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**Fútbol in the Park: Immigrants, Soccer, and the Creation of Social Ties. By Trouille, David. Chicago & London. University of Chicago Press. 2021. 238 pages.**

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**Abstract:** The book is an ethnography about a group of male immigrants who play recreational soccer at Los Angeles' Mar Vista Park, a park that over time has become gentrified. In this contentious public space, these immigrant men gain a sense of belonging despite being seen as a threat among the local community members. In addition, they also create a dynamic social support network amongst the players. Through 10 years of ethnographic observations, Trouille delves profoundly into the meanings of the interplay of their social realities beyond the park, such as undocumented migration, their love for the sport, and an anti-immigrant context in the US.

**Keywords:** undocumented migration; public space; anti-immigrant context; public space; sports; social network of support.

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**Fútbol en el parque: inmigrantes, fútbol y la creación de lazos sociales, de David Trouille. Chicago & Londres. University of Chicago Press. 2021. 238 páginas.**

**Resumen:** El libro es una etnografía acerca de cómo un grupo de hombres inmigrantes en Estados Unidos ha creado una red social de apoyo a través del fútbol en el parque Mar Vista de Los Ángeles, un lugar que se ha gentrificado con el tiempo. En este espacio público en disputa, estos inmigrantes han desarrollado un sentido de pertenencia a pesar de ser vistos como una amenaza por miembros de la comunidad. Aún más, la red social formada por estos inmigrantes ha sido un recurso valioso de integración en el país de recepción. A lo largo de 10 años de observación etnográfica, Trouille profundiza en los significados de la realidad social de los inmigrantes más allá del parque, como la migración indocumentada, el amor por su deporte, y el contexto anti-inmigrante de los Estados Unidos.

**Palabras Clave:** migración indocumentada; espacio público; contexto anti-inmigrante; deporte; red social de apoyo.

The well-recognized Italian coach Arrigo Sacchi once asserted that “fútbol [soccer] is the most important of the least important things in life.” Although, for the men portrayed in David Trouille’s book, *Fútbol in the Park: Immigrants, Soccer, and the Creation of Social Ties*, fútbol is a top life priority. For these men, playing in the park is a formidable resource to navigate life as immigrants in the United States. The book is an ethnography about a group of male immigrants who play recreational soccer at the Los Angeles’ Mar Vista Park, a park that over time has become gentrified. In this contentious public space, these immigrant men gain a sense of belonging despite being seen as a threat among the local community members. In addition, they also create a dynamic social support network amongst the players. Through 10 years of ethnographic observations, Trouille delves profoundly into the meanings of the interplay of their social realities beyond the park, such as undocumented migration, their love for the sport, and an anti-immigrant context in the US.

*Fútbol in the Park* shows how “Immigration from Latin America has transformed the public landscape in the United States” and the reaction that comes with it. For example; Roberto, one of the players stated: “I’ve been coming to this park for over twenty years, and it’s great that we have such a great field, but it’s hard when it’s taken away from us. We’re just asking for some leniency. We’ve been playing here a long time” (Trouille 2021, 42). In the microcosm of Los Angeles’ Mar Vista Park, it can be appreciated that Latino men playing soccer represent “Unwelcomed symbols of demographic change” in the country; moreover, for conservatives and White sectors, these men embody the notion of “bad hombres,” a harmful rhetoric strategically propagated by Donald Trump during his presidential campaign. Trouille’s book joins a new body of literature that portrays immigrants not as victims or villains but as rather complex and human.

While many immigration studies have focused on studying immigrants in a work and family context, Trouille demonstrates that understanding how immigrant men spend their leisure time is just as important. Trouille narrates the development of an immigrants’ network for conviviality and support in their new country, where a “park became a place to anchor and enrich their lives in a new country,” serving as a means to fulfill their needs for community and sociability. As one participant put it: “I was really happy because I didn’t know where to play soccer and I missed playing”; some others stated, “If not working,” “What am I going to do in my house all alone? *Estar encerrado ahí, nada más* [I’d just be cooped up there].” *Fútbol in the Park* is also about how these immigrant men have been creating a home in the U.S. for several generations.

Trouille contends the conventional wisdom about networks as relatively stable social constructs that served primarily as pre-migration ties that help people to migrate. Flipping the perspective, Trouille proposes that “Migrant networks remain essential but emerge under changing”; he emphasizes that there are also more networks that help migrants “to take the next steps in a new world”. *Fútbol in the Park*, as the author argues studies something overlooked by sociological studies about migrants network, which is “the day-to-day processes by which social networks erode, change, and develop over time”. Thus, the notion of “social tying” checkmates the idea of “social ties”. These theoretical insights seem more suitable to understand “the survival and success of newcomers” (Trouille 2021, 7).

Through thick description and rich vignettes, the author provides ethnographic insights into the dynamism of the park-players social network structure on and beyond the field. For example, to illustrate power relations and the well-structured organization of the game, Trouille presents a vignette where one of the player’s leaders, Polo, imposes order on newcomers. Polo confronted the offender by warning him: “No, you can’t just take a jersey here. You have to respect our rules if you want to play here”. The author noticed that “Jerseys were...tactfully withheld to sanction disobedience and to reinforce social hierarchies”. Trouille's research sheds light on the way the social network of fútbol players has an impact on job opportunities as well. Many of the immigrants Trouille shadows at work are undocumented and are typically regulated to working “under the table”, in non-official capacities, and can easily be taken advantage of. In the book, we see how players bond through play and social drinking at the park. Play and drinking serve as a basis to find trustworthy work partners. The bonding created in the field materializes to real work opportunities. The players have one another's backs both on the field and off the field.

Trouille’s White ethnicity is at odds with the immigrant milieu, but such a barrier to gaining access and establishing rapport was successfully resolved by his male identity since fútbol in the park is “Clearly a masculine space.” Moreover, the lack of Trouille’s knowledge of the way amateur fútbol is played in Latin America, served as an essential asset in his research that helped him discover profound meanings in apparently trivial activities that surround the game such as teasing, drinking, fighting, and having never-ending arguments on mundane topics. Having that cultural distance proved to be a benefit rather than a disadvantage.

With an engaging writing style, this well-researched book is a great addition to courses on the Latino experience, immigration, qualitative methodologies, gender and sports, urban studies, as well as of interest to a general audience.