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Mixed-sex in sport for development: a pragmatic and symbolic device. The case of touch rugby for forced migrants in Rome

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Following the success of its all-male refugee football team, the Italian voluntary-based association Liberi Nantes created a touch rugby team as a pilot project aimed at involving female forced migrants. Initially set up as an all-woman activity to provide a less intimidating environment, the touch rugby group was later turned into a mixed-sex team. While potentially enabling transformative experiences and generating opportunities for challenging gender stereotypes, the mixed-gender character of the touch rugby provision also served broader objectives within Liberi Nantes' mission. Focusing on the accounts of the activists and volunteers involved in the project, this paper investigates the practical and symbolic reasons for the strategic use of mixed-gender sport and its implications. Notably, by analysing the development of the touch rugby team, we highlight how its mixed-gender nature contributes to nourishing a wider rhetoric of social mixing and celebration of diversity, in which Liberi Nantes' identity is embedded.

Despite the growing consolidation of the sport-for-development sector (Giulianotti 2011), only recently have policy-makers and practitioners drawn on sport as a vehicle to foster the social inclusion specifically of males (Evers 2010) and females (Guerin et al. 2003; Palmer 2008) from refugee backgrounds (Jeanes, O'Connor, and Alfrey 2014). Sport participation has been shown to bring some benefits, although these are difficult to measure (Amara et al. 2005; Coalter 2010), such as facilitating the beneficiaries' interaction with the local environment and reducing anti-social behaviour. Nevertheless, gender boundaries and inequalities tend to remain unchallenged (Spaaij 2015) and refugee women are often excluded from participation in sports activities based on gender-related expectations that either prevent them from engaging in physical leisure activities (Evers 2010) or confine them to a spectator role. In the few cases where forced migrant women are actively involved in sport activities, this is mainly done in the context of 'typically female' sports or at least in women-only groups (Amara et al. 2005).

This sounds particularly limiting in the light of recent studies that have shown how mixed-sex sports can challenge the discourse of male dominance embedded in contemporary sport culture (Pringle 2005) by providing opportunities for unique and transformative experiences of embodied equality between male and female participants (Channon 2014).

On the basis of this, mixed-sex sport is becoming more widely-used in sport-for-development initiatives aimed at challenging normative conceptions of sex difference by trying to redefine sex boundaries and hierarchies. However, such initiatives are themselves underpinned by specific conceptions and representations of sex relations that can in turn become somehow normative or generate asymmetric relationships between sport-for-development practitioners and their beneficiaries. Moreover, mixed-sex sports provisions can sometimes play a strategic role, becoming functional in broader interventions and rhetorics.

These issues are discussed here through the exploratory study of a small sport project aimed at forced migrants in Italy, with particular focus on encouraging women's participation. In 2010, the voluntary-based sports association Liberi Nantes, which has been working with refugees and asylum-seekers in Rome since 2007, created a touch rugby¹ team that was initially composed of women only and later became a mixed-gender team.

The project – the only one in Italy that uses this method of intervention² – was not specifically conceived to challenge gender stereotypes and conceptions of sex differences, but was rather part of a broader effort to support the integration of refugees³ by providing opportunities for social mixing and interaction across ethnic, sex and age boundaries.

Therefore, the aim of this paper is not to evaluate the actual impact of the project in challenging or perpetuating sex and gender stereotypes, but rather to examine the practical and symbolic reasons for, and implications of, the strategic use of mixed-gender sport. To do so, our analysis will focus on the accounts and representations of Liberi Nantes' activists and volunteers.

Women (forced) migrants and sport-for-development

Sport-based initiatives are increasingly being used to try and address a variety of social issues (Beutler 2008; Kidd 2008), although concerns have been raised about the vagueness of such claims (Black 2010; Coalter 2010; Lyras and Welty Peachey 2011), the actual contribution of many sport-for-development programmes to inclusive social change (Kelly 2011; Long and Sanderson 2001) and their potential neocolonial impact (Darnell and Hayhurst 2011).

Most research on the role of sport in helping empower marginalized groups has focused on its potential to extend social networks and increase social capital. Notably with regard to migrants' participation, mostly mainstream team sports have been

studied for both their bonding effect of strengthening intra-group solidarity and cohesion, and their bridging capacity to favour inter-group relations and integration (Elling, De Knop, and Knoppers 2001; Janssens and Verweel 2014; Spaaij 2013a).

Beyond their functional potential in terms of networking, integration and acculturation (Evans 2014), sport and other leisure activities can also contribute to meeting important emotional needs of migrants (Boccagni and Baldassar 2015) and fostering a sense of identity and belonging (Ratna 2014; Walseth 2006a, 2006b) by acting as ‘culturally oriented means of survival and thriving in life if engaged in a constructive and meaningful way’ (Stack and Iwasaki 2009). Moreover, the very access of migrants to sport and leisure can be regarded as a right of participation and considered a matter of social justice in itself (Aitchison 2007).

Providing opportunities for meaningful engagement in sport activities becomes even more challenging in the case of refugee women, who suffer a double marginality for experiencing both gender inequalities, on the one hand, and the transient, rootless and uncertain condition of refugees, on the other. Besides coming from experiences that are ‘by definition traumatic and characterized by persecution, displacement, loss, grief, and forced separation from family, home and belongings’ (Olliff 2008), refugees also live a precarious existence, moving from one temporary host location to another, which makes it harder to settle and build new networks of relationships.

This clearly generates a number of limitations to their involvement in sports activities, which Olliff (2008) indicates to be structural, mediating and personal barriers. Structural barriers include the lack of funding for sustainable programmes; the tendency towards ‘one size fits all’ activities instead of a bespoke (tailored) provision; inconsistent referral of refugees to sport and recreation programmes by settlement services; barriers between targeted and mainstream sport and recreation options; access to transport; access to public space and facilities. Mediating barriers include: lack of inclusive and culturally sensitive practices in existing sport and recreation providers; lack of parental/guardian support in the case of young refugees; a different sport culture between the country of origin and the host country; racism and discrimination. Personal barriers include: resettlement experience, lack of time, other commitments; financial constraints; not knowing the rules of a specific sport.

