Running for inclusion: responsibility, (un)deservingness and the spectacle of integration in a sport-for-refugees intervention in Geneva, Switzerland

Mridul Kataria[a]* and Nicola De Martini Ugolotti[b]

[a]*Independent Researcher, Formerly Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, Geneva, Switzerland;* [b]*Bournemouth University, United Kingdom, and Associazione Frantz Fanon, Italy*

Correspondence: mridul.kataria@graduateinstitute.ch/ mkataria96@gmail.com

Running for inclusion: responsibility, (un)deservingness and the spectacle of integration in a sport-for-refugees intervention in Geneva, Switzerland

This study contributes to critical inter-disciplinary analyses of the meanings, uses and implications of sport-for-integration initiatives in relation to the contemporary politics of asylum in the Global North. It will do so, by drawing on an ethnographic study addressing the activities of FLAG21, a sport project based in Geneva, Switzerland, that employs running as an instrument of integration and health promotion for migrants and refugees. In advancing this discussion, we put to dialogue Nicholas De Genova's work on the "border spectacle" (2013) with critical analyses of integration in (forced) migration studies to explore what we call the "integration spectacle". Through this lens, we address FLAG21 activities to examine the scenes of inclusion and the obscene of exclusion that sport projects aiming to foster refugees' social integration can at the same time make visible and unwittingly conceal through their interventions. The discussion illuminates the ambivalent positions that sport interventions occupy within the politics and moral representations of asylum. This, as a premise to imagine, co-create and support sport and leisure practices and contexts that are more closely attending to and engaging with refugees' experiences, struggles and trajectories within and beyond contemporary regimes of asylum.

Keywords: sport; running; integration; politics of asylum; refugees; Switzerland

Introduction

In the face of consistent increases in asylum-seeking across the world, in the last four decades states of the Global North have grown more creative and aggressive in their attempts to exclude people seeking asylum from (and within) national borders (see Mayblin 2020; Mountz 2020; Tazzioli and De Genova 2020). Whether posited as an economic burden requiring stricter "sorting" procedures or as a cultural, and even existential, threat to the nation, the figure of the refugee[1] has been increasingly mobilised to justify the normalisation of xenophobic narratives and hostile environments towards newcomers. This discursive frame contributed to the advancement of "best practices of exclusion" (Mountz 2020, xvi), policies and laws that increasingly prevent people from arriving, making asylum claims or receiving adequate support while waiting for the outcome of an

[1] In this paper, the terms 'refugee', 'forced migrant', 'people seeking sanctuary/asylum' will be used inclusively to refer to people at all stages of the asylum process, unless when relevant to draw attention to the differences produced by the maze of the asylum system (see also De Martini Ugolotti, 2020)

application (see Mayblin 2020). As argued elsewhere, the growing scholarly attention towards refugees, sport and leisure has so far missed articulating refugees' sporting practices and contexts in relation to the *consequences* of intensifying state experimentations with various means of detention, dispersal and deterrence towards people seeking asylum (De Martini Ugolotti and Caudwell 2021). While aiming to make impactful research, most of the existing scholarship's alignment with policy-driven questions and frameworks (e.g. integration, health, community cohesion) often resulted in short-term answers to narrowly-defined questions when addressing the sporting experiences, needs and subjectivities of people seeking asylum (see Spaaij et al. 2019; De Martini Ugolotti and Caudwell 2021). The reproduction of widespread understandings of refugees as a "kind of person" (Malkki 1995, 513), traumatised, lacking, or needing to "integrate", have often contributed to the employment of deficit-approaches addressing forced migrants as passive beneficiaries of sport-for-inclusion interventions (see Spaaij et al 2019; Luguetti et al. 2021). These approaches have often failed to engage with refugees' trajectories of migration and resettlement and the relevance of sport in their lives beyond, and sometimes despite, pre-defined (and Western-centred) ideas of acculturation, health and (self)development (see, Mashreghi, 2021; Agergaard et al. 2021; Collison and De Martini Ugolotti 2021). At the same time, programmes aiming to *empower* refugees by highlighting and fostering their capabilities through sport have yet to critically examine how strength-based approaches can unwittingly overlap and converge with increasing assimilationist trends in integration policies (see Jeanes et al. 2015). This is specifically the case for policy approaches that insist on refugees' *responsibility* to integrate and transfer societal issues (unemployment and poverty, but also xenophobia, racism and gendered inequalities) onto newcomers (see Uheling 2015; Schinkel 2018).

Following these premises, this study takes up previous calls for a more critical examination of the role that sport and leisure have in reproducing or challenging existing assumptions, narratives, and practices that shape the lives and trajectories of people seeking asylum (see De Martini Ugolotti and Caudwell 2021). It will do so, by drawing on an ethnographic study addressing the activities of FLAG21, a sports project based in Geneva, Switzerland, that employs running as an instrument of integration and health improvement for migrants and refugees (FLAG21 2021).

In light of the aims of this paper, focusing on a sporting initiative in the Swiss context has a double relevance. Switzerland, and namely Geneva, constitute the symbolic birthplaces of the asylum convention and the country prides itself on its historical 'humanitarian tradition' (Affolter 2020; Eule 2020). Furthermore, while Switzerland hosts international organisations increasingly engaged with sport in relation to issues of forced migration and displacement (e.g. UNHCR; IOC), analyses of refugees' experiences of sport and leisure in the country have received very limited

attention (see Brehanu Alemu et al. 2021 for an exception).

In advancing this discussion, we put to dialogue Nicholas De Genova's work on the "border spectacle" (2013) with critical analyses of integration in (forced) migration studies (Uheling 2015; Schinkel 2018) to explore what we call the "integration spectacle". Through this lens, we address FLAG21 activities to examine the *scenes of inclusion* and the *obscene of exclusion* that sports projects aiming to foster refugees' social integration can at the same time make visible and unwittingly conceal through their interventions.

