

Appraising Gabriela McEvoy's La experiencia invisible

José Manuel Carrasco Weston

Abstract: *This is an appraisal of Gabriela McEvoy's groundbreaking study on the Irish immigration in Peru.*

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In Peruvian historiography, the issue of foreign immigration and its different contributions to Peruvian society has been one of the research topics that has had remarkable attention in academic and governmental environments. Thus, since the end of the nineteenth century we have monographic works on how propitious the arrival of European immigrants has been for our country such as the works of Aurelio Denegrí (1876), Felipe Paz Soldán (1891), H Sources (1892), A. Padilla (1971), M. del Río (1929), among others. The government's interest in the "immigration question" has been present since the first years of the Republic. In this sense, throughout the nineteenth century there was a series of legal arrangements by the various governments in turn that sought the massive arrival of Europeans to our country. However, the various laws advocating the arrival of European citizens occurred in the "paper" because, in practice, the political and economic crisis of the first years of the Republic did not allow the government to achieve its aims. In spite of this interest, there are few studies on the Irish community and its different contributions to the Peruvian society.

Gabriela McEvoy's book *La experiencia invisible. Inmigrantes irlandeses en el Perú*,¹ fills this historiographical void, in which readers are presented with a general vision of the Irish presence in Peru during the nineteenth century. The main objective of her study is to re-evaluate the contributions of Irish citizens to Peruvian society. That is to say, playing with the title of the book, McEvoy makes visible a colony of immigrants that due to their little quantitative presence has not been the focus of interest of the researchers.

With a clear (and rigorous) language and without falling into the mere anecdotal narrative, the author reveals, throughout the five chapters, the historical evolution of the bonds of Irish immigrants and Peruvian society during the nineteenth century. This analysis has also been framed in a global context where it is not only limited to the Peruvian temporal space, but also to the geographic and social context of immigrants in their native land, which allows the reader to understand the reasons which led them to emigrate.

McEvoy has also managed to combine the collective analysis of the workers, housewives and peasants who make up the invisible bulk of the Irish immigrants with well-known characters like Gallagher, Grace and Dowling among others. Personal and collective stories are part of the analysed sources showing what happened in Peru during the nineteenth century. She links the micro story to the macro history. Another aspect to stand out from other texts on immigration, is the immigrant woman, who had an identity of her own, though she was migrating with her husband or father.

A very important aspect to highlight as another of the great contribution of the book, is the excellent study of unpublished primary sources that have not been taken into account by

other scholars. Throughout the text we find references to letters and family archives. These family archives that have been kept by the descendants of the emigrants, compose a very rich documentary collection. They portray their every day life, personal experiences and various economic, social and political events that happened in the new land. For example, the earthquake that occurred in 1868 is the tragic episode narrated by Patrick Dowling.

Finally I must point out that McEvoy's book is a seminal work for new research on immigration, due to the wealth of information and the methodology used to reconstruct the historical account of social actors that have not yet been taken into account in the Peruvian historiography.

Note

1 McEvoy, Gabriela. *La experiencia invisible. Inmigrantes irlandeses en el Perú*. Lima: Fondo Editorial de la Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos, 2018.