

Featured reviews

ON EVERY TIDE: THE MAKING AND RE-MAKING OF THE IRISH WORLD. By Sean Connolly. Pp 488. London: Little Brown. 2022. £12.99/£25.

This book comes very close to supplying a much-needed synthesis of the current state of knowledge about the history of the Irish diaspora over the past two centuries. Connolly also manages to straddle the divide between a history that will be read by a general audience, and one that will appeal to fellow historians and their students. The focus is on the receiving countries, not on Ireland. The book draws on a formidable list of secondary reading, deft use of British Parliamentary Papers, primary sources in the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, especially its Irish Emigrant Database, and digitised sources from other repositories. Although there is no bibliography, the twenty-nine double-column pages of footnotes go a long way to filling that gap, though some readers will find the small font trying.

He begins his story in the early nineteenth century, which marks the start of mass emigration from Europe, at time of major change in the Irish and global economies and developments in long-distance transport. The end of the slave trade and the practice of convict transportation increased the demand for unskilled workers in North America and Australia to develop their economies and exploit natural resources. One underlying theme is the tension between the demand for more workers in receiving countries and anti-emigrant prejudice, a tension that exists today in many developed countries. Australia was hostile to the assisted emigration of Irish workhouse girls in the immediate post-Famine years, but that hostility was tempered by the shortage of young women; likewise, anti-Irish prejudice in the United States coexisted with a steady demand for their labour.

Connolly's descriptions of the emigrant travel experience are both compelling and significant. He highlights the physical and sexual abuse that many emigrants experienced from the ship's crew. While not denying the medical risks of emigrant voyages — a measles epidemic on a long sea voyage could kill many children — mortality among Irish emigrants on transatlantic voyages was approximately between 1 and 2.5 per cent, similar to other European emigrants, though it was significantly higher during the Famine years. The shift from sail to steam — which happened on the Atlantic from the mid-1850s — meant that Cobh and Merville replaced Liverpool as the main departure points for Irish emigrants to North America. By 1869 faster journeys on steamships had reduced mortality on emigrant ships arriving in New York to 1 per 1,000. Their welcome on arrival was often hostile. During 1847 thousands of Irish emigrants who arrived in Glasgow and Liverpool were deported. U.S. authorities examined recent arrivals with a view to preventing the aged, sick and infirm from settling; and ships' captains had to provide a bond for passengers who might become a public charge. Some emigrants were deported to Ireland or Canada; they included residents of mental hospitals, who had been living and working in the U.S.A. for decades.

The dominant story is of the Irish in the United States, and it provides a comparative framework for discussing Irish communities in other receiving countries. One underlying theme concerns the diversity of migrant experiences: economic, political and sectarian. The book maintains a careful balance between the well-established narrative: the Famine; the dominance of unskilled labourers and domestic servants as jobs taken by emigrants; the clustering of emigrants to the U.S.A. in major east coast cities; and the role played by the Catholic Church in reinforcing an Irish emigrant identity, while giving due recognition to less common emigrant experiences. Ulster Protestants, who pioneered mass emigration in the decades before the Famine, feature throughout the text; likewise, the Irish who settled

on the land in the U.S.A. and Canada, and emigrants with professional qualifications, who attained prominent careers in law and medicine in Australia or Canada.

But the majority of nineteenth-century Irish emigrants were less skilled and had less intellectual capital than emigrants from Scotland or Germany. Those who went to places that were in the process of being developed and settled fared much better than those who remained in cities on the east coast of the United States, though it is also possible that the west coast settlers were more adventurous and more confident than the New York or Boston Irish. The Irish in San Francisco or Butte, Montana experienced less discrimination and enjoyed greater mobility — both economic and political — because social structures were still fluid. While Irish migrants to Australia experienced discrimination and ethnic and religious prejudice they were among the founding settlers in this new nation.

Anti-Irish prejudice in the United States was a combination of anti-Catholicism and racist attitudes that represented the Irish as an inferior people. Such prejudices, however, did not promote Irish sympathy for enslaved or indigenous people. They were concerned that the abolition of slavery would worsen their job prospects, and many leading abolitionists such as Harriet Beecher Stowe were anti-Catholic. The Irish soldiers who fought for the Union were loyal to the United States, not anti-slavery. Connolly cites many instances of pro-slavery attitudes among the Irish in the U.S.A., and some even grimmer comments about ‘nigger hunting’ from the Irish in Australia. Irish participation in the army of the Union did not advance their integration into American society; indeed, the decades following the end of the Civil War marked the peak of ethnic ‘science’ and images portraying Irish emigrants as quasi-animals.

Social advancement in the U.S.A. was a slow process. It was achieved through the agency of the Catholic Church, which had created national parishes in a church dominated by Irish clergy, and by Irish involvement in political and labour organisations. Connolly is charitable towards the Irish ward politicians, seeing them as intermediaries between a poorly-educated community and a hostile state system. Irish prominence in local politics and labour organisations ensured that when the Irish ceased being the dominant new immigrant group they retained control over Italian and eastern European migrants. Irish women, for many years the largest female immigrant community, were prominent in labour organisations. Organisations such as the Ancient Order of Hibernians reinforced Catholic Irish communities. Protestant emigrants also had their organisations, notably the Orange Order, but given the dominant Protestant ethos in the U.S.A. and much of Canada, they tended to drift into non-ethnic organisations such as the Freemasons, and the Orange Order became more a symbol of Protestantism than of Ulster Protestant identity.

