

Unity in Play: Photographic Narratives of Diversity and Integration in Sports in Ireland.

A book of photography

By

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DECLARATION

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of the MA in Journalism & Media Communications, is my own; based on my personal study and/or research, and that I have acknowledged all material and sources used in its preparation. I also certify that I have not copied in part or whole or otherwise plagiarised the work of anyone else, including other students.

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ABSTRACT

"Unity in Play... "is a photographic project documenting the history of the Gaelic football team *Columbus*, made up mostly of immigrants. In a sport traditionally played by the Irish since school age, the Columbus team is challenging the norms and redefining the meaning of belonging and community within Gaelic football.

Through a collection of images, this book explores their training sessions as well as their participation in matches against other GAA schools.

As well as their diverse backgrounds, the images show their passion for learning more about Irish culture, particularly through these sports so characteristic of the Emerald Isle.

The book captures the beginnings of Columbus, its early members and some of their struggles for integration and acceptance within the Irish sporting community. The story of each player's journey to the team highlights the cultural and social barriers they faced, as well as the personal stories of overcoming and resilience.

It also aims to raise awareness of the importance of inclusion and diversity in traditionally homogeneous sports, showing how Gaelic football can function as a cultural bridge and catalyst for social integration.

Through this book, readers will not only discover the world of Gaelic football from a new perspective but will also be immersed in the lives of immigrants who use sport to find a sense of belonging and community in their new home.

The Columbus team thus becomes a symbol of sport's ability to unite people from different backgrounds and cultures, promoting values of inclusion, solidarity, and respect.

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CHAPTER ONE - INTRODUCTION

The origins of this research lie in a personal interest in the complex relationship between sport and cultural integration. As a migrant myself, I have witnessed first-hand the profound impact that active participation can have in fostering a sense of belonging and connection within a new community.

This personal experience, coupled with the growing body of research highlighting the social benefits of sport for immigrants, sparked my desire to explore this phenomenon in the context of Irish culture.

Sport, with its universal language and inherent ability to transcend cultural barriers, has long been recognised as a powerful tool for social inclusion. It provides a platform for people from diverse backgrounds to come together, build relationships and develop a shared sense of identity.

The “European Union White Paper on Sport” mentions that: “sport promotes a shared sense of belonging and participation and can therefore also be an important tool for the integration of immigrants. In this context, the creation of sport spaces and support for sport-related activities are important for immigrants and the host society to interact in a positive way.”(2007, p.7)

For immigrants, participation in local sport can be particularly valuable, as it gives them the opportunity to get to know the host culture, make new friends and develop a sense of belonging. According to the Cambridge dictionary, immigration (noun) is: “the act of someone coming to live in a different country.” (Cambridge University Press, 2024)

Migrants are people who immigrate to places other than those in which they were born, while migrating away from places they often continue to describe as home. The category encompasses a diverse group, including both asylum seekers, economic migrants, and refugees.

In this case, sport provides a common language that transcends language and cultural barriers. Through these shared experiences in the field, migrants can make connections with residents and build friendships. This social integration is crucial to alleviating the feelings of isolation and alienation that often accompany immigration.

In Ireland, *Cumann Lúthchleas Gael*, or the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) occupies a unique place in the cultural landscape. More than just a sporting organisation, the GAA is deeply intertwined with Irish history, identity, and community life. This association was a product of the political ferment of the late 19th century, which ultimately culminated in the Easter Rising

and the declaration of Irish independence in 1922.

Its games, Gaelic football, and Hurling are not just sporting competitions but cultural landmarks that embody the spirit of the nation.

The GAA plays a central role in Irish cultural and national identity, promoting not only sport, but also the Irish language and other cultural traditions and according to Inglis:

What makes the GAA and Ireland unique in modern sport is that it is an amateur organisation. With the exception of those employed full-time in the running of commercial aspects of the stadia and conference facilities at Croke Park, the GAA functions as an island-wide organisation of unpaid volunteers working at local parish, club, county and provincial levels. (Inglis, 2015, p. 203).

Consequently, participation in the GAA provides immigrants with a distinctive opportunity for cultural immersion and integration. In this thesis, I seek to examine the transformative potential of Irish sports, such as Gaelic football and hurling, in the lives of immigrants in Ireland.

By focusing on a GAA team comprised largely of Latin American players, this study aims to shed light on the experiences of these individuals and how participation in sport shapes their sense of self, their relationships with others and their connection to their adopted homeland.

This research has both personal and wider implications. By highlighting the experiences of Latino immigrants in GAA, it aims to contribute to the growing body of knowledge on the role of sport in promoting intercultural understanding and social cohesion. It also aims to provide valuable insights for policy makers and community leaders seeking to harness the power of sport to promote diversity and inclusion.

Research aims and objectives.

This research project endeavours to illuminate the multifaceted role of Gaelic football (GAA) as a catalyst for the social integration of immigrants in Ireland. By harnessing the unique power of documentary photography, this study will delve into the nuanced ways in which participation in a GAA team contributes to the acculturation process, fostering a sense of belonging, community, and shared identity among newcomers.

Specifically, this research seeks to achieve the following objectives:

1. **Documentary and Visual Storytelling:** Through a carefully curated collection of photographs, this project aims to create a compelling visual narrative that encapsulates the essence of cultural integration, diversity, and inclusion within the Irish sporting landscape. By capturing the raw emotions, candid interactions, and shared experiences of diverse communities, the photobook "Unity in Play..." will offer an immersive and empathetic portrayal of the transformative power of sport.
2. **Cultural Representation and Diversity:** By highlighting the rich tapestry of backgrounds and cultural identities present within Irish sport, this study seeks to celebrate the diversity that enriches our communities. The photographs will serve as a visual testament to the fact that sport is not only a reflection of the wider social mosaic but also a powerful tool for facilitating interactions and understanding between different cultural groups.
3. **Social Integration and Inclusion:** This research aims to explore and illustrate the profound impact of sport in promoting integration, fostering a sense of belonging, and building community among immigrants. Through the lens of Gaelic football, the study will examine how participation in a team sport can break down barriers, create social connections, and contribute to a more inclusive and cohesive society.
4. **Artistic and Creative Expression:** By harnessing the artistic and evocative power of photography, this project seeks to spark a wider dialogue about the intersections of culture, identity, and community in sport. The photographs, accompanied by insightful narratives, will invite viewers to reflect on their own assumptions and biases, encouraging a deeper understanding of the immigrant experience and the role of sport in fostering social change.