Additionally, working with forced migrants in Canada, Guruge and Collins (2008) observed that ‘women from countries where many refugees originate have less opportunity to engage in social and recreational activities than their male counterparts’. Ironically, being offered such opportunities in the host country does not necessarily make things easier, as they ‘are expected to stay at home and care for family (not just for children but often for elders and other extended family members as well) and their fear of using social resources limits their interaction with broader society’ (Guruge and Collins 2008). Studying the involvement of Somali Australian youth in community football clubs, Spaaij (2015) noted that ‘while social boundaries such as clan, team and locality are porous, other boundaries of inclusion/exclusion, notably gender, ethnicity and religion, tend to be more stable and more difficult to cross’ (Spaaij 2015).

While being rooted in deep cultural and social dynamics, some of these boundaries are also partly reinforced by the inner logic of mainstream traditional sports, which are based on categorization/segregation by gender, age and ability in order to ensure fair competition between equally skilled/strong/fast opponents. However, although a vast proportion of sport-for-development programmes aimed at women use football (soccer) as their main activity (Hancock, Lyras, and Ha 2013), a growing number of initiatives that aim at blurring boundaries and categorization entail either the desportization of traditional, mainstream sports (Sterchele 2015) or the use of alternative activities which are deemed more suitable to favour social mixing and inclusion, such as tchoukball, touch rugby, dodgeball, korfbal, as well as emerging lifestyle sports (e.g. Crum 1988; Gilchrist and Wheaton 2011; Thorpe and Rinehart 2012). In either case, mixed-sex activities are organized to encourage female participation, limit male dominance and challenge gender stereotypes.

Nonetheless, researchers have highlighted the ambivalent effects of such activities by showing how segregated sport provision can offer safer spaces (Brady 2005; Jeanes, O'Connor, and Alfrey 2014; Spaaij and Schulenkorf 2014) that are more attentive to the specific gender, cultural and religious background and needs of their participants (Elling, De Knop and Knoppers 2003; Watson, Tucker, and Drury 2013). These intersectional issues become particularly visible and have been largely explored, for instance, in the analysis of Muslim women's involvement in sports and physical activity (e.g. Ahmad 2011; Benn and Pfister 2013; Benn, Dagkas, and Jawad 2011; Dagkas, Benn, and Jawad 2011; Guerin et al. 2003; Jiwani and Rail 2010; Wray 2002; Zahidi, Syed Ali, and Nor 2012). Separated sport activities can also provide members of disempowered groups with temporary relief from the strain habitually experienced in their everyday asymmetrical interactions (Krouwel et al. 2006). Moreover, the simplistic idea that segregated sports activities only reinforce bonding social capital, whereas mixed activity generates bridging social capital, has been questioned by several studies (Elling, De Knop, and Knoppers 2001; Janssens and Verweel 2014; Spaaij 2012; Theeboom, Schaillée, and Nols 2012).

With specific reference to the sport provision for women, and particularly migrant women, the debate about the advantages and disadvantages of both mixed-sex and separated activities is still very open. However, this debate is itself partly underpinned by cultural imperialism and hegemonic representations based on a deficit model of sport participation (Toffoletti and Palmer 2015). As observed by Chawansky (2011), the fact that sport-for-development programming 'seeks to either allow for girls' sporting access in mixed-gender settings or aspires to 'empower' females in girls-only contexts' seem to imply that girls 'have gendered identities/experiences that need to be assisted, altered, or enhanced' which 'obscures an understanding of gender as a relational identity'.

The capacity of sport for breaking down gender hierarchies and divisions remains therefore a contested issue. So far, the benefits to women of involvement in mixed-sex sports have been explored only by a few studies that have investigated the 'undoing'

of gender stereotypes (Channon 2014) either directly by focusing on women's empowerment or indirectly by concentrating on men's experience and the challenge to hegemonic masculinities (Channon 2013a, 2013b; Tagg 2008). The fact that several sport-for-development programmes provide mixed-sex activities despite the paucity of research and lack of evidence about their benefits suggests that such initiatives are often based on optimistic assumptions and pre-conceptions. When sports provision is proposed/imposed within the asymmetric relation between donor and beneficiaries, such underpinning assumptions can easily assume connotations of cultural imperialism. Warning of the potential neocolonial dangers of sport for development, Darnell (2007) observes that very often,

a well-intentioned and benevolent 'mission' of training, empowering and assisting is not only based upon, but to an extent *requires*, the establishment of a dichotomy between the empowered and disempowered, the vocal and the silent, the 'knowers' and the known. [original italics]

Context and methods

Italy has only recently changed from a nation of migrants to a country of immigrants.⁴ Therefore, Italian policies on migrants and notably refugees were still non-existent or largely inadequate up until the late 1990s (Korac 2001, 2003).⁵ Following a series of reception projects randomly activated at the local level, a more integrated and organic system was created in the early 2000s through a network of reception centres spread around the country, enabling the hosting of 26,432 forced migrants between 2002 and 2009 (Marchetti 2014). However, such a network covers only a limited proportion of requests for admission.⁶ Moreover, this system enables the government to delegate most of the burden of migrant assistance to under-resourced local authorities, which in turn tend to rely heavily on the civic sector (Alexander 2012) composed of networks of volunteer-based associations such as Liberi Nantes.

The latter is an amateur sports association created in 2007 by 10 friends, men and women, with the purpose of supporting sports participation amongst asylum-seekers and refugees in Rome,⁷ where none of the few migrants' associations involved in sport activities (Granata 2013) was composed of forced migrants. Despite the formal (and occasionally financial) support received by a number of public and civic partners⁸, Liberi Nantes relies heavily on the volunteer work of a small group of people who put great effort into managing to restore, through crowd-funding and other fundraising initiatives, a run-down football pitch they had been allocated by the local authorities in the Roman neighbourhood of Pietralata.

The first activity of the association was the creation of an open male football team, which from 2008 onwards has been participating 'off-table' in the lowest local level league, since the Italian Football Federation does not officially recognize all-migrants teams. Alongside the more regular players, dozens of occasional participants have been

joining the training sessions on a drop-in basis, often borrowing second-hand equipment collected by the volunteers. Following the success of this initiative, which involved some 200 migrants in just two years,⁹ Liberi Nantes created in early 2010 a touch rugby team with the purpose of including the further marginalized category of refugee women.¹⁰

With the aim of promoting this initiative and attracting participants, contact was established with one of the few reception centres for women forced migrants in Rome, namely La Casa di Giorgia (Giorgia's Home). Located quite far from Liberi Nantes' pitch, although on the same metro line, this centre has a capacity of 30–35 guests at a time and hosts around 70–90 women per year.¹¹ Over the three years considered by this study, about 15 migrant women overall got involved in the touch rugby project, although with very different patterns of attendance one from another.