Fairness through exclusion: an overview of Swiss Asylum Policy

The timeframe of this study overlapped with the period immediately following the final implementation of a radical reform of the Swiss Asylum System from the 1st March 2019. The reform, approved by 65% of voters in a referendum in 2016, aimed to accelerate the processing of asylum applications so that integration or expulsion could happen as quickly and efficiently as possible (Eule 2020). Under the new, more restrictive system, up to 70% of asylum applications would be dealt with in less than 140 days through an accelerated procedure in which their "credibility" would be sorted through a number of criteria, including the nationality of the applicant (Poertner 2017; AIDA 2021). The reform also implied the decentralisation of the asylum system and the creation of 21 federal asylum centres to house people waiting for their asylum response or appealing a failed application (Eule 2020; Amnesty International 2021).

According to the policy, the reform would enable "credible" refugees to see their status swiftly recognised and start to rebuild their lives in Switzerland. At the same time, "non-credible" applicants, including those coming from nations with "high numbers of asylum application, but low success rates[2]" (AIDA 2021; see also Poertner 2017) would be as swiftly issued a negative response and deported.

Despite being presented as providing fairness and efficiency to the asylum process and better integration perspectives for those granted refugee status or temporary protection, the policy's implementation data suggested a very different picture. The number of cases that the Federal Administrative Court (FAC), which deals with appeals against asylum decisions, has sent back for re-examination to the State Secretariat for Migration (SEM) has increased almost four-fold in 2020 (from 4.8% to 16.8%). In the vast majority of cases, the FAC judges have ruled that the "SEM had not established the facts with sufficient precision in terms of the grounds for asylum" or that there

[2]It is important to note that nationality-based assessment for asylum decisions have been widely critiqued for ignoring individual circumstances that lead to an asylum claim (e.g. from political to gender, or sexuality-based persecution that are increasing in countries otherwise considered "safe to return") (Vuilleumier 2020).

are “gaps in the investigation of medical problems” (FAC 2020). As judges, lawyers and activists argued, the new policy focus on speed in asylum decisions had knock-on effects on the accuracy of the overall asylum process with systematic and dramatic implications for the lives impacted (Vuilleumier 2020). Third sector and migrant's rights organisations have also denounced the remote location (Poertner 2017) and security regimes that prevail in federal asylum centres. These include restrictions on private life (e.g. music bans and no eating in-between meals) and invasive security regimes (e.g. regular searches of sleeping quarters, body search upon entry to buildings) but also systematic abuse at the hands of security guards (Amnesty International 2021). The same reports have also noted how access to medical services is complicated in some centres by a lack of interpreters and cooperation between migration officials, lawyers, and doctors.

Overall, the policy ambitions to “expedite” the examination of asylum applications and the issues these ambitions create is not new, nor unique to the Swiss context. The reform adapted processes previously implemented in Denmark and The Netherlands (Eule 2020). Moreover, accelerating examinations of asylum applications is one of the objectives of the New Pact on Migration and Asylum currently under discussion within the European Union (European Commission 2019-2024). Authors have extensively underlined how the frame under which these asylum reforms are proposed and implemented stems from a long-lasting discourse about “false” or “bogus” refugees trying to abuse the system; a discourse that emerged as the number of asylum applications increased worldwide in the last four decades (see Mayblin 2020; Mountz 2020). In Switzerland, this “fight against abuse” has been the driving force behind many of the restrictions made in asylum law in the past thirty-seven years (Poertner 2017; Affolter 2020). One important implication of these reforms is the seemingly paradoxical way in which calls for restrictive refugee status determination are framed as upholding the Swiss “noble value of asylum” (Affolter 2020, p. 37) by ensuring that asylum is reserved for those “truly deserving” (Eule 2020). As Affolter (2020) puts it, “fairness is, therefore, based on exclusion” (28). As we will discuss later in more detail, these considerations have substantial implications in considering the role of sport in the integration of refugees and forced migrants in the context of the study, and elsewhere. This is the case as people seeking asylum often occupy a far-from-clear position within the moral and *arbitrary* definitions of credible and deserving refugees3 (see Fassin 2005; Fassin and Kobelinsky 2012; Affolter 2020), and are increasingly excluded by these (eg. when coming from the “wrong country”, or in the “wrong way”). As problematic moral distinctions between deserving and undeserving refugees

[3] Authors have highlighted how asylum claims' “non-credibility” are actively created by means of decision-making processes, particularly through the questioning techniques used in asylum interviews (see Affolter, 2020 for an overview). This argument complicates the common explanation put forward by asylum administrations, politicians and much of the mainstream media that the majority of claims are rejected because the majority of asylum seekers lie.

underpin rhetorics of fairness and integration in Swiss asylum policies and public perceptions, how and to what extent do sport-for-integration interventions reinforce, shift, or address such understandings? More specifically, whose integration and what conditions of possibility for integration are reiterated and made visible through sport interventions, and whose exclusion sport-for-integration initiatives may unwittingly contribute to conceal and normalise?

Theoretical framework: From the border to the integration spectacles

In addressing the questions just outlined we engage with and expand Nicholas De Genova's work on the border spectacle, in itself an adaptation of Guy Debord's analysis of the society of the spectacle (see Debord [1967] 1995; De Genova 2013). In Debord's conceptualisation, the spectacle "is not a collection of images; it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images" ([1967] 1995, 19). In this sense, according to Debord, the pervasive mass-mediated images that accompany people's lives in contemporary societies do not simply represent social life but are at the same time products and producers of social relations and practices. Drawing on this, De Genova (2013) explores the *discursive constellation* combining policy and media rhetoric, language and images, and more generally the "visual grammar" (1180) through which border enforcement practices and their representations *produce* figures of migrants' illegality.