In documenting the formation and evolution of the Gaelic Columbus team, this research endeavours to capture the multifaceted and nuanced nature of the immigrant experience in Ireland. By highlighting both the individual and collective dimensions of this journey, the project aims to advance our understanding of the intricate relationship between sport, migration, and

social integration.

Furthermore, this research aspires to offer valuable insights for policymakers, community organizations, and sporting bodies who seek to leverage the transformative potential of sport to build more inclusive and welcoming societies. By displaying the power of sport to bridge cultural divides, foster social cohesion, and create a sense of belonging, this project aims to inspire and inform future initiatives that promote diversity, equity, and inclusion through sport.

Methodology

This research adopts a multifaceted approach to explore the multifaceted nature of immigrant integration through sport. The primary method used is photographic documentation that captures the lived experiences of Columbus team members during training and matches.

This visual ethnography aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the social dynamics, emotions and interactions that shape the team's development.

The graphic narrative is enhanced by a review of the pertinent literature. This encompasses academic work in the sociology of sport, migration studies and visual anthropology, which offers a variety of perspectives on the social dynamics, emotions and interactions that typify the team's trajectory.

The following section presents a theoretical framework for interpreting the photographic data. Notable works such as those of John Connolly and Paddy Dolan offer significant insights into the historical and contemporary contexts of migrant experiences in Irish sport.

It is important to note that my primary artistic inspiration stems from the work of Martin Parr, a pioneering figure in the field of documentary photography. Parr's distinctive approach, characterised by a discerning eye for detail, a vibrant colour palette and an emphasis on capturing everyday moments, provides a valuable framework for encapsulating the essence of this team's experience.

Furthermore, to enhance the qualitative aspect of the research, an interview (see appendix B) was conducted with the founders of the Columbus team. This provided valuable insights into the rationale behind the formation of this sports team, as well as the challenges they encounter, and the sense of community derived from the sport.

The objective is to construct a comprehensive and empathetic representation of the immigrant

experience in the context of Irish sport through the utilisation of visual storytelling. the use of visual storytelling, the intention is to create a comprehensive and empathetic portrayal of the immigrant experience in the context of Irish sport.

Structure of the thesis

The following chapters of this thesis will address the many aspects of the research question, culminating in a comprehensive exploration of the role of sport in immigrant integration.

Chapter 2 will provide a solid foundation through a critical review of the relevant literature, mentioning other key texts that enrich this research, such as “Sport: A Critical Sociology” (Richard Giulianotti, 2005), in which the author offers a comprehensive sociological analysis of sport, examining its role in society, including aspects of identity, community and social integration. 'Rethinking Sports and Integration' (Agergaard, 2018) discusses how sport can function as both a barrier and a bridge to integration, depending on various factors such as inclusivity, access, and community support.

Meanwhile, “Gaelic Games in Society” (Connolly & Dolan, 2019) examines the place of Gaelic games in Irish society, discussing their cultural significance and social impact.

Chapter 3 delineates the methodological approach employed in this research, with a particular focus on the construction and design of the photographic documentary. The theoretical foundations of documentary photography are examined, with particular attention paid to the influence of Martin Parr.

This chapter will provide a comprehensive account of the fieldwork process, ethical considerations and techniques employed to capture and narrate the experiences of migrants who are actively involved in the Gaelic football team. Columbus.

Chapter 4 outlines the evolution of this documentary project from an initial concept that explored the diversity and inclusion of multiple sports teams to a focus on the Gaelic Columbus immigrant team. The input of supervisors Mark Neiland and Johnny Savage was pivotal in the evolution of the project. Neiland offered insights into visual storytelling and ethical considerations, while Savage provided guidance on the creation of the photobook, emphasising its narrative potential. As a result of collaboration and feedback from the supervisors, the project evolved into a compelling visual narrative that illuminates the experiences of the team and underscores the significance of collaboration in documentary filmmaking.

Through a series of collaborative workshops and discussions, Savage guided the selection, sequencing, and layout of the photographs, transforming a collection of individual images into a cohesive and impactful narrative. His expertise in photobook design, with its emphasis on visual rhythm, pacing, and the interplay of text and image, elevated the project to a new level of sophistication and aesthetic appeal.

The collaborative nature of this mentorship fostered a dynamic exchange of ideas and perspectives, and not only enriched the final product but also fostered my own growth as a photographer and storyteller.

Chapter 5 sums up the research and shows how sport can help people to get along better. It shows how creating inclusive environments, encouraging cross-cultural dialogue, and celebrating diversity in sport can have a positive impact.

My reflects on the project's impact, highlighting the importance of visual storytelling, ethical considerations, and the inspiring resilience of the Gaelic Columbus team. The chapter concludes by advocating for continued investment in sport-based initiatives to build more equitable and harmonious societies.

CHAPTER TWO: EVIDENCE OF RESEARCH

Sport has emerged as an important social platform in the study of cultural integration and community building among immigrant populations. The role of sport, particularly in the context of Gaelic football in Ireland, offers a unique perspective for examining the intersections between identity, belonging and social cohesion. This chapter explores the theoretical and empirical underpinnings of how sport facilitates integration, with a particular focus on the immigrant experience within the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA).

