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Andy Bielenberg, ed. *The Irish Diaspora.* London and New York: Longman, 2000. vii + 368 pp. $31.60 (textbook), ISBN 978-0-582-36997-9; $144.60 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-582-36998-6.

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The Irish WorldWide

As Piaras Mac Einri's introduction's to this interesting set of essays observes, studies of the diaspora, a word exemplifying a new willingness to embrace a more inclusive and less territorially bounded notion of Irishness, are very much in vogue. Within the past year, two collaborate volumes on the Irish in Britain alone have appeared. His efficient prelude succinctly summarises the contributions and he also notes new emphasis on life-history approaches, discourse analysis and feminist perspectives along with the trend to place Irish migration in comparative context. In fact, women do not occupy much space in this collection; politics and culture are similarly neglected. The overarching themes of the essays are the diversity and complexity of Irish migration which is very much the conclusion of most recent work in the area. This volume results from a conference on the Irish diaspora held in Dublin in 1977, and follows current trends of comparative case studies to illuminate the migration experience.

The essays are grouped into four areas: the Irish in Great Britain; in the Americas; in the empire; and general Irish studies, though one wonders whether a thematic organisation might have been more suitable. There are some fresh topics – comparison of the experience in Minnesota and New South Wales (Malcolm Campbell) and the Irish in Argentina (Patrick McKenna) – along those rehearsed previously, such as an overview of the Irish in Britain, 1815-1939 (Graham Davis), migration to North American (Donald Akenson) and the search for missing friends through the Boston Pilot (Ruth-Ann Harris).

Jim Mac Laughlin's intriguing commentary in the penultimate essay explicitly and implicitly challenges the underlying assumptions of many of the contributions, notably the perspective presented by Davis. His view seems to receive the endorsement of the magnificent cover illustration, a painting by Sean Keating in 1936. Positioning this essay immediately after the introduction could have made the volume more lively. Mac Laughlin points to the necessity of examining migration in terms of the intersects between local and global forces operating in specific regional and socio-historical contexts. He suggests the importance of links between a geography of closure, by which he means the absence of economic opportunity, and a politics of exclusion with the bourgeois classes promoting emigration as a means of ridding the country of its poor. He posits this as an alternative to the currently dominant hypothesis – which portrays emigration as driven primarily by economic opportunism –as a natural phenomena, and indeed as indicative of the enterprising character of Ireland's young. Looking at the 1980s emigrants, Mac Laughlin concludes that though it contained greater numbers of the 'new' that is educated young Irish, it was still heavily weighted with the rural, poorly qualified migrant.

The teenage generation of the 1980s, he observes, carried the double-psychological burden of schools examinations and the presumed necessity of emigration. His pessimistic interpretation contrasts with the optimistic accounts of Tracey Connolly, who considers migration during the Second World War; Damien Courtney's quantification of migration in the 1980s and 90s; and Enda Delaney's assessment of movement to Britain, 1945-1981. Mac Laughlin returns us to emigrants as victims, but this time the oppressor is less the British State and Protestant Ascendancy and more the Catholic middle-classes, using it as a mechanism to secure their own interests. Mac Laughlin's contentions are controversial but he achieves what is absent in many of the fine contributions, a theo-

retical construct that attempts to explain the emigration process as a whole and overcome the current paradigm of diversity and complexity.

Mac Laughlin does not examine the migrants' fate in new lands. This experience is treated in differing time frames by most of the contributors. Essays addressing immigration include, contributions on Scotland (Richard McCready), London in the 1980s (Breda Gary), Britain generally (Davis and Brendan Halpin), the Americas (Akenson, Harris, Campbell, Kerby Miller, and Patrick McKenna), the empire (Bielenberg, Michael Holmes, Donal McCracken and Angela McCarthy), and lastly general studies (Mac Laughlin, Delaney and Damien Courtney) conclude the volume. Miller on the American South, Campbell's comparison of Minnesota and New South Wales, McKenna on Argentina, McCracken on South Africa, McCarthy for New Zealand draw attention to the importance of local factors in the success or its absence for many migrants in new environments. Consistent with the majority of recent research, these and other chapters, point to the Irish migrant as adaptable, in most places securing fairly swift incorporation, if not necessarily assimilation.

The Irish appear to have adopted strategies aimed at gaining access to the receiving culture though the pace and success achieved differed over time and between places. In the American South, Irish Catholics in some numbers become Protestants and reinvent themselves as Scot-Irish. Miller usefully notes the flexible identity of this migrant stream, a point that receives less emphasis than it might in the volume. In South Africa and India the Irish seem to have interacted as part European minority confronted by a non-white majority. This comes as no surprise to the reviewer who noted more than two decades ago that the Irish National Party's involvement in imperial questions usually was motivated by concern for the opportunities for their country persons abroad rather than broad sympathies for other 'oppressed natives'. In Argentina the Irish got ahead by deploying a 'communal' strategy of co-operation in order to elevate their position. The editor cites this as presenting an alternative model to individualist migration, though the dichotomy is perhaps less sharp. Most studies of Irish immigrants stress the communal tendency in housing, occupation, religion, politics and associational culture among the recently arrived at least. These also point out that most settlement was not random; migrants went to places where they family or local connections. Where scholars differ is over the pace and reasons for incorporation.

This volume reflects the rapid advances in the field and compresses significant work within its covers. If there are omissions, it is also certain that the individual articles will be mined for information and insights for the foreseeable future.

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