In this way, De Genova (2013) argues, the spectacle of enforcement at the border produces migrants' spontaneous mobilities as "the brazen acts of veritable outlaws", and thus "as occasions for literal and figurative *apprehension"* which is to say "occasions for arrest and deportation, but also for fear and loathing" (1183, emphasis added). The border spectacle thus produces requests for more border enforcement that further reify the images of migrants' illegality. However, while producing *specific images and relations*, like those of the state's dutiful and pro-active efforts to ensure the security of its citizens, the border spectacle also conceals others. In this sense, the *scenes of exclusion* through which border enforcement practices and images reify migrants' illegality are always accompanied by their shadowy, publicly disavowed *obscene* supplement: the large-scale *inclusion* of illegalised migrants as legally vulnerable, precarious, and thus tractable labour in circuits of economic exploitation (see also Lewis et al. 2014). De Genova's conceptualisation offers an important contribution to unpack the ways in which the simultaneous extension and multiplication of border practices contribute to producing the phenomenon (illegal migration) they are designed to contain and control (on this, see also Mountz 2020).

Following these considerations, in this paper, we contend that a similar conceptual focus can be relevant to explore the constellation of images, texts and narratives that inform and shape discourses of refugees' integration through sport. In doing this, we put De Genova's framework to

dialogue with critical analyses of contemporary understandings of integration in (forced) migration studies (see Uheling 2015; Schinkel 2018). Uheling's work with refugee advisors in the United States illuminated how policy and public aims underlining refugees' responsibility towards integration effectively transferred social problems (like unemployment or poverty) onto newcomers (see Uheling 2015, 1006). This was operationalised through a (funding related) shift in refugee support organisations "away from legal protection and human rights toward [refugees'] work on the self, feelings and internal states" (1008) as preconditions to achieve the self-reliance and autonomy deemed necessary for successful integration.

Relatedly, Schinkel's (2018) work on the topic critiqued public and political framings of integration as an individual responsibility that is unequally placed on the shoulders of classed and racialised subjects in European societies (namely migrants and people seeking asylum, but also post-migrant and ethnic minorities). These understandings contribute to reinforce and conceal the systemic constitution of (forced) migrants and racialised citizens as always not "integrated enough" and thus in need to constantly prove their commitment to integrate (Schinkel 2018). Concisely put, Uheling and Schinkel's discussions illuminate how pervasive understandings of integration as individual responsibility obscure wider and unequal social processes that shape skewed opportunities, trajectories and *expectations* for people seeking asylum along intersecting classed, racial, gendered and legal axis of difference.

Drawing on and expanding on these analyses, in the following sections we engage with the ethnographic data and explore to what extent in FLAG21 activities an *integration spectacle* contributed to make visible sporting *scenes of inclusion* that aligned with Swiss "humanitarian tradition" (Affolter 2020) and idea(l)s of deserving, self-reliant and responsible refugees. This, while unwittingly concealing the *obscene exclusion* of other(ed) people seeking asylum, including those deemed undeserving-by-policy (Poertner 2017). Through this perspective, this paper contributes to inter-disciplinary scholarly analyses at the intersection of sport and forced migration studies that critically interrogate the meanings, uses and currency of sport-for-integration initiatives in relation to issues of asylum, integration, and resettlement.

Methodology and research context

This study draws on 14 months of ethnographic research conducted between March 2019 and May 2020, with the last 3 months of data collection conducted online due to COVID-19-related restrictions. As part of the research, between March 2019 and February 2020, the first author participated in FLAG21 activities, namely weekly runs, meetings and events). The second author joined later on for the data analysis and writing up of this study. FLAG21 is a not-for-profit

organisation founded in 2017 in Geneva, Switzerland. The association organises weekly training and running sessions with a mixed group of refugees and locals with the aim of facilitating the integration of migrants and refugees through running. Overall, the association's activities aim to serve three (broadly defined) goals: improving the physical and mental health of migrants and refugees; improving the quantity and quality of their social networks as a way to encourage migrants and refugees to take responsibilities in the first steps towards the labour market; sensitize the local population to the theme of migration (FLAG21 2019). Since June 2018, the association has organised regular running sessions every Saturday morning, which in the following months branched also in post-training social activities (e.g. picnics, trips). From the start, the training sessions have been conducted by four to five refugee coaches from Eritrea, Afghanistan, and Iran (four males, one female). The organisation's activities were promoted in cantonal asylum centres and were open to locals and migrants alike, with no economic barriers to entry like other show-up-and-run initiatives (e.g. parkrun).

During the research process, the first author's ethnographic participation in the weekly sessions and related activities was integrated with analysis of secondary data (documents from the association and other institutions/organisations, such as FAC, SEM, Amnesty International), informal conversations with the association's members and five interviews with refugees (four men, one woman, see Table 1) regularly attending and/or coaching the sessions. The gender imbalance in the participants interviewed broadly reflected the imbalance in the running sessions, an issue that the association was reflecting on during the research and has recently started to address by providing childcare support and women-only activities (FLAG21 2021).

The first author's positionality in the field as a non-Swiss person of colour conducting a postgraduate study on the association influenced the relationships and interactions that eventually composed the ethnographic fragments that informed the study. Having French as a second language but Hindi and English as first languages constituted at first a challenge to establish some relationships within the association but also facilitated the creation of trusting relationships with other participants and refugees in the sessions.

The conduction of interviews was contemplated only after several months of fieldwork, and only with participants who had expressed their interest in the research and in voicing their experiences of the group. Considering consent as an iterative process (Hugman et al. 2011), such availability was also checked before the actual interview and for its recording. The interview interlocutors had been in Switzerland for between one and six years. The study's methodological approach was not without limitations, and some considerations are important to make. Due to COVID-19 restrictions in place from March 2020, the interviews had to take place over the phone.

Moreover, the interviews were conducted in four different languages - English, French, Hindi and Tigrinya, and the interviews in French and Tigrinya were conducted with the help of an interpreter. The role of interpreters in migration research carries an array of complexities related to trust and power (see Edwards 2013). In this sense, the collaboration with an interpreter suggested by the participants was fundamental to ensure the participants' sense of safety and trust in the conversation with the researcher. Overall, the conversation-like approach employed in the interview and the relationships built in the previous months through shared running practice aimed and contributed to minimising the possibility of reproducing the experience of asylum interviews in the research process (see Haile et al. 2020). Finally, this study only engaged with refugees who actively participated in the running group, mostly as coaches. Therefore, the ethnographic field notes and the interviews do not suggest an exhaustive account of forced migrants' realities and relationalities in the group, in Geneva or Switzerland more widely. Nevertheless, the crystallized (Richardson and St. Pierre 2005) perspective provided by the study's integrated methods enabled us "to see beyond the literalness of the observed" (Kincheloe 2001, 686). This approach enabled us to *not leave unnamed* the historical, socio-economic, and political processes and forces that came into play in and through the physical cultural site of the group (Kincheloe 2005). Informed by this methodological and epistemological orientation we thus approached and analysed the data to address what had (not) been said, shown and considered in the activities, interviews, and texts explored in the study. Participants' names and some minor details from their accounts have been modified to protect their privacy and anonymity.