A key element of this research is the use of documentary photography as a methodological tool. With its ability to capture the immediacy and intimacy of everyday life, photography serves not only as a means of visual documentation, but also as a powerful narrative device capable of conveying complex social realities.

By integrating photographic evidence with sociological analysis, this research aims to provide a holistic view of the lived experiences of Latin American immigrants in Ireland who play Gaelic sports.

DOCUMENTARY PHOTOGRAPHY

As defined by the British National Gallery of Art (TATE) (1998), documentary photography is “a style of photography that provides a straightforward and accurate representation of people, places, objects and events, and is often used in reportage”.

Allan Sekula's seminal work on documentary photography highlights its power to take down modernist paradigms and offer a reinvigorated perspective on social documentation.

The author (1978, p.862) emphasises how: “the camera serves to ideologically naturalise the eye of the observer. Photography, according to this belief, reproduces the visible world: the camera is an engine of facts, the generator of a duplicate world of fetishised appearances, independent of human practice.”

The medium of documentary photography enables the viewer to establish a connection with humanity. Each photograph functions as a representation of two distinct spaces: the moment depicted and the specific circumstances surrounding the photograph. Additionally, it can be viewed as a metaphor for a larger, overarching theme.

As a medium that is persistent in the contemporary era, particularly through social media, the documentation of our everyday lives has become a common practice. Sekula suggests that the “(...) photography is operative at every level of our cul-ture. That is, they insist on treating photographs not as privileged objects but as common cultural artifacts.” (1978, p.866)

Documentary photography plays a crucial role in the conservation of memory because it “(...) preserves our collective history because it is evidence, witness, and memory. In this world of motion and sound, a still image stops time, and in turn forces us to be still as we regard it.” (Bogre, 2020, p.16)

The act of photographing the Columbus team, composed of over-age Latino immigrants participating in Gaelic football, has the effect of documenting their participation in a sport, but it is much more than that. It also preserves the narratives of adaptation, struggle, and integration that these individuals experience as they navigate their new lives in Ireland.

The visual documentation provides a tangible connection to their stories, offering future generations a glimpse into the challenges and triumphs of immigrant life.

One of Sekula's most significant contributions was his critique of the 'myth of photographic truth'. He challenged the idea that photographs are neutral or objective representations of reality, suggesting instead that they are constructed through the perspective of the photographer and the context in which they are viewed, because “The rhetorical strength of documentary is imagined to reside in the unequivocal character of the camera's evidence, in an essential realism.” (1978, p.862)

Sekula's insistence on the interpretive nature of photography encourages a deeper engagement with the subject and promotes a more nuanced and critical understanding of social issues.

SPORT AS A MEANS OF INTEGRATION

Sine Agergaard (2018) postulates that sports serve as an efficacious medium for immigrant integration, providing a structured environment in which newcomers can interact with members of the host society, the author also mentions that: “I posit that we define integration as temporal processes rather than simply a static end point in which a national unity is restored”. (2018, p.25)

This interaction often leads to the formation of social bonds and networks, which are crucial

for the successful integration of immigrants. Agergaard's analysis (2018) illustrates how participation in sports can facilitate the dissolution of cultural barriers and foster mutual understanding and respect between immigrants and natives.

The formation and participation of the Columbus team, composed mostly of Latin American immigrants, exemplifies the micro-scale integration processes proposed by the author.

This level of analysis focuses on the interactions between individuals from diverse backgrounds in specific sporting environments, which facilitate personal connections and cultural exchanges. Through regular training, matches and social events, Columbus members interact directly with each other, and these interactions facilitate the formation of friendships, foster understanding and generate mutual respect.

At the same time, they learn about the culture, traditions, and rules of Irish Gaelic football, while sharing their own cultural practices, foods, and stories. This exchange enriches both the immigrant and local communities.

Adrian Favell (2016) stresses the importance of mobility and social inclusion in the integration process, proposing that integration is not a linear phenomenon, but rather a dynamic and continuous negotiation of identity, belonging and participation in the host society. To this effect, he explains the following:

Integration is useful as a term in that it goes beyond merely political issues, such as citizenship or participation, to encompass more difficult to specify social processes and moral problems. It also indicates that change is likely on both sides and presupposes no necessary assimilation to the dominant culture or norms. (Favell, 2016, p.23)

In the Irish context, sports can be considered a microcosm of the broader integration process. Gaelic football, with its deep roots in Irish culture, provides a distinctive opportunity for immigrants to engage in this process of identity formation and social integration.

The participation of immigrants in sports enables them to navigate the complexities of integration, striking a balance between the preservation of their own cultural identities and the adoption of new cultural practices.

Favell's analysis highlights the significance of establishing inclusive environments where immigrants can actively engage and contribute.

This study builds on Richard Giulianotti (2005) to examine sports as a microcosm of wider social

dynamics, with a particular focus on the nexus between immigration and integration.

The framework put forth by Giulianotti underscores the dual nature of sport as both a reflection and a potential agent of social change.

In the context of Gaelic football, the participation of immigrants challenges traditional boundaries of national identity, demonstrating the sport's capacity to foster inclusion and challenge exclusionary practices.

While the sport is not widely played in Latin America, for example, the practice of football allows for a primary approach to Gaelic football before hurling.

Giulianotti's emphasis on the social function of sport is particularly pertinent to this study. By facilitating interaction and shared experiences between diverse individuals, Gaelic football provides a platform for immigrants to engage with Irish society, fostering a sense of belonging and challenging stereotypes.

This is in accordance with Giulianotti's argument that sport can be a powerful instrument for social integration, providing a space in which individuals from different backgrounds can come together in a common pursuit.

Gaelic Sports and National Identity

The Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) offers a particularly illustrative case study of this dynamic in Ireland. Traditionally viewed as a bastion of Irish culture, the GAA's embrace of immigrant players represents a significant shift towards inclusivity.