Alongside the touch rugby provision, whose practical and symbolic implications are explored in this paper, further initiatives have been activated by Liberi Nantes, such as hiking and walking excursions and Italian language courses.

Liberi Nantes touch rugby was one of several cases investigated as part of the broader European project MIMoSA (Migrants' Inclusion Model of Sport for All) aimed at fostering migrants' inclusion/empowerment through sports by creating European networks of practitioners and policy-makers, sharing best practices, and developing models and methodologies for intervention.

As such, this case study was only funded by a small share of the overall budget and was restricted by the time framework of the wider MIMoSA project (April 2011–July 2012), which unfortunately partly overlapped with a period of several months (September 2011–January 2012) in which the pilot activities of Liberi Nantes touch rugby had to be suspended due to the lack of participants.

Moreover, the frequent turnover and the irregular patterns of the refugees' attendance, together with the 'screening' attitude adopted at times by some of our gatekeepers at Liberi Nantes (Scourfield 2012) to protect the participants and limit the research intrusiveness (Reeves 2010), further reduced the opportunities for ethnographic fieldwork and direct contact with the refugees involved in the programme.

Given these constraints, and considering the remit of the broader MIMoSA project, our purpose was not to undertake a systematic evaluation of the initiative through the voice of the refugees, which would have provided specific evidence (Banda et al. 2008; Kay 2012) of the actual contribution of the touch rugby initiative towards either the amelioration, or perpetuation, of sexual hierarchies and the inequality these involve.

Instead, our opportunistic sample (Patton 1990) focused on a small number of Liberi Nantes' activists and volunteers as information-rich cases in order to explore their experience and representations of the project, thus providing insights into the rationale and meanings underpinning the use of a mixed-gender sport activity such as touch rugby. Although all the volunteers involved in touch rugby were interviewed,

theoretical saturation was not fully reached (Strauss and Corbin 2008) and further investigation is needed.

All the fieldwork was conducted by the first author. Two field visits were carried out during one-day-long touch rugby events organized by Liberi Nantes in June 2011 and March 2012. The purpose was not to undertake in-depth ethnographic investigation, but rather to get access to the field and become familiar with the context through nonparticipant observation, informal conversations and exploratory interviews, as well as establish contacts with some of the volunteers and arrange for formal interviews to be conducted later on via Skype (Hanna 2012).

Overall, twelve interviews were undertaken with Liberi Nantes' members and volunteers during this study: ten within the time frame of the MIMoSA project (five during the field visit in June 2011, two in November/December 2011, three in March 2012) and two follow-ups in June 2013 to gather retrospective accounts on the development of the touch rugby initiative. These involved six women directly active in the touch rugby project as players, coaches or organizers (including the president of the association, who was interviewed three times) and four men, comprising the touch rugby coach of 2012 and other Liberi Nantes' members supporting the touch rugby events but otherwise engaged in other activities of the association such as football and hiking. The duration of interviews ranged from 20 to 90 min and all the participants gave their consent for note-taking (in the field) or digital recording (via Skype). The data provided by the transcripts were also complemented by documentary material published on and off line, as well as internal project documents that Liberi Nantes kindly consented to share for this study.

In this paper, we mainly focus on data from the in-depth interviews with those female volunteers who were more directly involved in the touch rugby project.¹² A thematic analysis (Sparkes and Smith 2014) was initially developed to identify and examine those parts of the volunteers' accounts that focused on the participation of forced migrant women in the touch rugby initiative and the different outcomes of both the original women-only and the subsequent mixed-sex sports provision. However, broader meanings emerged from the subsequent sociological discourse analysis (Ruiz 2009), drawing our attention to the way the volunteers described and made sense of the birth and evolution of the touch rugby project. This partly turned our work into a narrative analysis that investigated how the stories about the touch rugby team were used by the volunteers as means to claim Liberi Nantes' identity by expressing and constructing it at the same time (Spector-Mersel 2011).

A difficult start: struggling to engage and retain refugees in a women-only team

Initially set up as a women-only activity to provide a more protective and less intimidating environment, in its first months Liberi Nantes touch rugby found it hard to recruit enough players to run regular training sessions. The pilot activities, started in

early 2010, were suspended after a few months due to the lack of participants. They were resumed at the beginning of 2011, when the initiative eventually took off and a small group of 5–6 Italian female volunteers and 4 refugee women¹³ managed to train twice a week for about six months, attending (as spectators) their first ever touch rugby match in April 2011 and eventually taking part in their first one-day tournament in June 2011. Contacts were thus established with a few teams in Rome and a small network of friends was gradually developed within the touch rugby community. This gave some visibility to Liberi Nantes and facilitated the involvement of the refugee women in public events.

These six months of regular training enabled the volunteers to gradually build trust and relationships with the refugees also through off-pitch convivial moments such as meals and parties:

I've seen them change, in that at first they talked a lot among themselves and not much with us – they arrived, trained and left – while later I noticed that they really needed to open up, to talk, and to tell us their story. At the beginning it was a bit difficult, as you don't go there straight away and ask 'So where do you come from? How did you get here?' You give them time to regain their confidence, and then it is they who gradually talk about their past. Once we went for lunch together – cause at the end of the day you also have to create off-pitch moments to build a different connection – so we went together for a meal, we drew a map of Africa, and they explained to us where they came from, which route they had travelled all the way ...

The initial reserve was progressively overcome, to a point where empathic relations between volunteers and refugees could even be expressed at times through emotional and physical intimacy:

initially they came, they did this thing [the training] and then went away, full stop. Then, gradually, you became ... they really saw you as a friend you can rely on and therefore they told us a little bit about their life in Italy, that eventually wasn't like the one they had expected of course, and about their problems, the fact that sometimes you noticed that they said to you 'I feel bad', 'What's the matter?', 'I feel sick, I have pain here', so we tried to figure out what the matter was so that we could maybe give advice, like 'Take an anti-inflammatory', and eventually you cuddled them a little bit and the pain was gone, it wasn't really an actual physical pain but probably something they had inside, an inner discomfort and perhaps they needed someone to give them attention, also some love ...