Scenes of inclusion: running as integration, integration as (self-)responsibility

> Firstly, there is an aspect of mental and physical wellbeing we want to promote. The aspect of team building appeals to us, given the potential that sport has. *Along with that, other activities do not create networks by themselves as much sport does*, because the bar for participation is really low. (James, FLAG21 founder, personal communication, April 12, 2019, emphasis added).

According to one of the FLAG21 founders, James, the idea to start the association and the running sessions came when the founding members, all Swiss and mostly working in refugee support organisations in Geneva, noticed a number of refugees who regularly participated at running events across the city. Resultantly, and in relation to the excerpt above, the initial aim of the association was to harness the benefits, in terms of health, social networks and employment opportunities of forming a group where locals and refugees could join and train together (Field notes, March 14,

2019). In this way, instead of addressing refugees as a problem to be solved, the association mobilised an existing interest and practice among some refugees in Geneva and saw this as a means to demonstrate their capabilities, fight discrimination, and support wider processes of integration. Therefore, avoiding deficit-based approaches widely used in sport interventions with forced migrants (see Spaaij et al. 2019), the association arguably pursued its aims by fostering refugees' leadership, self-direction and effort, as capacities deemed to be fundamental to achieve "integration and empowerment" (Whitley et al. 2016, 177):

> [James adds that] for the coaches there is an added element of *putting them in a position of responsibility* and *putting them in-charge*, *which expresses confidence and acceptance* as well as allowing them to be a part of the decision making process for the sessions. (Field-notes excerpt, April 13, 2019, emphasis added)

> I really like running and it has always been my favourite sport. I joined the association after I heard about it, and I thought it would be a good opportunity to learn French and integrate more... Friends from FLAG advised me on where to look for work. I found my current job through them, along with other various coaching jobs... (Mebratu, personal interview, April 30, 2020).

Every Saturday morning across (and beyond) the duration of the research, 20 to 30 runners, roughly half of which men (and very few women) from Eritrea, Somalia, Afghanistan and Iran would meet, train, run, and occasionally share post-training picnics in Geneva's parks. The *visible*, weekly, refugee-led running sessions, the coaches' public narratives of integration and social mobility[4] and the images used to promote the association (fig.1) undoubtedly offered vivid *scenes of inclusion;* scenes meaningfully summarised by Aafreen's statement that "sport is binding, it does not need the language... but has certainly improved the process of learning it" (interview, May 02, 2020). Drawing from De Genova's (2013) discussion of how images and narratives surrounding migration shape social perceptions and practices around the topic, it can be argued that these scenes of sporting inclusion contributed to render refugees' integration the *semblance of an objective fact* in the context of the association's activities. FLAG21 narratives and images arguably *fetishised* integration as something *available to any refugee* with an interest in running (and, in theory, in sport more widely) and willing to "to be put in charge" of their integration process. Undoubtedly, the

[4] The refugee coaches often represented the associations when at running events and in several occasions were invited to speak about the association's aims at these and other public events

"fact" of refugees integration through sport emerging from FLAG21 activities assumed the semblance of something most palpable and verifiable when and by being implicitly associated to wider, common-sense sporting narratives and spectacles. The prosaic, yet consistent images of refugees and Swiss weekly "running as one" (as per FLAG21 promotional material) in Geneva were always already associated with more grandiose and sensational spectacles of sport as a universal conveyor of integration opportunities; the "celebrity humanitarianism" (Kapoor 2013) of the IOC Refugee Olympic Team being only a recent and emblematic example. At the same time, while the scenes of sporting inclusion that unfolded weekly in Geneva via FLAG21 activities arguably made tangible common-sense discourses surrounding the intrinsic positivity of sport, they also materialised and brought to the fore specific images and approaches towards integration. *Pace* academic propositions theorising integration as a two-way process enacted by refugees and host societies (Castles et al. 2002), these images (re)produced pervasive discourses that in (and beyond) Switzerland framed integration and asylum in terms of individual responsibility and deservingness, instead of rights (see Schinkel 2018; Affolter 2020):

> *I am a refugee, and I am aware of the surveillance by the Swiss. Certificates are a good way to prove that I am useful for my permit*. I have gained certificates from my experiences as a volunteer at running events; as a translator at [xxx] in Geneva, and other places (Behrooz, personal interview, 28 April, 2020, emphasis added).

Significantly, in this excerpt Behrooz managed to sum up what the scenes of inclusion described above at the same time made visible and concealed. On the one hand, Behrooz, but also Mebratu's words implicitly showed how the best-intentioned constellation of FLAG21 images and narratives unwittingly but effectively contributed to reinforce an idea of integration as the sum-up of individualised efforts by refugees and supportive citizens. An image widely normalised in Swiss public and policy discourses (Poertner 2017; Affolter 2020, 2021; Eule 2020) that effectively contributes to (re)define refugees' integration as an individual affair and responsibility rather than a trajectory unequally shaped by the intersection of wider socio-political forces (from poverty, racism/xenophobia, homophobia and gendered inequalities to increasingly shrinking spaces of asylum (see Uheling 2015; Schinkel 2018). At the same time, Behrooz's words also hinted at the *obscene* supplements that underpin the (im)possibilities of integration for people seeking asylum in Switzerland: the pervasive *prescription* to demonstrate commitment and responsibility for those deemed "deserving" refugees (e.g. certificates as proofs of one's *usefulness,* see also Schinkel 2018), and the *proscription* of those deemed non-deserving of the Swiss "noble value of asylum"

(Affolter 2020, 28). It is to the latter and to how it was (not) acknowledged in FLAG21 integration activities that we turn in the next section.