In the book "Are the Irish Different?" Tom Inglis (2015) explores the evolving nature of Irish identity in the context of globalisation and increasing cultural diversity.

He argues that sport, particularly those deeply rooted in national identity such as Gaelic football, plays a crucial role in negotiating what it means to be Irish in a multicultural society, "the GAA is one of the dominant ways for people to create meaning, a sense of identity and a sense of belonging". (Inglis, 2015, p.206)

The author suggests that the inclusion of immigrants in traditional Irish sports challenges and extends the conventional boundaries of national identity. This inclusion helps to redefine what it means to be Irish by incorporating a wider range of experiences and backgrounds.

The participation of immigrants in Gaelic football symbolises a greater acceptance and integration of diverse identities into the fabric of Irish society.

This phenomenon reflects a shift towards a more inclusive national identity, where being Irish

is no longer defined solely by heritage or ethnicity, but also by participation in shared cultural practices, and as the author mentions “The modern GAA espouses the principles of inclusion and diversity in which the opportunity to participate in Gaelic games and culture is afforded to all irrespective of nationality, religion, ethnicity, age and ability. This is also reflected in the increasing number of immigrants playing Gaelic games.” (Inglis, 2015, p.203)

Rahul Sambaraju (2022) challenges the notion of a singular, monolithic Irish identity, highlighting its evolving and contested nature. This perspective examines how Latin American immigrants negotiate and contribute to the ongoing construction of Irishness through their participation in Gaelic games: “For minority ethnic group members, negotiating inclusion is a routine part of their lives. They might claim for themselves authentic ethnic identities in ways to resist being taken-up by an ethnic majority.” (Sambaraju ,2022, p.78)

The findings of his research indicate that participation in Gaelic games may facilitate the process of immigrants becoming integrated and accepted within Irish society. However, this process is not without its complexities. For example, Sambaraju's findings demonstrate the potential for well-intentioned expressions of solidarity to have unintended consequences.

PHOTOGRAPHY AS A MEDIUM

Sabine T. Kriebel (2016, p.2) conceived that “photography has also functioned as a medium of manipulation, capable of staging fantasies, embellishing half-truths, and asserting outright lies.” This illustrates the capacity of photography to navigate uncertainty and ambiguity. In her research, she employed photography as a means of grappling with the multifaceted nature of cultural integration.

The photobook, then, as a concrete representation of this process, became a repository of the tensions and contradictions intrinsic to the immigrant experience.

Photographing this sports team went beyond mere documentation; it was an active engagement with their realities. Through the photographic lens, I aimed to capture not only the overt expressions of joy and camaraderie during their training sessions, but also the subtle nuances of cultural adaptation as they integrated into the practice of these Irish sports.

As this work is a reflection of my journalistic practice, I did my best not to intervene in the interactions of the participants. As Susan Sontag mentions in her book "On photography": "Photographing is essentially an act of non-intervention (...) The person who intervenes cannot

record; the person who is recording cannot intervene" (1977, p.8).

The resulting images, infused with both a documentary and artistic sensibility, prompted viewers to reflect on their own assumptions about identity and belonging.

Kriebel's emphasis on photography's capacity to 'make the invisible visible' was a concept that I found particularly resonant in informing my own approach.

The presentation of these narratives in a visual format was intended to transcend the limitations of language, thereby facilitating a more visceral and empathetic understanding of the complexities of integration.

The act of physically turning pages, encountering images, and reading the accompanying texts fostered a sense of intimacy and engagement that would not have been possible with a purely textual dissertation.

In essence, emphasising Sontag's point: " the importance of photographic images as the medium through which more and more events enter our experience is, finally, only a byproduct of their effectiveness in furnishing knowledge dissociated from and independent of experience.". (Sontag, 1977, p.121) It allowed me to navigate the complexities of cultural integration with a degree of nuance and sensitivity that would not have been possible through other means (I think it might have been possible through video filming, but it would have required more people to make it).

The photobook, as the culmination of this process, serves as a testament to the power of visual storytelling to illuminate the multifaceted aspects of human experience.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE PHOTOBOOK

In their work "The Photobook: A History Vol. II", Martin Parr and Gerry Badger (2006) highlight the unique ability of the photobook to transcend the limitations of individual photographs, weaving together visual narratives that engage the viewer on both an intellectual and emotional level.

For this documentary project, the creation of a photobook serves as a fundamental methodology, allowing for a nuanced exploration of the complex interplay between sport, immigration, and identity formation in Ireland.

The origins of the photobook are almost as old as the invention of photography. The first book to be illustrated with photographs on record is William Henry Fox Talbot's "The pencil of nature"

(1844) and since then, the production of these visual materials has been on the rise.

I am aware that we live in an age where the modernity of digitalisation has made it possible to preserve and organise photographs more quickly and efficiently, but I remain a loyal consumer of a book in its physical state, or in this case, a photobook.

I emphasise this importance as Sontag put it:

For many decades, the book has been the most influential way of arranging (and usually miniaturizing) photographs, thereby guaranteeing them longevity, if not immortality—photographs are fragile objects, easily torn or mislaid—and a wider public. The photograph in a book is, obviously, the image of an image.

(Sontag, 1977, p.2)

I would like to point out that the sheer number of photobooks out there made me a bit confused about how to make my own. However, during all the confusion, I also got a lot of inspiration from all the visual information I was getting, as Martin Parr mentions: "(...) photographers learn more about their medium from other photographers' books than from any source." (2006)

The ability of a photobook to create a cohesive and immersive experience allows for a deeper understanding of a subject than individual images alone. In the context of this photo-documentary, the photobook format provides a platform to highlight the diverse experiences of the immigrants participating in the Gaelic games.

