1 Participation Matters More Than Winning/Losing

Based on the data, the researchers found that refugee athletes' participation in sport is more substantial than winning a match. As refugees, sending the message of peace to others is meaningful:

“The most important thing is not to win gold... but to spread the peace.”

(James Nyiang Chiengjiek, Athletics)

Experiencing conflict and bloodshed had taught these athletes to appreciate the meaning of freedom. Freedom means practising and competing in sport once again:

“I've seen too much war, too much death. I do not want to get into that. I want to stay clean so I can do my sport.”

(Popole Misenga, Judo)

It is unfortunate to be a refugee. However, this did not stop them from participating in the Olympic Games. Their passion and participation brought hope to those in the refugee camps to chase their dream in life:

“I feel very excited. This is the first chance for the refugees to participate in the Olympics and to give us hope, for us to encourage the young generations of fellow refugees who are remaining in the camps maybe to continue their talent.”

(Rose Nathike Lokonyen, Athletics)

Indeed, conflict and war are temporary in nature. In the end, humans naturally love peace, freedom and calmness in their life:

“I want to show everyone that, after the pain, after the storm, come calm days.”

(Yusra Mardini, Aquatics)

4.2 Equal Access to Sports Facilities

Apart from the participating agenda, the researchers found that these athletes were treated fairly in their host countries. This included getting access to sports facilities. Therefore, they trained hard for their Olympic dream:

“That is why I am trying very hard, three times a day - in the morning, midday, and in the evening.”

(James Nyang Chiengjiek, Athletics)

Living in a new place is not easy. These refugees had to socialize with their host communities. This process was indispensable in order for others to recognize their presence. Many of them did well in adjusting themselves in the new place and to the new culture:

“Brazil is my home now.... I want to stay here and build a new life.”

(Yolande Mabika, Judo)

Having access to training facilities means they had equal opportunities to reclaim their strength and fitness to the best level possible. It looks like they were not affected by their status as refugees while competing with other athletes:

“If others can break the world record, what will stop me?”

(Anjelina Nadai Lohalith, Athletics)

4.3 Recapturing Pride and Dignity through Sport

Sport can increase the moral and psychological sentiments of an athlete. Although they were refugees, the IOC had granted them this platform to perform to the best of their ability and serve as examples to other fellow refugees:

“My fight in the Olympics will be for all refugees, to give them faith in their dreams.”

(Popole Misenga, Judo)

South Sudanese athletes in Kukuma Refugee Camp in Kenya had a different experience:

“The first day I arrived they treated me like a big boss and I am not a boss! People liked me a lot... God gave me the chance.”

(Paulo Amotun Lokoro, Athletics)

“Maybe I will build my life here in Germany, and when I am an old lady I will go back to Syria and teach people about my experience.”

(Yusra Mardini, Aquatics)

To our opinion, being refugees was a blessing in disguise for these athletes. Although they were ensnared in the middle of crises, various opportunities were given to them. Some of them managed to obtain asylum status, which allowed them to stay affiliated to their host countries. Comprehensive data on their background information is shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Background of Refugee Athletes in Rio 2016 (N = 11).

Items	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
Age	15 - 20		21 - 25		26 - 30		31 - 35		36 - 40	
Sex	-	2	4	2	2	-	-	-	1	-
Olympics	-	2	4	2	1	-	-	-	1	-
Paralympics	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-
South Sudan	-	-	3	2	-	-	-	-	-	-
Syria	-	1	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-
Congo	-	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Ethiopia	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-
Athletics	-	1	3	2	-	-	-	-	1	-
Aquatics	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-

Items	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
Age	15 - 20		21 - 25		26 - 30		31 - 35		36 - 40	
Judo	-	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Kakuma Refugees Camp, Kenya	-	-	2	3	-	-	-	-	-	-
Rio	1	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
Berlin	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Belgium (Granted Asylum)	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-
Luxembourg	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Athens	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-

Source: Data of Refugee Athletes in Rio (2016) gathered and adapted from "Official Olympics Website," accessed November 15, 2018, <https://www.olympic.org>

5. Discussion

This discussion is contextualized on the participation of refugees in a sport with Talcott Parsons' theory of AGIL³⁴ and Everett Lee's Theory of Migration³⁵, both of which are related to the discussion and have been utilized widely in social science and migration discourses concerning cases worldwide.