The obscene of exclusion: on the conditions of (im)possibility of integration through sport

> My time at FLAG21 has helped build my morale and kept me busy. It also is a good distraction from the complications related to my asylum process...my morale and focus on French has also been affected by the asylum process. I used to have French classes and was very good at them, but at present, the classes are not so interesting, and I do not have much motivation to attend... I do not have work for now. I worked for a year before but had to stop due to my reasons. (Yonas, personal interview, May 8, 2020).

Among FLAG21's consistent participants, Yonas could have arguably been considered as *embodying* the association's ethos of *responsibility and leadership* as gateways and facilitators of wider processes of social integration through sport. While not acting as one of the coaches for the association, he consistently attended the running sessions and often took charge of organising the post-training refreshments, including organising an Eritrean food stall and making an Eritrean music performance for the association at a major running event in January 2020. However, in the phone interview conducted in May 2020 Yonas mentioned his "complications" with the asylum process. We do not know exactly the nature of the "complications" that suspended Yonas' life in Switzerland, with knock-on effects on his morale and focus. What we do know is that in between 2018 and 2020 the Swiss parliament tasked the State Secretariat for Migration (SEM) to "review the temporary admission of 3,400 Eritrean nationals5". The review, linked to the Swiss government's efforts to make more efficient (read, restrictive) the provision of asylum resources only to those "truly in need" (Poertner 2017; Eule 2020; Affolter 2020, 2021) was justified by the argument that for those under review Eritrea could now constitute a "safe country"6 to return to. The receipt of a letter from the SEM stating "We are considering cancelling your provisional admission, which would result in your removal from Switzerland" (Herzog 2018) would mean for those affected losing the right to work and social assistance (including eviction from public housing). The review ended in 2020 with the overall revocation of 104 temporary admissions (AIDA, 2021), but during

[5] Out of 9500 Eritrean nationals with temporary admission permits and an overall population of 25000 Eritreans in Switzerland in 2018 (Herzog 2018).

[6] See also what is currently taking place in Denmark with 1200 people facing the prospect of being deported to Damascus, Syria, now deemed "safe to return". In this sense this exemplifies once more what Mountz (2020) discussed in terms of the "fast policy transfer" of "best practices of exclusion" across nation states (xv- xvi)

the time of the review, local associations flagged how individuals and families were evicted, lost their employment and teenagers dropped out from education (Herzog 2018).

Yonas did not make explicit mention of the review during the interview. Yet, during the COVID-19 lockdown months in Switzerland in 2020, he exited from the WhatsApp chat of the association. When the association's activities resumed February 2021, Yonas did not join them. Although we cannot be sure if Yonas' predicament was related to this specific issue, his asylum "complications" and ensuing consequences are emblematic of the lives made precarious by ongoing changes and "reviews" in asylum and border policies (De Genova 2013; Lewis et al. 2014). Yonas might now have tried to seek asylum in another country, remained in Switzerland "under the radar" and with a precarious legal position, have been "accommodated" in (often remote) federal asylum centres for appealing or denied asylum seekers, or have relocated to another city. Any of these perspectives regarding Yonas, and many others' present and future, remain uncertain. Nevertheless, the unfolding of his relationship with FLAG21 is emblematic of a larger and widely disavowed socio-political and legal process of "inclusion through exclusion" (De Genova 2013, 1184) that always already constitutes the *obscene supplement* haunting the scenes of inclusion discussed in the previous section. In other words, Yonas' trajectory within and beyond the group, *including* its blanks, silences and uncertainties, is emblematic of what FLAG21 aims and scenes of inclusions unwittingly *made invisible* and missed to explicitly recognise. This, it is important to acknowledge, notwithstanding the facilitation of meaningful opportunities for *some* refugees in specific circumstances.

It is important to note that in the excerpt above Yonas underlined how important it was for him to be engaged with FLAG21, especially at a time in which everything else in his life was suspended. The role of leisure and sport in addressing and re-structuring the suspended time that asylum policies enforce on the lives of people seeking sanctuary has been discussed in the literature (see Webster and Abunaama 2021; Schmidt and Palutan 2021) and is something on which we will return in the discussion. Nevertheless, while Yonas' accounts of the group went some way to reflect some of these experiences, it seems that their relevance was somehow missed in the association's aims and activities directed to improve specific (and arguably more measurable and policy-relevant) outcomes of health, employment and integration. Moreover, despite a general intention to "fight discrimination", FLAG21 never explicitly mentioned in its aims, public narratives and interventions the consequences of Swiss asylum policies on the (im)possibility of integration for the participants. In this sense, Yonas' case made painfully visible how widely accepted understandings of integration as responsibility contribute to obscure the operations of ever-expanding apparatuses of classification and deterrence aimed towards people seeking asylum (Mayblin 2020; Mountz 2020).

In this sense, we contend that addressing how sport-for-integration interventions can recognise and address the *obscene of exclusion* inherent in widespread trends in asylum policies becomes fundamental in addressing the nexus between sport, integration and forced migration. Relatedly, we argue that this discussion entails addressing *what is at stake* in the provision and/or co-creation of sporting and leisure spaces, mediums, and temporalities with refugees. This is what we focus on in the next section.

Discussion: Sport, (spectacles of) integration and the exclusionary politics of asylum

It is important at this point to highlight how some of the issues addressed in the previous sections meaningfully resonate with a well-established body of research that has problematised the 'mythopoeic' conceptualisations of sport as a social panacea in the development field (Spaaij 2009; Coakley 2011; Coalter 2013). Nevertheless, we contend that scholars addressing the intersecting domains of sport, integration and forced migration want to put to work these analyses with critical contributions in (forced) migration studies on the unfolding scenarios regarding border, integration and asylum policies.