By juxtaposing portraits, action images and candid moments, the photobook can tell a story, revealing images that reflect his involvement in sport, and immersion within Irish culture.

Moreover, as Parr and Badger (2006) suggest, the photobook is not merely a compilation of images; rather, it is a curated narrative.

The sequence, layout, and design of the book can be employed to create a visual rhythm and flow that guides the viewer through the story. In this project, the photobook was structured to reflect the experiences of the immigrant living, training, and socialising with a sports team.

One of the things I admire most about photobooks is the freedom to read or interpret them in a more free and non-linear way like an ordinary book, "The sequence in which the photographs should be looked at is suggested by the order of the pages, but nothing holds readers in the recommended order or indicates the amount of time to be spent on each photograph." (Sontag, 1977, p.3)

CHAPTER THREE: CONSTRUCTION AND DESIGN

DESIGN PROCESS

The design process for the Unity in Play photobook was a meticulous and interactive endeavour, based on both theoretical considerations and practical constraints. The goal was to create a visual narrative that not only documented the experiences of Latino immigrants in Irish sport, but also resonated with viewers on an emotional and intellectual level.

I was supported by my supervisor Johnny Savage, who is a professional photographer with an extensive background in documentary and editorial photography.

- **Photographic Equipment and Technical Considerations:** The primary photographic equipment used for this project included a DSLR camera: Nikon D600 Full frame (35.9 mm x 24.0 mm CMOS).

In the quest to capture the diverse experiences of Latino immigrants in Gaelic Games, lens selection became a critical consideration. While a 50mm f/1.4 lens offers exceptional low-light performance and shallow depth of field, the AF-S NIKKOR 24-120mm f/4G ED VR lens was ultimately chosen for its versatility and ability to maintain narrative coherence.

The 24-120mm focal length range provided the flexibility to capture a wide range of perspectives, from intimate portraits to sweeping action shots. This versatility was essential in documenting the diverse settings and activities that make up the lives of the immigrant athletes, both on and off the field. The wider end of the zoom range allowed for the inclusion of environmental context, highlighting the athletes' interactions with their surroundings and communities.

To maintain a cohesive aesthetic, all images were captured in RAW format, providing maximum flexibility for post-processing adjustments.

- **Conceptualisation:** The initial phase entailed the establishment of a robust conceptual framework for the photobook. This involved defining the overall narrative arc,

identifying key themes and motifs, and determining the desired emotional tone. I drew inspiration from Martin Parr's photobooks, such as "From A to B: tales of modern motoring" and Martin Parr's "Signs of the Times: A Portrait of the Nation's Times." In these works, the artist captures the everyday reality of diverse subjects, celebrating their resilience.

- **Image selection and sequencing:** A rigorous selection process was undertaken that included the review of hundreds of photographs taken during fieldwork. The process consisted of several online meetings via the Zoom platform with my supervisor. In total we had five meetings and for each photo session I had during the week I would shortlist up to 10 photographs to send to him for review.

The total number of photo shoots was 7:

- a) Five of these were at weekly training sessions in Fairview Park, located in Northside Fairview Co. Dublin, during the months of June and July 2024.
- b) One photo session during a friendly match against Scoil Uí Chonaill GAA Club, located in Clontarf East, Dublin 3, held on Saturday 27th July.
- c) One session held on Saturday 22nd July at the Harcourt Bar & Garden, Saint Kevin's, Dublin 2, where Colombia Day was celebrated and the Columbos team had the opportunity to present the project to all attendees via an information stand at the entrance of the venue.

After each of these sessions I pre-selected the material to send to my supervisor, and I must say that it was not an easy task to choose from up to four hundred photographs taken in one session, only 10. I was able to achieve this thanks to photo editing and organising software such as Adobe Bridge and Adobe Lightroom Classic.

The images chosen were not only aesthetically pleasing, but also narratively significant, contributing to the overall story arc. The sequencing of the images was carefully considered to create a visual rhythm that would guide the viewer through the narrative. Juxtapositions of contrasting images were used to create visual tension and highlight the complexity of the immigrant experience.

- **Layout and design:** The layout and design of the photobook were based on the principles of visual storytelling. I chose a horizontal format that goes more in line with

the photographs I took, and the characteristics are as follows:

- a) Thirty-eight pages in total.
- b) The dimensions of the pages of the photobook are 27.4cm wide and 21cm long.
- c) The resolution of the photographs is three hundred pixels per inch.
- d) A total of twenty-eight photographs were selected.
- e) One photograph makes up the front cover and 1 the back cover.
- f) The order of the photographs varies every five photos: the first is a photograph covering 1 full sheet and an eighth of the other.
- g) The other four are on each page, centred and in an approximate size of 6x4 inches.
- h) The final photograph covers two pages and is placed in the centre of both pages.
- i) The digital version consists of a 42-page interactive pdf format.
- j) The printed version has a size of 27.4cm by 21cm and has a total of thirty-eight pages and is hardcover.
- k) Regarding the aesthetics of the book, we opted for a minimalist look, letting the photographs speak for themselves. Ample white space was used to create a sense of breathing space and allow the viewer's eye to rest.
- l) The typeface used was Poppins, in its black, semibold, light and cursive variety. This font was chosen for its legibility and discretion, so that the text would complement the images rather than compete with them.

The resulting photobook, "Unity in Play"..., is a testament to the power of visual storytelling to illuminate complex social issues. It is a carefully crafted object that invites viewers to engage with the lives and experiences of immigrants in Irish sport, fostering empathy, understanding and a deeper appreciation of the diversity that enriches our communities.

INTERVIEW

To formalise the follow-up of taking photographs of the Columbus team, I conducted an interview with the founders of the team (see appendix A), in which Emilio Picciano and Marianella Oropeza spoke to me about the challenges of starting a team from scratch with people with no experience in this type of sport. Also, they talked about the reception obtained

by the community and the good responses obtained through social networks in terms of the calls launched by media such as Instagram and Facebook.