Connolly suggests that the depth and longevity of anti-Irish and anti-Catholic prejudice in the United States fuelled Irish-American support for militant republicans, though only a minority engaged with these groups. He contends that the Irish transferred their sense of grievance and victimhood into a more militant Irish nationalism and a strong Anglophobia that survived on occasion into the second or third generations. By contrast, the Irish in Canada, New Zealand and Australia, having experienced less discrimination, tended to support home rule and a more moderate nationalism. Former Young Irelanders, such as Thomas D’Arcy McGee and Charles Gavan Duffy, became leading political figures in Canada and Australia respectively, several generations before any Irish emigrant secured a comparable position in the United States. The fact that Canada, Australia and New Zealand enjoyed devolved government from Britain made them more supportive of an Irish home rule settlement. In Argentina the Irish migrants were largely subsumed into the British minority.

‘The second largest group of Irish living outside their own country is easily overlooked’ (p 278), yet the Irish in Britain receive rather cursory treatment in this book, and no explanation is given for this decision — was it because the book would have been too long, or because adding Britain would have complicated the comparisons? This is the only real shortcoming, and it is regrettable, given the impressive volume of research carried out in recent years into the Irish in Britain — much of it to be found in research theses. It would have been interesting to see Connolly applying his analytical framework linking the strength of anti-Catholicism and anti-Irish prejudice with support for militant republicanism, and a comparative analysis of Irish activism in political and labour movements in

Britain. Unlike the United States, Catholic schools in Britain did not articulate a strong sense of Irishness, but that was also the case in Canada because of the presence of a significant Francophone Catholic population.

The contrasting attitudes towards participation in the First World War on the part of Irish-Americans, who were isolationists, and the Irish elsewhere who fought on the side of Britain, ties in with the question of diaspora support for Irish republicanism. The 1916 Rising and the War of Independence created divisions among the Irish overseas. While the Irish in Australia opposed conscription Connolly suggests that their stance owed more to domestic politics than to Irish interests, as did Clan na Gael's opposition to U.S. involvement in the war and later to the League of Nations, evidence that these hyphenated communities were by now integrated into the countries where they had settled.

The treatment of the diaspora post-1920 is briefer, but nevertheless valuable, especially the attention given to Northern Ireland Prime Minister Basil Brooke's reaching out to the Ulster diaspora. Connolly suggests that anti-Irish prejudice in the United States disappeared sooner than anti-Catholicism; the latter was a factor when John F. Kennedy ran for president in 1960. He also suggests that Irish emigrants after 1960 were seeking better prospects, not fleeing destitution, but that could be overstated. Until the 1990s many emigrants left Ireland because they could not find a job, and the emigrants of that period included both university graduates and those without skills or qualifications. The penultimate chapter provides an excellent summary of the role of Irish-American politicians in the Northern Ireland peace process that is interspersed with occasional pointed comments.

Migration ranks among the most important issues today, and Connolly contends that the story of Irish migration constitutes an important chapter in the wider history of world migration. At various points throughout the book, he relates the history of Irish emigrants — prejudice, deportation, exploitation and abuse on the voyage, to contemporary issues in global migration, but he does not labour these points. However, he does suggest that history 'can offer a critical perspective on highly emotive issues' (p. 414); '[t]he path that the(se) Irish pioneered, marked by exploitation, discrimination and nativist hostility was to be followed over the next two centuries by many others ... continues to the present day' (p. 413). But there were specific elements in Irish emigration that may not be applicable to recent mass migration. The Irish, an initially reviled immigrant group, achieved not just acceptance but influence beyond their numbers. They had the advantage of being white, Christian and English-speaking, and they migrated to countries that were thinly populated, where human settlement was expanding. Furthermore, the countries where migrants settled took minimal responsibility for their welfare. He concludes with a discussion of *Global Ireland: Ireland's Diaspora Strategy, 2020–25*, which, he contends, marks the end of an era.

doi:10.1017/ihs.2023.9

MARY E. DALY
University College Dublin
mary.e.daly@ucd.ie

THE POLITICAL THOUGHT OF THE IRISH REVOLUTION. Edited by Richard Bourke and Niamh Gallagher. Pp 389. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2022. £22.99.

In 1993, the editors of a pathbreaking collection of essays exploring the history of political thought in modern Ireland issued the discipline with a rallying cry. Noting that 'the history of political ideas in Ireland' remains 'largely unwritten', they implored colleagues to cease searching for the history of Irish ideas in a traditional canon of 'classic texts', and to draw instead upon 'recent methodological developments in intellectual history', notably the emergence of the contextualist approach associated with the University of Cambridge, to recover the broader intellectual culture that shaped the political evolution of modern Ireland (D. George Boyce, Robert Eccleshall and Vincent Geoghegan (eds), *Political thought in Ireland since the seventeenth century* (London, 1993)). Three decades on, it seems opportune to ponder the extent to which this methodological injunction has been heeded.