Although only a small minority of the 30–35 refugees hosted by La Casa di Giorgia joined the touch rugby group in early 2011, this provided some of them with an alternative environment where self-expression could be encouraged, as reported by a volunteer from Liberi Nantes:

I met a girl who last year was volunteering at La Casa di Giorgia, and so spent a lot of time with them, and she told me ‘I can’t understand how you girls managed to have such a special and beautiful relationship with the four girls who came [to touch rugby], who were the most complicated of all those hosted at La Casa di Giorgia at that time ... for instance one of them told me that she spoke Italian with you, indeed she acted as a translator for the others as being the youngest she had learnt it the quickest, so very often it was she who translated into French for them, while at La Casa di Giorgia at one point she had stopped speaking Italian and gone back to only speaking French!’

Nonetheless, despite the encouraging results of the first half of 2011, the training sessions could not be resumed at the beginning of the new season in September because the two female volunteer coaches were not available anymore and all the refugee players had moved to other Italian or European cities following their resettlement pathway.¹⁴

After a few months of inactivity in autumn/winter 2011, two Liberi Nantes volunteers visited La Casa di Giorgia together with two new (male) volunteer coaches in January 2012 to try and advertise the initiative once again through a practical demonstration. As one of them recalls:

we arrived there, they were waiting for us; actually they had understood that we would make a speech, an oral presentation of the project ... and then, also, there was the problem that being January it was cold, anyway we went outside and tried to play with them, we called them, we went inside together with the social workers, then since they were at home many were wearing their pyjamas so they had to get changed, and this way we wasted time; then they slowly came out, one by one, as I say, it’s cold for them ... if he’s a male he comes and plays, while for them that too becomes a reason for resistance, so to speak ...

Similar comments, highlighting the low predisposition of refugee women to engage in outdoor physical activity in the event of bad weather, were a recurrent theme in our interviews. While many accounts tended to attribute a gendered nature to such attitude, others also referred to cultural reasons such as the lack of sporting socialization:

the girls live far from the city center (...) so when it’s cold, having to take the metro gets complicated for them. This year we had one of the girls, Shane, who has a gorgeous one-year-old baby daughter, Nadège, so not only didn’t she come when she couldn’t but also when the baby was sick, therefore with the girls we suffer from this problem a little bit that they don’t have a high sporting literacy, many of them have never done any sport ...

Despite their benevolent intent and the acknowledgement of several other difficulties and constraints, comments of this kind partly recall the deficit model criticized by Toffoletti and Palmer (2015) and Chawansky (2011).

Notwithstanding the cold, seven migrant women still took part in the short practical demonstration at La Casa di Giorgia. Other guests of the center preferred to stay in the dining room and watch the demonstration from the windows:

Then the others were intrigued, they looked through the window from the dining room, although they said 'It's cold, it's cold, tell us about that here inside' (...) they clearly didn't want to get out, although we were telling them 'If you come out then you'll warm up!', which is true actually, but it is not easy to make them realise this.

Once again the volunteers seem to implicitly refer to the migrants' lack of sport experience and knowledge as the source of understandable and yet unjustified concerns, thus unintentionally confirming a representation based on a deficit model. This interpretation was often intertwined with other considerations that acknowledged and addressed the problems faced by the refugees when trying to attend the training sessions:

in this period of January, February, March, when the days are still short, we did training around six and they were afraid of going around alone, they fear the darkness, the night more than the people, at times they didn't come also for this reason, a sprinkling of rain was enough, the fact that it was dark ... on Saturday morning they would come, on Wednesday they never did ... so we've cut it down to a single training session, we've made it longer, but it's on Saturday morning; during the week they also have an Italian language course, so in this way they were free from any other commitment, and then the darkness, this fear that at least some of them had, at least it was eliminated (...) they take the metro, they don't need to change, they take Line B and they are there, basically they go from one end of the line to the other, more or less that's the route ... but they're more willing to come at some times than others, it changes according to many things ...

While the efforts made by the volunteers to adapt the activities to the needs of the refugees clearly demonstrate the acknowledgement of the legitimacy of such needs and the commitment to address them, expressions such as 'a sprinkling of rain was enough' still reveal a deficit-based interpretation by suggesting that these women often miss training sessions for reasons that would not be considered valid by an Italian/Western (sports)woman. Hence, bad and cold weather was often mentioned by the Italian volunteers as the main reason why the refugees did not attend very regularly:

but then the following Saturday it was foggy, a really thick fog, I remember there was an incredible fog at my place as well, then I went to the pitch and the weather was nice, but where they live there was this fog like where I live, I'm telling you the climate factor is the first thing that keeps them away: 'it's foggy, we don't go cause the weather is dull'.

More generally, when reflecting on the difficulties of signing people up, our interviewees at Liberi Nantes tended to focus on many of the structural and practical barriers highlighted by Olliff (2008). Besides the bad weather, they often mentioned

the distance to the pitch, the clash with other personal and familiar priorities, and the rapid turnover of participants due to their ongoing resettlement procedure.

While several studies highlight the importance of cultural and religious factors in influencing minority women's participation in sport (e.g. Ahmad 2011; Benn and Pfister 2013; Benn, Dagkas, and Jawad 2011; Dagkas, Benn, and Jawad 2011; Guerin et al. 2003; Jiwani and Rail 2010; Wray 2002; Zahidi, Syed Ali, and Nor 2012), the accounts of our interviewees did not focus on such aspects.

Further structural barriers (Olliff 2008) were also implicitly mentioned by some interviewees when explaining how their initial contacts with the forced migrant women was mediated and filtered by the social workers who were responsible for them at La Casa di Giorgia:

we said that in case they were interested they could leave their names with the social workers at the Centre and we'd have liaised with them at least for the first two or three sessions, to know which people we had to wait for, who was going to come, etc.

While Liberi Nantes' volunteers clearly acknowledged and respected the role and responsibility of the social workers, they sometimes felt that their outreach potential was somewhat limited when they had the impression that some operator at La Casa di Giorgia was not particularly persistent in promoting the touch rugby activity amongst their guests:

we are in contact with the social workers of the centre, with the supervisor and then with another girl, however I'm afraid that this girls I've been in contact with in this period ... I mean, I've seen her working, more or less, and I don't feel ... she doesn't show much motivation, she tries to say 'If you want to do ... just go', but I don't think she motivates them that much, she doesn't ...

Such a weak commitment in encouraging participation may be due to a lack of trust in the potential benefits of the sports activity, perceived as less urgent than other practical needs of the migrants such as managing the bureaucratic process related to their legal status, or completing their educational and working training programmes. Being often busy with such priorities, the social workers can act as 'screening' gatekeepers (Scourfield 2012) by protecting their guests while at the same time unintentionally limiting their opportunities.