It was also explained to me how the training sessions are structured and where they train.

An important part of the interview was the explanation of the name of the team and the elements of the crest, as well as their motto in Latin: *via, veritas, vita*.

I ended the interview by asking about the future they aspire to with the formation of this team and considered providing them with my photographic work to be used for recruiting new members to their team.

EDITORIAL DECISION

The construction and design of the *Unity in Play...* photobook involved a meticulous editorial process, guided by a commitment to authenticity, diversity, and visual storytelling. The aim was to create a compelling narrative that not only documented the experiences of Latino immigrants in the Irish Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) but also resonated with viewers on an emotional and intellectual level.

- a) **Authenticity and Respect:** The foundation of the editorial process was a profound respect for the subjects and their stories. A collaborative relationship was cultivated with the players, fostering an environment of trust and open communication. This allowed for authentic and unfiltered portrayals of their lives, both on and off the field. The selection of images prioritized genuine moments of joy, struggle, camaraderie, and determination, eschewing stereotypes, and sensationalism in favour of a nuanced and empathetic representation.
- b) **Diversity and Inclusion:** The photobook celebrates the rich tapestry of diversity within both the Latino community and the GAA. It features players from various countries, backgrounds, and skill levels, highlighting the unifying power of sport to transcend differences and create a sense of shared purpose. The images capture the unique personalities and individual stories of each player, highlighting the multifaceted nature of the immigrant experience.
- c) **Visual Aesthetic:** The photographs in *Unity in Play...* are characterized by their spontaneity and candidness. They capture the raw emotions and everyday moments of the players' lives, from the intensity of training sessions to the light-hearted banter

during breaks. The deliberate use of colour, composition, and lighting enhances the visual impact of the images, creating a vibrant and emotionally resonant experience for the viewer. The aesthetic choices made throughout the photobook aim to draw the viewer into the world of Gaelic Columbus, fostering a sense of empathy and connection with the players.

- d) **Narrative Arc:** The photobook is structured along a narrative arc that mirrors the immigrant experience within the context of sport. It begins with images of anticipation and preparation as the players gear up for training. The narrative then progresses through moments of intense physical exertion, strategic collaboration, and the emotional highs and lows of competition. As the players gain confidence and a sense of belonging within the team, the images reflect their growing connection to their new community. The book culminates in a celebration of their first match against an established Irish team, a symbolic milestone in their journey towards integration and acceptance. The final images highlight the power of the GAA to foster cultural exchange and create a sense of community that transcends national borders.

In essence, the editorial process was driven by a desire to tell a story that was both authentic and inspiring. Through careful image selection, sequencing, and design, the photobook *Unity in Play...* aims to offer a glimpse into the lives of these remarkable individuals, celebrating their resilience, their passion for Gaelic football, and their unwavering spirit in the face of adversity.

CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS

The final process of crafting the "Unity in Play" photobook was not without its challenges, primarily stemming from the constraints of time and the seasonal nature of Gaelic football. These limitations, while initially altering the scope of the project, ultimately reinforced its core purpose of showcasing the integration and inclusion of immigrants through sport in Ireland.

The original vision for this documentary was ambitious, aiming to explore the experiences of three distinct groups within the Irish sporting landscape: the LGBTQ+ community, individuals with special needs, and immigrants. However, an exhaustive search for suitable teams within these demographics proved challenging. Several factors contributed to this difficulty, including a lack of response from certain clubs, summer hiatuses for some sports teams, and the

relatively nascent development of organized sports leagues specifically catering to these groups.

Despite these setbacks, the project found its footing through the power of social media. A connection made on Facebook led to contact with several migrant sports groups, ultimately introducing me to the Gaelic Columbus team. Their unique story, centred on Latin American immigrants uniting through their shared passion for Gaelic football, resonated deeply with the project's overarching themes of integration and community building.

However, the decision to focus on Gaelic Columbus was not without its own constraints. The most significant of these was the limited timeframe for fieldwork. In-depth photo-documentary work, especially when aiming to capture the nuanced experiences of a sports team, ideally requires an extended period of immersion. This allows for the development of trust, a deep understanding of team dynamics, and the ability to be present for pivotal moments that truly reflect the integration process. With only a few months at my disposal, building these deep relationships and capturing a wider range of experiences became a challenge.

Furthermore, the seasonal nature of Gaelic football presented additional hurdles. The team's training schedule, match days, and social gatherings did not always align with my availability. This meant missed opportunities to document aspects of the team's experience that could have enriched the narrative, such as the camaraderie in the locker room, the intensity of close matches, or the quiet moments of personal reflection off the field.

While these limitations inevitably narrowed the project's scope, they also led to a more focused and in-depth exploration of the Gaelic Columbus team. The resulting photobook, "Unity in Play...", may not represent the full spectrum of diversity in Irish sport, but it offers a powerful and intimate glimpse into the lives of one group of immigrants who have found a sense of belonging and purpose through their shared passion for Gaelic football. By embracing the constraints and adapting to unforeseen challenges, this project has ultimately succeeded in its mission to shed light on the transformative power of sport in fostering inclusion and community for immigrants in Ireland.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

Throughout the production of the "Unity in Play..." photobook, the highest standards of ethical conduct were upheld. Every effort was made to ensure that the documentation of the Gaelic Columbus team's experiences was in line with the principles of respect, integrity, and informed consent.

Adherence to the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) Code of Conduct (see appendix C) ensured that the highest ethical standards were upheld in journalism and photojournalism. This code emphasises the importance of accuracy, fairness, impartiality, and respect for privacy.

Prior to commencing any photography, all portrait subjects were provided with comprehensive information regarding the nature and purpose of the photo-documentary. They were informed about how their images would be used (see appendix A), the potential audience for the photobook, and the overarching goal of showcasing their experiences as immigrants in the Irish sporting community.