With the concept of the *integration spectacle,* we have thus aimed to illuminate the dense weave of sporting images, narratives and rhetoric that give the semblance of an objective fact to (un)problematic assumptions on the role of sport in facilitating refugees' integration. In advancing this concept, we have put into dialogue De Genova's work on the border spectacle with the insights provided by critical analyses of integration (see Uheling 2015; Schinkel 2018). Therefore, this conceptual lens examines how a wide constellation of narratives, practices and understandings of sport as a pro-social force and a means of self-development contribute to (re)produce existing *individualising* policy and public expectations regarding refugees' integration (see Uheling 2015; Schinkel 2018). This, while concealing the obscene exclusion operated by and through ever-expanding apparatuses of classification and deterrence aimed towards people seeking asylum (Mayblin 2020; Mountz 2020).

Different from the border spectacle, which De Genova (2013) understood as framed through highly mass-mediated images and narratives of illegal migrants "apprehension", we can understand the integration spectacle as composed by the simultaneous assemblage and overlap of grandiose, sensational and more prosaic images; from the stories of extra-ordinary achievement and "resilience" of the members of the IOC Refugee Olympic Team to the mundane images of FLAG21 members running in Geneva and their less-televised but still warming trajectories of integration and social mobility. Significantly, these overlapping images compose a visual and discursive frame, what De Genova called a "visual grammar" (1180), through which existing public and humanitarian

narratives and perceptions regarding (deserving) refugees' resilience and integration echo and reinforce each other, ultimately shaping the phenomenon they represent. In this sense, the scenes of inclusion assembled through FLAG21 weekly running groups, from the promotional images to the coaches' public narratives, *did not emerge in a vacuum*. The scenes, narratives and images of inclusion that emerged from the group's activities were always already and constantly (re)associated with existing popular images of sport as a "common language" (as per Afreen's excerpt) and with humanitarian narratives of refugees' overcoming and resilience (Easton-Calabria and Omata 2018). At the same time, as Yonas' case painfully indicated, in and through the same constellation of images and narratives, the policy frameworks that produce the highly-contingent, arbitrary and exclusionary conditions for the integration of people seeking asylum in Switzerland *vanished from view* (and from scrutiny). In this sense, through what we call here the integration spectacle we can see how the focus and aims of well-intentioned sport-for-integration initiatives unwittingly contribute to conceal how (forced) migrants' integration in host societies "proceed through a constant differentiation" (De Genova 2013, 1188). A differentiation that distinguishes between those always-already assumed as integrated, the "native" and inherently White population (Schinkel 2018), and those contingently and precariously included, and thus always-already at the reach of intensifying state practices of classification and deterrence.

Following these considerations, it is thus significant to look at how (usually grassroots) sport initiatives and clubs have made visible and addressed, rather than hidden from view in their interventions forms of state-sanctioned violence towards forced migrants. These experiences have been discussed across a range of (mostly European) social and spatial settings from informal camps (McGee and Pelham 2018; Schmidt and Palutan 2021) to urban contexts in which refugees are dispersed and/or re-settling (Stone 2018; Webster and Abunaama 2021).

We contend that these interventions represent only partially explored, yet crucial domains from where to explore the critical relevance and productivity of sport and leisure in ways that operate "against the grain" (Schinkel 2018, 7) of established understandings of issues of sport, integration and forced migration. First, while far from devoid of ambivalences and contradictions (see McGee and Pelham 2018) these interventions arguably complicate the spectacle of (sporting) integration by naming and challenging the conditions that produce marginality and contingent inclusion of people seeking asylum. Relatedly, these initiatives' "lateral and anti-hierarchical" forms of solidarity (Rozakou 2016, 188) highlight the salience of encounters with refugees that can (if partially and temporarily) interrogate and challenge at the same time dehumanising discourses and procedures of migration control, and the "policy-relevant" aims and structures of humanitarian/integration initiatives (see De Martini Ugolotti 2020). To be clear, this does not mean

arguing against the possibility to *pragmatically* facilitate training and employment opportunities in and through sport interventions supporting refugees. Rather, it is an invitation to examine how emphases on up-skilling and employment as contributions to "fix" the issue of refugees' integration may, in fact, contribute to locate "the issue" itself in refugees' own inadequacies and lacks, or in the missed recognition of their "strengths", rather than in wider socio-political, and legal processes that govern their access and opportunities for health, livelihoods and sociality. In light of these considerations, exploring sport-for-integration initiatives through the lens of the integration spectacle implies also critically examining *why* specific aims and outcomes are identified in specific interventions, *what* these aims and outcomes focus on and leave aside, and *for whom* these are relevant, desirable and in fact enabling. This, as a premise to re-think and mobilise different grammars and vernaculars to imagine, narrate and co-create sport and leisure practices and domains that are more closely attending, highlighting and engaging with refugees' experiences and trajectories within and beyond contemporary regimes of asylum.

Conclusions

Drawing on an ethnographic study addressing the activities of a sports project that employed running as an instrument of integration and health promotion for migrants and refugees in Geneva, Switzerland, this paper addressed the ways in which the aims, narratives and practices of sport interventions can contribute to creating what we have called here spectacles of integration. In this sense, Switzerland's symbolic relevance, influence and interactions with other migration policy interlocutors at the European and global level (Eule 2020) made the empirical site of this study a partial, situated, yet relevant prism that reflected and articulated individual trajectories to wider (inter)national mechanisms, logics and discourses surrounding sport, asylum and integration in the Global North. Through the conceptual lens of the integration spectacle, we advanced a critical perspective that interrogated the ambivalent position that sport interventions occupy within the politics and moral representations of asylum. The discussion of the data illuminated the ways in which widely-available understandings of sport as a facilitator of integration obscured how people seeking asylum remain often contingently, differentially and precariously included in host societies (De Genova 2013; Schinkel 2018) and thus always-already at the reach of intensifying state practices of classification and deterrence.