However, although this clearly makes it harder for Liberi Nantes to recruit new players, it also guarantees that those women who join touch rugby do so out of their own free choice, rather than being pushed by their caregivers or being encouraged by linking sport participation to other transferable rewards, as happens with many sport-for-development programmes (e.g. Coalter 2010; Spaaij 2013b).

Keeping the door open: from women-only to mixed-sex

The temporary interruption of the activities due to the lack of coaches and refugee players in autumn 2011 raised serious doubts amongst the volunteers at Liberi Nantes about the efficacy of the project and the suitability of touch rugby as a tool to engage forced migrant women. However, it was also highlighted that despite the difficulties in recruiting and retaining migrant women, those (few) who got involved had clearly benefitted from the participation and therefore it was worth trying to keep this option available for other women in the future.

As a solution, in order to enlarge the pool of participants and enable the training sessions to resume, it was therefore decided to extend the participation to male players, initially by involving some members of the well-established all-male Liberi Nantes football team. Two players from the Roman team Spartaco Rugby volunteered to act as coaches, and the training sessions were eventually able to restart in winter 2011/12 with a group mixed by gender and origin. By the end of 2012, this involved 15–20 people including: Italian female volunteers from Liberi Nantes, male migrants (asylum-seekers and refugees, but also labour migrants already settled in the city), Italian young adult males interested in supporting the initiative and practising sport, and five new refugee women who gradually joined after the La Casa di Giorgia demonstration described above.

Opening up the team to male participants enabled the touch rugby activity to be advertised within the network of Reception Centres already developed by Liberi Nantes through their successful football team project and via other, more recent initiatives such as the provision of Italian language courses. Although the vast majority of the newcomers were initially more interested in playing football, the volunteers at Liberi Nantes tried to divert some of them to the touch rugby group. While this was firstly due to the practical impossibility of accommodating all the requests within the football team, the volunteers also saw it as an opportunity for the refugees to try and experience something new:

so they went [to the football training] on Monday, they were 43, a disaster, they were so many, too much, I had told them: ‘Look, keep them down to around 15’, then she [the contact person at the Reception Centre] had told me ‘15–20 people’ but it works by word of mouth amongst themselves, maybe they don’t say anything to the operator and just go. So 43 of them arrived, so now we wanted to do a demonstration of touch rugby there at the Centre to try and balance the two things, cause I understand they are male and the first thing is football, however if they get to know another sport maybe they’ll like it as well, I see it with some of the guys who play football with us [at Liberi Nantes], now they attend some touch rugby training cause at the end of the day it’s enjoyable, it’s good fun, therefore they come, if they’ve nothing else to do they come there as well.

According to our interviewees, the mixed-gender nature of the new touch rugby team did not seem to particularly inhibit or discourage the refugee women involved in the activity:

I must tell you that especially this year the girls who came, let's say ... apart from the initial embarrassment, which is fair enough, then they were very ... I mean, they weren't ashamed to get changed, they weren't uncomfortable (...) in fact, they connected nicely with all the guys, they didn't feel these difficulties.

However, the volunteers noted some embarrassment in the initial approach between males and females, which tended to gradually fade away with time:

every time a new person arrives you can feel this embarrassment, if a girls arrives she feels embarrassed playing with guys and vice versa, so also in the pitch there's this phase of observation and waiting, then gradually when the relationship grows and you keep playing together it's like you don't notice it anymore, so no such embarrassment anymore.

According to this interviewee, although the initial embarrassment was common to both males and females, it was more evident in the former and could be partly attributed to concerns about physical contact and potential collisions:

we noticed at the beginning the guys who arrived... the impact of finding girls playing with them too was peculiar (...) also the hesitation, because it's called 'touch' rugby, hence there is a contact, which is not violent as in rugby but yet there is a contact and therefore (...) they really seemed more reluctant about contact (...) Also this fear of hurting, I mean, it was there (...) Of course the embarrassment, why not, the embarrassment was actually visible even before they went on the pitch, meaning that once they arrived at Liberi Nantes and were welcomed by girls, you could immediately tell that the expression, the attitude, in short there was a difficulty.

Such initial discomfort tended to be expressed through mockery and ironic comments rather than explicit statements:

it was mainly as a joke, meaning that some of the guys, especially this year when that famous group of 30 guys came, they made a lot of jokes, 'we must play with girls', as if it was belittling, from a physical point of view I mean, as if it was taken for granted ... that they'd win because of their physical superiority, therefore they saw it also as ... also for this reason they went ... 'I want to play football'.

As a strategy to cope with body-related, emotionally challenging situations (Flaming and Morse 1991), mocking comments based on gender stereotypes tended to be used as a defensive device by newly arrived, often young, male participants when they perceived mixed-gender sport as a threat to their masculine identities based on gender-segregated sporting socialization.

On the other hand, the Liberi Nantes touch rugby initiative also enabled participants to experience how it feels when players get used to a mixed-sex sporting environment

and some of the initial restraints and inhibitions partly fade away. For instance, when recalling a match played against an all-men side composed of well-trained rugby players, an Italian woman volunteer observed that they did not receive any special treatment to compensate for their evident difference in physical size and strength ('which on the one hand is better, as it's a level playing field'). In her words, there seemed to be no sign of the female frustration due to males 'holding back' which is described in the studies of mixed-sex combat sports (Channon 2013a). In fact, competing against males can be slightly intimidating even in the alleged level playing field of touch rugby:

Let's say that it's very much about tactics and strategy, so non having that physically violent contact like in rugby you must try ... you have to figure out where gaps can emerge to pass through, it's more about speed and tactics. Nonetheless there's also a ... how can I say ... the fact that you still are facing a person who is athletically formidable, you approach him in a different way (...) body size is not fundamental in touch rugby; however, since the goal is to score a try and therefore the opponent team tries to advance and push you back, if running towards you it is a physically big person it certainly has a different effect, I mean it scares you, so you tend to pull back [giggles]. If you are touched by a person who has a massive hand, it pulls you back, and since centimetres are fundamental in rugby, in touch rugby, as you have to score a try so more centimetres you move forward and the closer you get to the try, if you're touched by a big guy perhaps he pushes you out of position just with a touch. So yes, it is not important however ... it has its effects, let's say (...)