To guarantee informed consent, a detailed consent form was made available to each subject online prior to the commencement of photography. The form set out the project's objectives, the intended use of the images and the subjects' right to withdraw their consent at any time. The form also addressed potential privacy concerns, assuring participants that their identities and personal information would be protected throughout the process.

In addition to obtaining formal consent, we maintained ongoing communication and transparency throughout the project. Players were encouraged to share their thoughts and feelings about the documentary process, and their feedback was actively sought and considered. This open dialogue fostered a sense of trust and collaboration, ensuring that the final product accurately reflected the team's experiences and perspectives.

Furthermore, great care was taken in the selection and editing of images. The objective was to present a balanced and authentic portrayal of the Gaelic Columbus team, avoiding any stereotypes or misrepresentations. The images were selected to convey the team's diversity, resilience, and spirit of camaraderie; while also highlighting the challenges and triumphs they faced in their journey of integration.

By prioritising ethical considerations at every stage of the documentary process, this project aimed to create a visually compelling and informative photobook, while also empowering the Gaelic Columbus players by providing them with a platform to share their stories on their own terms.

CHAPTER FOUR: DISCUSSION

The start of this documentary project dates to November 2023, when the initial idea began to take shape. On 17 January 2024, a formal proposal was submitted to the department under the supervision of Paddy O'Brien, my research methods lecturer. This initial concept envisaged a broader exploration of diversity and inclusion in Irish sports, encompassing four distinct teams: LGBTQ+, special needs, community, and immigrant.

However, the path to documenting this multi-faceted narrative proved difficult. The initial search for suitable sports teams representing the LGBTQ+ and special needs communities yielded limited results, partly because the timing of the research coincided with some clubs' off-seasons. This led to a strategic shift in focus, narrowing the scope to a single team that embodied the spirit of immigrant integration through Gaelic games.

On 26 April 2024, the project gained momentum with the appointment of supervisors Mark Neiland and Johnny Savage. Neiland, an experienced photographer and educator, brought a wealth of experience in documentary practice, while Savage, a skilled designer and bookbinder, offered invaluable expertise in visual storytelling and photobook creation.

The first virtual meeting with Savage, held on 17 June, marked a turning point. It was during this exchange that the Gaelic Columbus team emerged as the ideal subject for the documentary. The team's unique composition of Latin American immigrants, their passion for Gaelic football and their shared experiences of dealing with the complexities of integration in a new country resonated deeply with the core objectives of the project.

Over the course of four virtual sessions with Savage, the photobook began to take shape. His advice on sequencing, layout and design elements proved instrumental in transforming a collection of photographs into a coherent and impactful narrative. Discussions focused not only on aesthetics, but also on the ethical considerations inherent in representing the lives and experiences of others through visual media.

Although no formal meetings were held with Neiland, his influence was ever-present through a series of email exchanges that provided valuable feedback and guidance. Neiland's in-depth knowledge of documentary photography and his emphasis on the importance of a solid bibliographical base were crucial in refining the theoretical framework of the project and ensuring a nuanced approach to visual storytelling.

The collaborative nature of this mentorship fostered a dynamic exchange of ideas and

perspectives, creating fertile ground for creativity and innovation. Regular feedback, critique and discussion with both supervisors encouraged me to critically reflect on my work, overcome obstacles and produce a documentary of which I was proud.

For the development of the documentary, I agreed with the team members, and through their social media channels I found out about future trainings. I was also included in the official Whatsapp group in which I actively participated by providing them with some images that would not be part of my project so that they could see the progress of the work.

Some difficulties in this project besides the inclement weather, did not prevent the seven photographic sessions that the founders of the team, Emilio and Marianella and I had previously planned, from being conducted.

I must admit that the mentoring experience highlighted the importance of interdisciplinary dialogue and collaborative learning in the creative process. Drawing on the diverse expertise of my supervisors, I gained a deeper understanding of the nuances of documentary photography, the power of visual storytelling and the importance of ethical considerations when documenting the lives of others. This collaborative approach not only enriched the final product, but also fostered my own growth as a photographer and storyteller.

This documentary project is the culmination of a journey of exploration, adaptation, and collaboration. The Gaelic Columbus team, with their passion, resilience, and unwavering spirit, provided the inspiration and subject matter for this work. The guidance and expertise of my supervisors, Mark Neiland and Johnny Savage, shaped the trajectory of the project and ensured its success. The resulting photobook, "Unity in Play...", is a testament to the transformative power of sport, the importance of community and the enduring human spirit that transcends borders and boundaries.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

This thesis has embarked on a journey to unravel the intricate and dynamic relationship between sport, immigration, and identity formation in Ireland. Focusing on the experiences of Latin American immigrants participating in Gaelic football, a sport deeply intertwined with Irish culture and national identity, it has illuminated the profound potential of sport to serve as a catalyst for social integration, challenge stereotypes, and redefine the boundaries of community and belonging.

Through a comprehensive review of relevant literature, this study has situated the experiences of the Gaelic Columbus team within a broader theoretical framework, drawing on insights from the sociology of sport, migration studies, and visual anthropology. Engaging with the work of scholars like Agergaard, Darby & Hassan, Giulianotti, Inglis, and Sambaraju has revealed the multifaceted ways in which sport can bridge cultural divides, facilitate social interaction, and create spaces of inclusion where diversity is not only tolerated but celebrated.

The documentary photography methodology employed in this study has offered a unique and intimate perspective on the lives of the Gaelic Columbus players. Through carefully curated images, the photobook "Unity in Play..." has captured the essence of their journey, from the initial trepidations and uncertainties of adapting to a new culture to the exhilaration of teamwork, the warmth of camaraderie, and the hard-won victories on and off the field. The visual narrative has not only documented their experiences but also invited viewers to witness the subtle nuances of identity negotiation, the importance of social networks, and the transformative impact of shared passions and struggles.

