

Reviews

Review of Mícheál Ó hAodha and Máirtín Ó Catháin eds., *New perspectives on the Irish Abroad: The silent people?* Lanham, Md.; Toronto: Lexington Books, 2014, 166 pages. ISBN-13: 978-0739183717

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Ireland is one of the countries in the world (alongside China and India, for example) that has a long history of emigration and a large diasporic population. Ireland's history and society, however, are often studied within a nationalist framework and in an isolated manner. The existence of its historically-formed and sizable overseas communities in addition to the inter-connection of Ireland with the rest of the world, including its diasporic population, have not been given adequate attention. As Ireland is increasingly integrated into the global economy and transformed from a traditional emigrant country to an emerging immigrant country itself, it is vital to rethink and remedy those territorial-bounded historical and epistemological paradigms which are no long able to explain many new issues that Ireland is facing today. This edited volume is a timely and excellent response to this social and academic challenge. By giving voices to the silent diasporic subjects who are invisible in the mainstream narrative of Irish history and by foregrounding the nexus between Ireland and its large diaspora in time and space, it inscribes 'transnational' firmly onto national narratives, and opens up new discourses on ethnicities, identities, belongings, homes, citizenship and nation-building in academic debate about Ireland and beyond. Methodologically, this book demonstrates the value of oral history scholarship and archival analysis in unveiling migrant subjectivities and memories.

The two editors successfully draw together nine very different but equally engaging chapters that provide stimulating, accessible and varied snapshots into the experiences, emotions and identities of the diasporic Irish. This edited volume is split into two distinct yet overlapping parts, each of which has its own analytical focus and corresponding methodological approach. Part one, 'Voices', consists of five papers. Despite varying in context and writing style, they all attempt to address the core question of how to '*remember the forgotten or silent voices of the emigrant generation and create an*

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opportunity for them to be heard again' (p. 15) through innovative engagement with oral history materials. In the opening chapter, Bernadette Sweeney details an oral history project on the Irish in Montana, and demonstrates how through recording, archiving, and performing oral history narratives of Irish-Americans in Montana it has enhanced awareness of Irish migrant history and fostered closer connections between overseas Irish communities and Ireland. Bill Tobin demonstrates the power of memoir-turned-autobiographical novel in bringing to life family migration history and his memories of childhood as a second-generation immigrant in New York; drawing on in-depth interviews with eight Irish sisters who went to France between 1940 and 1960, Gráinne O'Keeffe-Vigneron reconstructs largely forgotten lived experiences and complex subjectivities of Irish females in a French religious order; in their chapter Stephen Moore and Paul Darby shift their focus to the role of Gaelic sports in forming '*a home away from home*' (p. 69) for Irish diasporans in cosmopolitan London, and discuss the interplay between the development of the GAA abroad and Irish domestic politics manifested at different periods of time since the turn of twentieth century; finally, by using 'conversation' as a means of data collection and analysis, Sarah O'Brien brings our attention to the taboo topic of horrors in the turbulent 1970s Argentina and shows how the present-day Irish-Argentine community's sense of nationhood is still haunted and affected by political disputes in the past.

If the chapters in part one help articulate in one way or the other individual and collective voices and memories of the subaltern and oppressed diasporic subjects, part two, 'Places', maps the study of the Irish diaspora onto a truly global context. It starts with Barry Crosbie's fascinating chapter that looks at the unique role of the Irish, being '*colonizer*' but also '*colonized*' at the same time (p. 100), played in British expansion. It brings to light the distinctiveness of imperial migration of the Irish to India in sharp contrast to Irish movement to so-called 'White settlements' such as North America, not only in terms of dissimilar patterns of migration but also the global impact of the Irish diaspora on negotiating '*competing demands of Irish nationalism, British imperialism and Indian welfare, demonstrating the Irish ability to simultaneously contest the empire and accelerate change from within*' (p. 112). Jason R. Myers's paper highlights the vital role of Irish cultural elements and practices, via the media of music, sports, language and so on, in sustaining Irishness among Irish immigrants in Chicago despite the declining interest in Irish politics after its independence in 1922. In his chapter, David Convery makes a strong and convincing argument about the necessity to study Ireland's history beyond a national framework. The largely unknown and heroic stories of Irish internationalists participating in the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) '*is but one example of the inter-connectedness of Ireland with the rest of the world and an illustration of the depth of illuminating history we can discover if we shift perspective to view Ireland in its proper international context*' (p. 141). The final chapter of this

book by Juan José Delaney surveys representative literary texts created by Irish-Porteños in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Argentina to illustrate the ways in which Irish immigrants gradually integrated into the host society and culture while at the same time trying to preserve their own heritage and tradition in the linguistic realm and in everyday life. While papers in part one share a methodology of oral history in making who were invisible visible and unheard heard, papers in part two are united by down-to-earth engagement with and enthusiastic interpretation of archival documents, such as newspapers, memoirs and migration literature as historical/linguistic texts in representing Irish diaspora in a global context and over time.

The rich diversity of the Irish diasporic experience and the fluidity of their ethnic and cultural identities brought about by this book is truly amazing and inspirational to anyone who is interested in the study of migration and globalization. As a whole, it provides the reader with a kaleidoscope of voices, images and stories of people coming from various walks of life, be they miners, railway workers, nuns, colonial/imperial administrators, revolutionary internationalists, Irish-Porteño, and living in diverse geographical and temporal spaces, ranging from Montana, New York, Chicago, to France, London, Spain and to Argentina and India. Coming from an academic background of the study of China and the Chinese diaspora, the reviewer is amazed by the interesting differences and unexpected similarities between Irish and Chinese diaspora experiences, and excited by the many theoretical questions shared by the study of these two major diasporas. As the editors aptly argue, this book ‘constitute(s) a new and exciting articulation of Irishness and, indeed, a fresh way of articulating human experiences’ (p. ix).

This excellent volume is of great interest to specialists working on Irish diaspora, and will be a useful reference book for postgraduate and undergraduate students studying Irish history and transnational migration in general. It opens up many exciting avenues for future research. How, for instance, to conduct research of transnational migration across diasporic spaces in comparative perspectives? And how to further conceptualise key issues emerging from this book, such as gender, class, ethnicity, home and abroad (if this distinction ever exists) in relation to transnational mobilities, through interdisciplinary-oriented research and based on dialogues with anthropologists, sociologists and cultural study scholars in this field.