These comments suggest that mixed-gender touch rugby can generate opposite dynamics compared to other practices already studied in the literature, notably mixed-sex combat sports. In fact, the latter can enable the 'undoing' of gender through participants' experiences that disconfirm sexist stereotypes within a practice which is intrinsically based on physical confrontation/collision, strength and aggression (Channon 2014). In our case, on the other hand, while touch rugby (or at least the way it is intended by Liberi Nantes' volunteers) is based on an inclusive and anti-sexist rhetoric that downplays or even denies the importance of differences in physical strength and condition, this can be disconfirmed by the actual experience of the female participants when playing against an all-male team composed of massive athletes used to physical collision. The slight ambivalence of our interviewee's account seems to evidence the cognitive dissonance generated by this contradiction.

Why touch rugby? Pragmatic reasons and symbolic meanings

The initial difficulties experienced by Liberi Nantes in the implementation of their pioneer initiative invite a reflection on both the advantages and disadvantages of using sport for social inclusion in the specific context of (women) forced migrants in Rome.

Notably, this involves discussing both the rationale for, and the outcomes of, choosing touch rugby as a vehicle, as well as the implications of turning this sport provision from women-only into mixed-sex. We argue that both pragmatic and symbolic reasons and results can be highlighted.

The main pragmatic reason for using touch rugby is that being a recently established and small, volunteer-based association Liberi Nantes simply tried to offer the best that their limited resources enabled them to offer. Firstly, the choice of activities depended on the kind of competences that could be activated within the networks of volunteers. Secondly, the range of sports that could be offered to female forced migrants was restricted to those that could be played on the only available facility, i.e. Liberi Nantes' football pitch. Thirdly, the opportunity provided by touch rugby to build a mixed team by gender, age and physical condition/ability represented an important asset in a pioneering phase when the number of future participants could not be predicted and the physical condition of individuals was expected to vary. In that respect, although the activity was initially thought of as women-only, the possibility of opening it up to male participants was somehow implicit in the choice of touch rugby from the very beginning.

The practical outcomes of the project tend to be evaluated by the volunteers at two different but interrelated levels, since the specific aim of the touch rugby initiative is to engage female refugees, while the broader remit of Liberi Nantes is to provide inclusive sports opportunities for refugees in general. This leaves room for some ambiguity as the critical reflexivity about the specificity of women's involvement becomes at times merged with (and balanced by) self-encouraging considerations about the positive contribution of the touch rugby project to the broader aims of the association. For example, one interviewee illustrated how the project was providing participants with safety nets by extending their sporting and social networks even beyond the area of Rome:

One of the Bengali guys, Shamal, who has always played with us (...) one day he came and said 'they are transferring me, I must go to Modena' so he was very sorry because he'd come to love the game, being with the group, and mostly because he was moving to a city he didn't know. So thanks to a contact we had from the Mondiali Antirazzisti, we knew there was a touch rugby team in Modena called TurtleIn (...) we called them and told them: 'there's this guy who played with us, he's moving to Modena and he needs to make new friends and keep playing touch rugby' and they adopted him.

However, it is worth noting that when trying to highlight positive outcomes of the project, many of these anecdotes referred to stories of male participants. Our interviews also seem to evidence that men were more easily attracted by Liberi Nantes' sport provision (with football generally, or at least initially, preferred to touch rugby), while women needed additional outreach efforts. On the one hand, this was due to the higher number of male refugees in the area compared to the few women-only reception centres. On the other hand, men had more freedom of movement around the city, while

women seemed to be more limited by structural and mediating barriers (although cultural barriers, seldom mentioned by our interviewees, arguably play a significant role in constraining their physical and social mobility).

Yet it can be doubted whether sport and particularly mixed-sex touch rugby was an adequate tool to try and engage female forced migrants in this context. In fact, other activities organized by Liberi Nantes such as hiking and walking excursions, also mixing male and female volunteers and migrants, seemed to attract more refugee women than touch rugby. Hence, this could suggest that it is not the mixed-sex nature, but rather the type of activity that discourages refugee women from participation, since otherwise the walking tours would struggle to recruit as well as touch rugby does. More precisely, it can be reasonably argued that mixed-sex interaction generates different impacts when experienced through different activities, and (competitive team) sports can be perceived as a more challenging and intimidating environment than others.

However, turning the touch rugby provision from women-only into mixed-sex enabled Liberi Nantes to keep the initiative alive and maintain an opportunity for participation that would not have been available otherwise. It also facilitated exchange and communication between volunteers and migrants involved in the different activities of the association, with many of them moving from one activity to another or taking part in more than one at the same time.

The touch rugby team also enabled Liberi Nantes to extend their networks beyond the football field by building new friendships and establishing cooperation within the rugby community in Rome, increase the visibility of their association, recruit new volunteers, involve the neighbourhood of Pietralata and raise awareness about the condition of the refugees.

However, beyond the pragmatic reasons for, and practical outcomes of, choosing touch rugby, important symbolic factors need to be considered. For instance, a project document produced by Liberi Nantes' to advertise their initiative to the reception centres describes this sport as follows:

rugby, as well as touch rugby, is a sport traditionally associated with the concept of fair play and because of this very characteristic it can become an instrument of mediation for those healthy and loyal relationships that are paramount for a fully-lived life. (...) the existence of the 'third period' as an integral part of touch rugby's sports activity is an encouragement to openness and encounters between people where they see each other as human beings rather than through the labels of 'refugee' and 'Italian'.

In this vein, even ordinary aspects of the game can be magnified as representative of highly significant principles and values, as in the initial webpage of Liberi Nantes' touch rugby¹⁵ (now replaced by a lower key description of the project):

There is an important rule in Touch Rugby; when you are unmarked and you can receive the ball you must shout to your teammate HERE I AM, YES I'M HERE! These words embody all the strength inherent in this sport whereby the support of teammates is

paramount; knowing that you are not alone on the pitch, helping the teammates who are struggling, it is fundamental. For the guys and the girls who escape from countries where war, violence and torture are a daily occurrence, knowing that you can rely on someone is a fundamental psychological factor. They don't feel alone anymore, they are not alone anymore, they can run and play like we all do and they can take back that life, made up of simple things, which they had to give up.