The founder of AGIL theory, Talcott Parsons, is well-known for his vast contributions of thought in the field of social sciences, particularly economics and sociology. One of his most significant contributions to the field of sociology is the AGIL framework, which was used in this paper for data analysis. We feel that the determinant causes of refugees could be due to some push and pull factors that triggered their movement to other nations. In order to justify the functional theories, the basic principles of AGIL and its connection with the issues of refugees in sports should be explained.

AGIL stands for *Adaptation, Goal, Integration and Latency*. It is considered as a scheme or paradigm by many functionalists. It represents the idea of 'processes of adaptive upgrading,

³⁴ Parsons, *The Social System*, 45-76.

³⁵ Everett S. Lee, "A Theory of Migration," *Demography* 3, no. 1 (1966): 47-57.

differentiation, inclusion and value generalization'.³⁶ The Adaptation and Goal phases are closely related to systems of behaviour and of personality of members. The Integration and Latency phases are associated with cultural and social systems.³⁷ However, it should be noted that these four indispensable phases are interrelated and interpenetrated with one another. Parsons thought on AGIL is also linked to voluntary actions, which are based on: (a) free-will; (b) self-initiative; (c) individual autonomy, despite material or ideal restriction; (d) individual autonomy (regardless of unstable social order); and (e) residual normative elements.³⁸

In the case of the IOC Refugee Team in Rio 2016, this theoretical framework is well applied by looking at their experiences and journey to the host nations or refugee camps. As indicated in Diagram 1, all refugee athletes who competed in Rio had adapted to the new cultural and social systems in their host countries, motivated by their desire to obtain their ultimate goal (to compete in the Olympic Games). In order to adapt to the in the new places, they were required to embrace new norms and values in the new host nations. Most indispensably, all these athletes had voluntarily decided and taken actions to move to other host nations, despite the potential limitations that they would encounter.

Diagram 1: Parsons' AGIL and Refugees in Sport



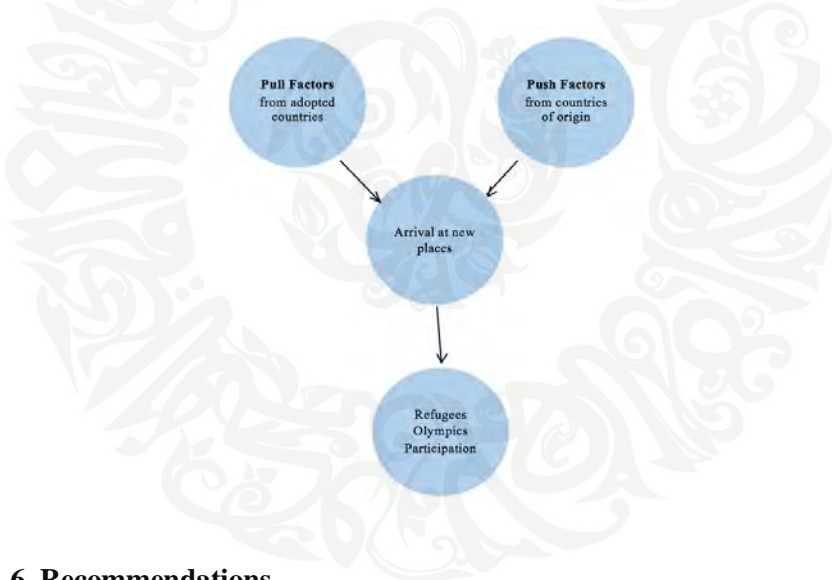
³⁶ Raf Vanderstraeten, "Talcott Parsons and the Enigma of Secularization," *European Journal of Social Theory* 16, no. 1 (2013):80, <https://doi:10.1177/1368431012449236>.

³⁷ Jacek Tittenbrun, "Talcott Parsons' Economic Sociology," *International Letters of Social and Humanistic Sciences* 13, (2013):21.

³⁸ Anthony H. Richmond, "Sociological Theories of International Migration: The Case of Refugees," *Current Sociology* 36, no. 2 (1998):14, <https://doi:10.1177/001139288036002004>.

Lee’s Pull and Push theory of migration³⁹ views migration as a lasting or semi-lasting change of residences, determined by push and pull factors. Pull and push factors are two contradictory forces that trigger human migration from one place to another. Pull factors are the appealing aspects that make people go to one place while push factors are those matters that force people to leave their place of origin. In the case of this paper, for example, the refugee athletes were mainly forced to leave their countries due to political instability occurred in their country of origin – push factors. Simultaneously, the driving factors such as new sporting opportunity provided in the new adopted homes – pull factors. To visualize this, Diagram 2 describes the nature of Lee’s pull and push factors as applied to refugee athletes.