The guidance and expertise of mentors Mark Neiland and Johnny Savage have been instrumental in shaping the final product of this project. Neiland's deep understanding of documentary photography and its ethical implications, combined with Savage's mastery of photobook design and narrative construction, have elevated this work to a level of sophistication and impact that would not have been possible without their invaluable contributions.

This thesis, however, transcends the confines of an academic exercise. It is a testament to the power of human connection, the resilience of the human spirit, and the transformative potential of sport to bridge divides and foster understanding. The Gaelic Columbus team, with its diverse backgrounds and shared passion for Gaelic football, has demonstrated that sport can transcend cultural boundaries, foster empathy, and build bridges between communities that might

otherwise remain isolated. Their story is a beacon of hope in a world often marred by division and conflict, reminding us that even in the face of adversity, the human spirit can find common ground, forge new connections, and create a sense of belonging that enriches us all.

The findings of this research have far-reaching implications for policymakers, community organizations, and sporting bodies. By recognizing and embracing the unique role that sport can play in fostering social cohesion and intercultural dialogue, we can create more inclusive and welcoming societies where everyone, regardless of their background, feels valued and empowered. The Gaelic Columbus team has shown us that sport is not just about winning or losing; it is about coming together, building community, and celebrating the diversity that makes us human.

As we move forward, it is imperative that we continue to invest in and support initiatives that harness the power of sport to promote social integration and intercultural understanding. We must strive to create sporting environments that are truly inclusive, welcoming individuals from all walks of life and providing them with the opportunity to participate, excel, and connect with others. By fostering cross-cultural dialogue and celebrating the unique contributions of immigrant communities, we can build a more equitable and harmonious society where everyone has the chance to thrive.

The Gaelic Columbus team's story is not just a story about sport; it is a story about the human spirit's enduring capacity for connection, resilience, and transformation. It is a story that reminds us that even in the face of adversity, we can find common ground, build bridges, and create a sense of belonging that transcends cultural differences. It is a story that inspires us to embrace diversity, celebrate our shared humanity, and work together to create a more inclusive and equitable world for all.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: RELEASE FORM

This project aims to document the experiences of Latino immigrants participating in Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) teams in Ireland, exploring themes of cultural integration, identity, and community through photography. The resulting images will be used in a photobook and dissertation as part of an academic research project.

I, _____ hereby grant permission to Benjamin Ruiz, the photographer and researcher, to take photographs of me in the context of my participation in GAA activities. I understand that these photographs may be used in the photobook and dissertation, as well as in any related academic presentations or publications.

I further understand that my participation in this project is voluntary and that I may withdraw my consent at any time by notifying the photographer in writing. I have been informed of the purpose of the project and have had the opportunity to ask questions and receive clarification.

By signing this form, I confirm that I have read and understood the terms of this agreement and freely give my consent to be photographed for the purposes described above.

SIGNED _____

PRINTED NAME _____

DATE _____

APPENDIX B: MAIN INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

To formalise the follow-up of the Columbus team's photography, an interview with the founders of the team was conducted.

- What inspired them to form a Gaelic football team composed of immigrants?
- What was the process of recruiting the players?
- How did they choose the name of the team?

Regarding Challenges and Achievements

- What have been the biggest challenges you have faced in forming and maintaining the team?
- What major accomplishments have you achieved so far?

Culture and Community

- How has the local community received the team?
- How has the team influenced the integration of migrants into local society?

Training and Strategy

- How do you structure training sessions for players who may not be familiar with Gaelic football?
- What strategies do you implement to maximise team performance?

Diversity and Adaptation

- How do you manage cultural diversity within the team?
- Are there specific adaptations or methods to help players adapt to Gaelic football?

Future and Aspirations

- What are your short- and long-term goals for the team?
- Do you have plans to expand the team or form new categories, such as youth or women's?

Personal Impact

- What impact has been part of this project had on you personally?
- Any stories or anecdotes you would like to share about the team?

Relationship with the Federation and Other Teams

- What has your relationship been like with the Gaelic football federation?
- Have you had any interactions or matches against other similar teams?

Promotion and Support

- What kind of support have you received from local or international organisations?

- What measures do you take to promote Gaelic football to the immigrant community?

Experiences and Lessons Learned

- What important lessons have you learned along the way?
- What advice would you give to others considering forming a similar team?

APPENDIX C

NUJ CODE OF CONDUCT

Members of the National Union of Journalists are expected to abide by the following professional principles.

A JOURNALIST:

1. At all times upholds and defends the principle of media freedom, the right of freedom of expression and the right of the public to be informed.
2. Strives to ensure that information disseminated is honestly conveyed, accurate and fair.
3. Does her/his utmost to correct harmful inaccuracies.
4. Differentiates between fact and opinion.
5. Obtains material by honest, straightforward, and open means, with the exception of investigations that are both overwhelmingly in the public interest and which involve evidence that cannot be obtained by straightforward means.
6. Does nothing to intrude into anybody's private life, grief or distress unless justified by overriding consideration of the public interest.
7. Protects the identity of sources who supply information in confidence and material gathered in the course of her/his work.
8. Resists threats or any other inducements to influence, distort or suppress information, and takes no unfair personal advantage of information gained during her/his duties before the information is public knowledge.
9. Produces no material likely to lead to hatred or discrimination on the grounds of a person's.
10. age, gender, race, colour, creed, legal status, disability, marital status, or sexual orientation.
11. Does not by way of statement, voice or appearance endorse by advertisement any commercial product or service save for the promotion of her/his own work or of the medium by which she/he is employed.
12. A journalist shall normally seek the consent of an appropriate adult when interviewing or photographing a child for a story about her/his welfare.
13. Avoids plagiarism.