The strong symbolic relevance attributed to touch rugby by Liberi Nantes plays an important role in the volunteers' attitude. This can be noted for instance when they justify their determination to pursue their goals, despite temporary difficulties and consequent doubts about the effectiveness of the project:

touch rugby was very suitable as a sport for teaching integration, a way of living together; as I told you, despite the difficulty we had found with the women we still wanted to insist, precisely because sport is a very strong vehicle [for achieving these things], therefore we thought 'let's broaden it out and involve the boys as well and let's see if ... With the girls it probably takes longer to engage them, so meanwhile let's carry on with this sport and try to keep an eye open for an opportunity to involve the girls'. And that's how it worked, I mean, this year for instance many girls came to train, also refugees.

However, this strong conviction of the inclusive value of this alternative activity risks becoming an unintentional expression of cultural imperialism (Darnell 2007), considering that touch rugby is a totally alien activity to the forced migrants (and to many of the volunteers as well) and thus their trust needs to be won, as if they have to be convinced of the virtues of this strange sport ('cause initially they're a bit dubious about the things that you suggest, maybe they understand them and maybe not'). Liberi Nantes' drive to promote the touch rugby initiative does not even seem to be undermined by their awareness of the evident cultural gap between this kind of sport provision and the migrants' actual expectations:

if you present Liberi Nantes to people like Africans or ... Afghans, Iranians, and you tell them about Liberi Nantes they'll come to football, none of them will ever come to touch rugby of their own free will. Maybe afterwards, when they already come to football and then you tell them: 'but why don't you go on Saturdays [to play touch rugby]?' (...) But if football is available, there's no way that someone comes to play touch rugby, it's just not part of their culture. With the Asians it's been a bit easier because as soon as we arrive at the centres the Bengalis, Pakistanis and Indians ask you to play cricket as the first thing, and not having it available you tell them: 'why don't you come and try [touch rugby]?' and once they come maybe they get really keen ...

As mentioned above, in the case of Liberi Nantes, the risk of unintentional cultural-imperialism is partly balanced by the absolute lack of pressure or blackmail in the way the touch rugby provision is proposed, leaving the migrants completely free to decide

whether they want to take part in the activity or not (and also offering the flexibility of a drop-in format).

Besides, the volunteers' persistence in promoting touch rugby is also justified by highlighting the importance of providing alternatives to mainstream sports and notably football, which is representative of a more general concern with the promotion of sporting pluralism as opposed to mainstream practices and homogenizing processes (Walseth and Fasting 2004). In turn, this represents the application of principles and values to the sports realm – such as the protection of minorities and biodiversity, the support to the disempowered and marginalized, the promotion of intercultural knowledge, respect and dialogue – which Liberi Nantes activists believe to be fundamental for any other area of our societies.

Therefore, the symbolic investment of Liberi Nantes in touch rugby is primarily related to its emblematic potential for social mixing. In this perspective, rather than being significant per se, the mixed-sex aspect of touch rugby is important insofar as it contributes to a broader rhetoric (and latent ideology) that celebrates any form of intersectional *mixité* and hybridity – i.e. across boundaries defined by nationality, ethnicity, class, gender, age or physical ability – as opposed to processes of classification, labelling, segregation and suppression of diversity.

To some extent, this reproduces the celebration of (super)diversity (Boccagni 2014) that characterizes the Mondiali Antirazzisti (Sterchele and Saint-Blancat 2015), the event promoted by Uisp in which Liberi Nantes were conceived.¹⁶

The social-mixing potential of touch rugby therefore plays a strong ritual role (Durkheim 1912; Collins 2004) as it symbolizes the core values of Liberi Nantes, the sources of their moral commitment, and ultimately Liberi Nantes themselves. This is clearly evidenced by the following quote from an internal document circulated after the first, unsuccessful attempt to start the touch rugby team:

Touch rugby was a bet that had to be made, for many reasons. There was little energy available, though it had to be done. Conditions beyond our control (...) led to its suspension; but it has to be resumed, and quickly. A core group needs to be identified, possibly of girls, but not only, who can take this on board, since within the touch rugby experience a new rib of Liberi Nantes can form and, I dare to say, can be forged. A new experience needs to be rebuilt from scratch (...) It isn't and it won't be a joke, but it's our mission, our ultimate goal. Without this, nothing else means anything at all.

This partly explains why the mixed-sex nature of touch rugby is sometimes uncritically praised by our interviewees ('we've always seen it as a strength') and social mixing in any form tends to be magnified as a value per se as well as, or rather than, a means to an end:

We can consider that [event] to be the inauguration of our mixed-sex touch rugby provision; 'we didn't succeed with the female-only, then let's extend it: to the men, to the nations ...' [giggles], we've done it all-mixed!

Paradoxically, the mixed-sex character of Liberi Nantes touch rugby team is not a particularly distinctive feature within the touch rugby community, in fact being a common trait of a number of teams. Hence, other characteristics – such as the multi-ethnic, colourful composition of the team – become more relevant for those volunteers who consider the celebration of diversity as the main symbolic identifier of Liberi Nantes:

we wear a fuchsia shirt and therefore the reaction is very curious cause yes it's true, the other teams have some female members as well ... but we have this cross-cutting mix which is ... which makes people curious anyway, and this while also bringing an activity in sport ... I mean, we go and take part, we are an association while they perhaps are teams that only have a sporting objective while we bring an added value, that with sport you can also do something else, that it is also a very powerful means to create a model of integration (...) and on this aspect we've always found very welcoming teams.

The inclusive culture of touch rugby clearly makes it easier for Liberi Nantes' social activism to be acknowledged and welcomed. However, their recognition within the Roman touch rugby community also needs to be reinforced by the gradual development of a sporting reputation:

perhaps they expected a team that 'OK, an association that organises sport for refugees, so there's more of a human dimension to it, they won't pay attention to the sporting side'; but then the congratulations arrived for this sporting aspect too, for having been able to actually become a real team and therefore it highlighted this diversity even more.

Once the sporting reputation puts the team on the same level as their opponents, then the other distinctive features become more significant and deserve further acknowledgement. As a ritual outcome of this process, the symbolic power attached to touch rugby by Liberi Nantes' volunteers strengthens their group cohesion, gives them moral satisfaction and puts new energy into their motivations.

Conclusions

The choice of using mixed-sex touch rugby for forced migrants presented both advantages and contradictions. Given the limited resources and options available, it enabled Liberi Nantes to draw on a larger pool of male refugees to keep providing an opportunity for female participation, despite the frequent turnover and occasional lack of women participants.