Diagram 2: Everett Lee’s Pull and Push theory and Refugees in Sport



6. Recommendations

The participation of the Refugee Team in the Olympics reveals the great potential for sport to function as a powerful tool for development and peace.⁴⁰ Indeed, this new practice by IOC has

³⁹ Lee, “A Theory of Migration,” 49-50.

⁴⁰ Sports Think Tank, “Introduction to Sport for Development and Peace”, 3-12.

marked the importance of sport in our lives and communities, not only for the sake of the physical and psychological wellness of individuals and direct participants. Today, sport is seen as a serious agenda and contributes to the inclusion of refugees throughout the world.⁴¹ Based on the data available for this study, it is substantial to indicate that the power of sport has crossed geographical boundaries.

The decision of the IOC to put together refugees and asylum seekers as a team should be acknowledged. Indirectly, this act will call others to create a better world.⁴² Although the team did not win medals, the important message is to participate, and indeed it is remarkable that the members were able to compete in their sports at the highest possible global level. This is fully in the spirit of the Olympics as envisaged by Coubertin.⁴³

Secondly, the opportunity given by the host nations to allow them to train together with their athletes is appreciated. This opportunity is rare and not a privilege they can access in their countries of origin. By training with others, the athletes' performance was enhanced prior to the games.

Thirdly, refugees' participation in the Olympics is meaningful, allowing them to regain their pride and dignity.⁴⁴ Losing their relatives and homes was something to be pondered upon by these athletes. They also lost their training grounds and the supporting infrastructure upon which high-level athletes depend. By virtue of their Olympic participation, they regained control of their lives once more. At this point, the researchers would like to highlight a few recommendations based on the findings.

6.1 Sports Programme as Intervention Tool

This study reveals that sport activities have the ability to unite people and to connect them to a new place and culture.⁴⁵ It is reported that

⁴¹ Pelle Kvalsund, "Sport as a Response to Emergencies and Disasters." in *Sport, Peace, & Development*, ed. Keith Gilbert and Will Bennet (Champaign, Illinois: Common Ground, 2012), 229-242.

⁴² Reid, "Olympic Sport and Its Lessons," 205–214.

⁴³ Loland, "Coubertin's Ideology of Olympism," 55-62.

⁴⁴ Conrado Durántez Corral et al. "PRINCIPLES OF THE OLYMPIC MOVEMENT," *Journal of Human Sport & Exercise* 5, no. 1 (2010): 4-6.

⁴⁵ Mahfoud Amara et al. *The roles of sport and education in the social inclusion of*

the sports-based intervention⁴⁶ programmes can be powerful tools to promote social integration,⁴⁷ inclusion,⁴⁸ and cohesion⁴⁹ for vulnerable groups.⁵⁰ In the context of Malaysia, as a multi-ethnic society, Malaysians can learn from this experience too.⁵¹ Educational institutions should play a role in advocating this practice.⁵² Hence, apart from the academic agenda, sports activities in schools (and educational institutions)⁵³ should be seen as intervention tools to integrate students from various backgrounds.⁵⁴

asylum seekers and refugees: An evaluation of policy and practice in the UK (Loughborough: Institute of Sport and Leisure Policy, Loughborough University and Stirling University, 2005), 20-21.

⁴⁶ Oliver Dudfield, "Sport for Development and Peace: Opportunities, Challenges and the Commonwealth's Response." in *Strengthening Sport for Development and Peace: National Policies and Strategies*, ed. Oliver Dudfield, (London: Marlborough House, Commonwealth Secretariat, 2014), 1-12.

⁴⁷ Ramón Spaaij, "Beyond the Playing Field: Experiences of Sport, Social Capital and Integration among Somalis in Australia," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 35, no. 9 (2012):1526–1535, <https://doi:10.1080/01419870.2011.592205>.

⁴⁸ Ramón Spaaij, "Cultural Diversity in Community: An Ethnography Inquiry of Somali Australians' Experiences," *Sport Management Review* 16, no. 1 (2013):37–38, <https://doi:10.1016/j.smr.2012.06.003>.

⁴⁹ Chris Stone, "Utopian Community Football? Sport, Hope and Belongingness in the Lives of Refugees and Asylum Seekers," *Leisure Studies* 37, no. 2 (2017): 174–175, <https://doi:10.1080/02614367.2017.1329336>.