The relevance of the considerations and conceptual framework advanced here can emerge more clearly if we consider the increasing momentum (and investments) surrounding sports and leisure programs and interventions that pursue health, therapeutic, or social purposes in working with forced migrants in the European Union, North America and Australia (Spaaij and Oxford

2018). This is even more evident as (inter)national actors as different (in terms of their approaches towards migration and asylum) as the UNHCR, the European Union and the British Home Office have all stressed the importance of sport and leisure in newcomers' integration processes (see Spaaij et al. 2019; Ndofor-Tah et al. 2019). These unfolding developments hint at the spilling over of specific understandings and narratives of sport as a site of (individual) investment and transformation from the social problem to the migration industries (Andrews and Pitter 1997; Eule 2020) that we call for researchers to critically address and unpack further in future research. In this unfolding scenario, this study contributed to underline the importance of conceptual tools that can make visible the *political work* that narratives, images and practices surrounding sport and leisure *do* in relation to issues of integration, asylum and sanctuary. In addressing these issues, this paper advanced what we hope can be(come) productive questions and frames of analysis for scholars and practitioners alike that are engaged in critical discussions and praxis at the intersection of issues of sport, integration and forced migration.

References

Affolter, Laura. 2020. “Keeping numbers low in the name of fairness. Ethos and ethics in a Swiss asylum administration.” In *The bureaucratic production of difference,* edited by Julia Eckert, 27–57. Bielefeld: Transcript.

Affolter, Laura. 2021. “Trained to Disbelieve: The Normalisation of Suspicion in a Swiss Asylum Administration Office.” *Geopolitics*: 1-24. DOI: 10.1080/14650045.2021.1897577

Agergaard, Sine, Verena Lenneis, Camilla Bakkær Simonsen, and Knud Ryom. 2021. "Granted asylum and healthy living?: Women newcomers’ experiences of accessing leisure time physical activity in Denmark." In *Leisure and Forced Migration,* edited by Nicola de Martini Ugolotti and Jayne Caudwell, 105-120. London: Routledge.

Alemu, Betelihem Brehanu, Hanna Vehmas, and Siegfried Nagel. 2021. "Social integration of Ethiopian and Eritrean women in Switzerland through informal sport settings." *European Journal for Sport and Society*: 1-20. doi: 10.1080/16138171.2021.1878435

Amnesty International. 2021. “*I ask that they treat asylum seekers like human beings”: Human Rights Violations in Swiss Federal Asylum Centres.* Report. London: Amnesty International.

Asylum Information Database (AIDA). 2021. *Country Report: Switzerland*. Brussels: European Council on Refugees and Exiles.

Castles, Stephen, Maja Korac, Ellie Vasta, and Steven Vertovec. 2002. "Integration: Mapping the field." *Home Office online report* 29, no. 03. London: Home Office.

Coakley, Jay. 2011. Youth sports: what counts as "positive development?". *Journal of Sport & Social Issues*, 35 (3), 306–324.
Coalter, Fred. 2013. *Sport-for-development: What game are we playing?* London: Routledge.
Collison, Claire, and Nicola De Martini Ugolotti. 2021. "Pain, faith and yoga: An intersectional-phenomenological perspective on Syrian Muslim women's experiences of resettlement in Sweden" In *Leisure and Forced Migration: Lives Lived in Asylum Systems*, edited by Nicola de Martini Ugolotti and Jayne Caudwell, 121-138. London: Routledge.
Debord, Guy. 1967/1995. *The Society of the Spectacle*. Translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith. New York: Zone Books.
De Genova, Nicholas. 2013. "Spectacles of migrant 'illegality': the scene of exclusion, the obscene of inclusion." *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 36(7): 1180-1198.
De Martini Ugolotti, Nicola. 2020. "Music-making and forced migrants' affective practices of diasporic belonging." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*: 1-18. doi:10.1080/1369183X.2020.1790344
De Martini Ugolotti, Nicola and Jayne Caudwell, eds. 2021. *Leisure and Forced Migration: Lives Lived in Asylum Systems*. London: Routledge.
Easton-Calabria, Evan, and Naohiko Omata. 2018. "Panacea for the refugee crisis? Rethinking the promotion of 'self-reliance' for refugees." *Third World Quarterly* 39(8): 1458-1474.
Edwards, Rosalind. 2013. "Power and trust: an academic researcher's perspective on working with interpreters as gatekeepers." *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 16(6), pp. 503-514.
Eule, T. G. 2020. "Advice as a Vocation? Politics, Managerialism and State Funding in the Swiss Refugee Support Community." *Ethnos*: 1-16. doi:10.1080/00141844.2019.1687547
Fassin, Didier. 2005. "Compassion and repression: The moral economy of immigration policies in France." *Cultural Anthropology* 20 (3): 362–387.
Fassin, Didier, and Carolina Kobelinsky. 2012. "How asylum claims are adjudicated: The institution as a moral agent." *Revue française de sociologie* 53 (4): 444–472.
Federal Administrative Court (FAC). 2020. Press Release on the first year of the new Asylum Act, March 23. St Gallen: FAC Media Relations.
https://www.bvger.ch/bvger/en/home/media/medienmitteilungen-2020/mm-asylbilanz-0320.html (last accessed 4th August 2021)
FLAG21. 2019. *General Assembly Report*, March 26. FLAG21 (available on request)
FLAG21. 2020. *Rapport Annuel 2020*. FLAG21. http://www.FLAG21.ch/FLAG21.html (last accessed 4th August 2021)

Haile, Semhar, Francesca Meloni, and Habib Rezaie. 2020. “Negotiating research and life spaces: participatory research approaches with young migrants in the UK.” In *Refuge in a moving world: tracing refugees and migrant journeys across disciplines*, edited by Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 23-24. London: UCL Press.

Herzog, Stéphane . 2018. “Bern puts pressure on refugees from the Eritrean dictatorship.” *Swiss Community*, November 22. https://www.swisscommunity.org/en/news-media/swiss-review/article/bern-puts-pressure-on-refugees-from-the-eritrean-dictatorship (last accessed 4th August 2021)

Hugman, Richard, Linda Bartolomei, and Eileen Pittaway. 2011. “Human agency and the meaning of informed consent: reflections on research with refugees.” *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 24(4): 655-671.