While extending the refugees' opportunities for social interaction, it also contributed to diversifying the range of Liberi Nantes' activities and enlarging their networks to raise further awareness of the forced migrants' cause and recruit new volunteers.

Nonetheless, female participation rates were relatively low in both the initial, women-only activities and the subsequent, mixed-sex provision. Cultural and structural barriers such as gender-role expectations, breadwinning and childcare commitments, concerns about the risks of commuting alone, and lack of sporting socialization, seem to limit forced migrant women's participation in Liberi Nantes' touch rugby regardless of the gender format of the activities. This clearly stimulates the volunteers' reflexivity, challenging them to question the appropriateness of using touch rugby specifically, and sport more generally, as a tool to engage forced migrant women in socially and personally meaningful experiences.

However, the symbolic meanings and implications of this choice appear at least as significant as (if not more significant than) its pragmatic outcomes. Touch rugby was chosen as an emblem of inclusion, equality and fair play, as well as promoted alongside/against mainstream sports like football as a symbol of sporting pluralism representing a broader commitment to celebrate diversity and support the disempowered both within and beyond the sporting field.

The mixed-sex dimension of touch rugby is part of this totemic representation since it contributes to this subversive symbolism of overcoming social hierarchies and boundaries by fighting segregation and favouring intersectional social mixing. Therefore, mixed-sex touch rugby can act as a ritual device to nourish a sense of moral purpose in Liberi Nantes' volunteers and reproduce their collective identity.

As shown by our analysis, this important identity-building power effect can be dangerous when the faith in the basic goodness of this sports provision risks overshadowing the vital to a voluntary-based association initiative to maintain group cohesion and regenerate motivations, without which Liberi Nantes – and the opportunities they provide to forced migrants women and men – would not exist.

The expectations and achievements of both the volunteers and the migrants are somehow intermingled and need to be balanced. The careful management of this balance is clearly the challenge that Liberi Nantes' activists are faced with.

Notes

1. Touch rugby is a limited-contact version of rugby in which players seek to avoid being touched, rather than tackled, while in possession of the ball.
2. A growing attention to the provision of sports opportunities for migrants in Italy is however shown by a number of initiatives run by sport-for-all organizations (e.g. Borgogni and Digennaro 2015).
3. The massive increase of asylum requests in Italy due to the very recent humanitarian emergencies in North Africa and the Middle East has increased the proliferation of legal types of partial protection, such as constitutional asylum, conventional refugee status, subsidiary protection, humanitarian protection, temporary protection (Marchetti 2010). This means that a decreasing proportion of all the asylum-seekers are actually given the full status of refugee. Hence, forced migrants, rather than refugees, would be a more appropriate term to define them

all. However, for ease of reference, we will use the terms ‘forced migrants’ and ‘refugees’ interchangeably in this paper.

4. This partly consisted of labour migrants attracted by Italian economic prosperity up until the recent credit crunch (1980s–2000s) and largely of asylum-seekers and refugees following a sequence of migratory waves. Particularly from the 1990s onwards, these were generated by the terrible conflicts in Central and East Africa, the Balkans, the Middle East and more recently North Africa.

5. Moreover, most of the subsequent interventions have focused more on regulation and repression, rather than on reception and support (Ambrosini 2013).

6. For instance, in June 2010 – when Liberi Nantes’ touch rugby was taking its first steps – the municipality of Rome claimed their reception centres were hosting around 2000 forced migrants but a further 3000 requests were on the waiting list (interview with the Councillor for Social Policy, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9UIbtO7NfS4>).

7. The founders were inspired by their participation in the Mondiali Antirazzisti (Antiracist World Cup), a non-competitive multi-sport and intercultural festival organized by UISP (Unione Italiana Sport Per tutti), one of the main Italian sport-for-all providers. Aiming at celebrating diversity and promoting anti-discriminatory practices, the Mondiali deliberately blur sporting categorizations and foster the creation of mixed teams by gender, age, origin, physical and technical ability (Sterchele and Saint-Blancat 2015 – both for mainstream disciplines such as football, basketball, cricket, volleyball and rugby, as well as for lesser known sports which are already inherently open to mixed-gender practice, such as tchoukball and touch rugby).

8. This network includes among others the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Italian Council for Refugees, Jesuit Refugee Service, Diocesan Caritas of Rome, UISP-Italian Union for Sport for All, Shoot4Change and some local amateur sports clubs such as Touch Rugby Roma, Spartaco Rugby and Red&Blue Rugby, and receives limited financial support from the Lazio Region and the Province of Rome.

9. See the video-documentary by The Guardian, available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/football/video/2015/oct/01/liberi-nantes-football-team-italy-refugees-video>.

10. Liberi Nantes’ website stated that ‘in addition to persecutions, violence, torture and cruelty similar to those experienced by men, women often suffer abuse related to their gender, both physical (e.g. rape) and social (e.g. discrimination and prohibitions or constraints on certain behaviours)’. Assuming that all this would cause ‘a strong sense of helplessness, passivity, lack of self-confidence and lack of trust in other people’, sport was considered as ‘a useful practice to progressively re-appropriate your body, generating self-esteem and a self-awareness that facilitates the way women relate to the host society’.

11. In the first period of Liberi Nantes’ touch rugby (2010–2013), examined in this paper, the guests ranged from minors to over-50s, though most of them were aged 18–30. The majority came from the Horn of Africa (notably Eritrea, Ethiopia and Somalia) and other West and Central African countries (Ivory Coast, DR Congo, Nigeria, Senegal, Guinea).

12. Since these interviewees shared similar characteristics in terms of age, social background, political orientation and level of involvement in the project, their accounts are reported in the text without attribution to each specific respondent. Instead, pseudonyms were used to anonymize any other people mentioned in the text.

13. Two of these migrant women came from English-speaking countries in the Horn of Africa, while the other two were French-speaking (one from North Africa and the other from Senegal). The linguistic divide was one of the main issues the Italian volunteers had to address in order to facilitate communication and relationships amongst the participants.

14. The difficulty or impossibility of keeping in contact with them was clearly frustrating for the volunteers as it showed how precarious and transitory the relationships can be, no matter how intense, when working with asylum-seekers and refugees.

15. <http://www.liberinantes.org/touch-rugby/>.

16. This is not surprising if we consider that their founders come from the same cultural and political milieu and the same networks as the Mondiali, with some of them being directly involved in both organizations.

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