⁵⁰ Ramón Spaaij, "Refugee Youth, Belonging and Community Sport," *Leisure Studies* 34, no. 3 (2015):304–313, <https://doi:10.1080/02614367.2014.893006>

⁵¹ Nurazzura, Mohamad Diah and Baidruel Hairiel Abd Rahim, "The Pull Factors of Minority Students' Participation in Sports," *Asian Journal of Management Science and Education* 3, no. 1 (2014):143–45.

⁵² Monika Stodolska and Alexandris Konstantinos, "The Role of Recreational Sport in the Adaptation of First Generation Immigrants in the United States," *Journal of Leisure Research* 36, no. 3 (2004):386, <https://doi:10.1080/00222216.2004.11950029>.

⁵³ Richard Giulianotti, "Human Rights, Globalization and Sentimental Education: The Case of Sport," *Sport in Society: Cultures, Commerce, Media, Politics* 7, no. 3 (2004): 355-369, <https://doi:10.1080/1743043042000291686>.

⁵⁴ Richard Giulianotti, "The Sport, Development and Peace Sector: A Model of Four Social Policy Domains," *Journal of Social Policy* 40, no. 4 (2011):757-76, <https://doi:10.1017/S0047279410000930>.

6.2 *Funding Participation*

Listening to the narrative of these refugees' athletes in mass media, it is recommended to all multinational companies to finance athletic facilities and activities for disadvantaged groups under their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). CSR programmes are important to ensure solid preparation for athletes to compete in the Olympics and Paralympics. With sufficient help from these companies, the athletes (refugees) can train and participate in the competitions prior to the Olympic Games. Such financial support could also boost their morale to compete with other athletes under their own name (as the Refugees' Team).

Multi-event sports programs such as the Olympics, Paralympics, and Commonwealth Games carry some identities and images. Their events are considered prestigious and robust. Therefore, the engagement of multinational companies in refugees' participations will enhance their long-term business and boost their visibility among sports spectators. This unique opportunity will surely spur the image of sponsoring companies and enable them to genuinely enhance the lives of millions of disadvantaged people, including the athletes themselves and those they inspire.

6.3 *Empowering Sociology of Sport as an Academic Discipline*

Human conflict is a primordial and apparently unstoppable phenomenon, but the negative drives of humanity can be mitigated by sports, particularly when they are conceptualized and driven under an aura of peace, mutual respect, and development.⁵⁵ Sport is multidimensional, and it includes profound encouragement of teamwork and cooperation in addition to the more obvious aspects of competition and excellence.⁵⁶ In realizing this vision, a specific theme on sport for peace and development should be developed as a discipline and included in the discipline of sociology of sport.

⁵⁵ Cárdenas, "Peace Building through Sport?," 26-27.

⁵⁶ Jay Coakley, "The Sociology of Sport as a Career and Academic Discipline," in *Reflections on Sociology of Sport: Ten Questions, Ten Scholars, Ten Perspectives*, ed. Kevin Young (Wagon Lane Bingley, UK: Emerald Publishing Limited, 2017), 42-44, <https://doi.org/10.1108/S1476-285420170000010003>.

Similarly, in the context of Malaysia, there is an urgent need to empower the discipline of the sociology of sport. The Malaysian government has traditionally made substantial efforts to improve sport performances, apart from having the policy of sport for all and sport as an industry.⁵⁷ While it is true that sport and performance are the main agenda of all countries worldwide when it comes to the highest levels of international competition, the sociology of sport is largely overlooked compared to technical sport-related disciplines. Perhaps, this issue needs to be addressed at the ministry level so that the study on society, sport and culture can be seen as equally substantial. Truly, what has been experienced by the refugee athletes serves as a reminder for all of us.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, the participation of refugee athletes in Rio 2016 was substantial. Based on the data, it is pertinent to address the issue of refugees' participation in sport. The aim of their participation is not merely to win but to celebrate the meaning of free will participation. This paper also reveals that refugees genuinely appreciate the facilitation of access to utilise sports facilities, and that this increases their respect for host countries. By sharing the facilities, they are exposed to the training system of the host countries. This invaluable experience is vital for them as athletes without a nation. Thirdly, it is essential for them to participate in the Olympics as the conflict in their original country has reduced their competency and skills in sport. Through sport, they have regained their confidence, pride and dignity, inspiring millions of their peers to similarly engage and excel.

⁵⁷ Mohd Salleh Aman, Mawarni Mohamed, and Mohd Sofian Omar-Fauzee, "Sport for All and Elite Sport: Underlining Values and Aims for Government Involvement via Leisure Policy," *European Journal of Social Sciences* 9, no. 4 (2009): 659-668.

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Special Issue

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