Jeanes, Ruth, Justen O’Connor, and Laura Alfrey. 2015. “Sport and the resettlement of young people from refugee backgrounds in Australia.” *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 39(6): 480–500.

Kapoor, Ilan. 2013. *Celebrity humanitarianism: The ideology of global charity*. London: Routledge.

Kincheloe, J. L. 2001. “Describing the bricolage: conceptualizing a new rigor in qualitative research.” *Qualitative Inquiry,* 7 (6): 679-692.

Kincheloe, J. L. 2005. “On to the Next Level: Continuing the Conceptualization of the Bricolage.” *Qualitative Inquiry,* 11 (3): 323-350.

Lewis, Hannah, Peter Dwyer, Stuart Hodkinson, and Louise Waite. 2014. *Precarious Lives. Forced Labour, Exploitation and Asylum*. Bristol: The Policy Press.

Luguetti, Carla, Loy Singehebhuye, and Ramón Spaaij. 2021. “‘Stop mocking, start respecting’: an activist approach meets African Australian refugee-background young women in grassroots football.” *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*: 1-18. doi: 10.1080/2159676X.2021.1879920

Malkki, L.H. 1995. “Refugees and exile: from ‘refugee studies’ to the national order of things.” *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 24: 495–523.

Mashreghi, Sepandarmaz, Hassan Yasmin, and Mohammad Ali. 2021. “Decolonial stories of forced migrants in physical activity and sport ‘We the Afghan kids’.” In *Leisure and Forced Migration: Lives Lived in Asylum Systems,* edited by Nicola De Martini Ugolotti and Jayne Caudwell, 157-175. London: Routledge.

Mayblin, Lucy. 2020. *Asylum and Impoverishment: Social Policy as Slow-Violence*. London: Routledge.

McGee, Darragh, and Juliette Pelham. 2018. “Politics at play: locating human rights, refugees and grassroots humanitarianism in the Calais Jungle.” *Leisure Studies,* 37(1): 22–35.

Mountz, Alison. 2020. *The Death of Asylum: Hidden Geographies of the Enforcement Archipelago*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
Ndofor-Tah C., A. Strang, J. Phillimore, L. Morrice, L. Michael, P. Wood, and J. Simmons. 2019. *Home Office Indicators of Integration Framework 2019*. London: Home Office. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/835573/home-office-indicators-of-integration-framework-2019-horr109.pdf (last accessed 4th August, 2021)
Pitter, Robert, and D.L. Andrews. 1997. "Serving America's underserved youth: Reflections on sport and recreation in an emerging social problems industry." *Quest*, 49(1): 85–99.
Poertner, Ephraim. 2017. "Governing asylum through configurations of productivity and deterrence: Effects on the spatiotemporal trajectories of cases in Switzerland." *Geoforum*, 78: 12-21.
Richardson, Laure, and Elizabeth St. Pierre. 2005. "Writing: A Method of Inquiry." In *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research* (3rd Edition), edited by N. K. Denzin and Y.S. Lincoln, 959-978. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
Rozakou, Katerina. 2016. "Socialities of solidarity: revisiting the gift taboo in times of crisis." *Social Anthropology*, 24(2): 185–199.
Schinkel, Willem. 2018. "Against 'immigrant integration': for an end to neo-colonial knowledge production." *Comparative Migration Studies* 6: 1–17. doi: 10.1186/s40878-018-0095-1
Schmidt, Donatella, and Giovanna Palutan. 2021. "Thick leisure: Waiting time in a migratory context." In *Leisure and Forced Migration: Lives Lived in Asylum Systems,* edited by Nicola De Martini Ugolotti and Jayne Caudwell, 52-66. London: Routledge.
Spaaij, Ramón. 2009. "Personal and social change in and through sport: cross-cutting themes." *Sport in Society*, 12: 1265–1268.
Spaaij, Ramón, and Sarah Oxford. 2018. "SDP and forced displacement." In *Routledge Handbook of Sport and Development and Peace*, edited by Holly Collison, S.C. Darnell, Richard Giulianotti, and P. D. Howe, 385-395. London: Routledge.
Spaaij, Ramón, Jora Broerse, Sarah Oxford, Carla Luguetti, Fiona McLachlan, Brent McDonald, Bojana Klepac, Lisa Lymbery, Jeffrey Bishara, and Aurélie Pankowiak. 2019. "Sport, refugees, and forced migration: a critical review of the literature." *Frontiers in Sports and Active Living*,1. doi:10.3389/fspor.2019.00047
Stone, Chris. 2018. "Utopian community football? Sport, hope and belongingness in the lives of refugees and asylum seekers." *Leisure Studies*, 37(2): 171–183.
Uheling, Greta. 2015. "The responsibilization of refugees in the United States: on the political uses of psychology." *Anthropological Quarterly*, 88(4): 997–1028.

Webster, Chris, and Khaled Abunaama. 2021. “Informal football spaces and the negotiation of temporal politics in the lives of forced migrants.” In *Leisure and Forced Migration: Lives Lived in Asylum Systems*, edited by Nicola De Martini Ugolotti and Jayne Caudwell, 20-34. London: Routledge.

Whitley, M. A., Cassandra Coble, & G.S. Jewell. 2016. “Evaluation of a sport-based youth development programme for refugees.” *Leisure/Loisir*, 40(2): 175–199.

Figure 1 – Table of Interviewees.

Name	**Sex**	**Country of Origin**	**Years in Geneva**
Behrooz	M	Afghanistan	6
Hafez	M	Afghanistan	6
Yonas	M	Eritrea	5
Mebratu	M	Eritrea	6
Aafreen	F	Iran	2

Figure 1.


© Antoine Tardy
FLAG21
SPORT ET INTEGRATION GENEVE
FLAG21 a pour objectif de faciliter l'intégration
des migrants au travers d'activités sportives.
REJOIGNEZ-NOUS!
Pour plus d'informations:
www.flag21.ch
www.facebook.com/flag21ch
REPUBLIQUE ET CANTON DE GENEVE
PIC
SUBVENTIONNÉ PAR LA VILLE DE GENÈVE