The migrant experience through Irish eyes: sketches of 19th century Argentina in the narratives of Marion Mulhall, William Bulfin and private letters collected by Edmundo Murray

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Abstract

Between 1860 and 1930 about 6,000,000 Europeans arrived in Argentina, half of whom established in our country. The arrival of that massive migration wave took place at a very crucial point in the history of Argentina, since it was undergoing a huge process of national organization after the sanction of the 1853 National Constitution. By then, more than a third of the Argentine population was constituted by immigrants, which included the largest Irish diaspora within Latin America. About 40,000 Irish migrants left Mother Ireland by the late 19th century to establish in the Argentine countryside and main industrial cities associated with farming.

Even though at the beginning Irish immigrants formed a rather closely knit community with little contact with the locals, both in order to preserve their own culture and separate themselves from *criollos* and *gauchos*, they eventually proved to have had a very active social role in Argentina, founding institutions, associations and clubs that still continue today.

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Some of those Irish migrants that arrived in our country since the mid-nineteenth century were journalists and writers, which allowed them to register their observations of Argentine geographical space, traditions and local manners, from a European perspective and remarking socio-cultural differences and similarities between the diverse migrant communities and the local population. Besides, many Irish immigrants kept a frequent correspondence with their family and friends left in Ireland that has been carefully preserved by their relatives, which constitute a great source of knowledge on the Irish migrant experience.
The aim of this paper is to explore representations of 19th century multicultural Argentina from the perspective of Irish migrants. It will be achieved through the analysis of Marion Mulhall's travel book *Between the Amazon and Andes* (1881), private letters and memoirs from Edmundo Murray's 2004 collection of private letters and memoirs *Becoming Irlandés - Private Narratives of the Irish Emigration to Argentina (1844-1912)* and stories from William Bulfin's *Tales of the Pampas* (1997). These narratives offer rich insights of their migrant experience in Argentina and illustrate the initial cultural clash and the slow process of adaptation to the local manners, which evolved into new and richer cultural patterns for both local and foreign subjects.

Key words: Irish diaspora - immigration - identity - traditions - representations

Introduction

Undoubtedly, America was built on the migrant experience. Those foreigners were determined to succeed through hard work and effort in what they envisioned as promising though distant lands. The nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century were marked by an unprecedented massive migration process from European countries to the Americas. Some of those migrants settled in the United States, but more than 13,000,000 immigrants came to Latin American countries, such as Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay and Mexico. About 3,000,000 migrants established in Argentina between 1860 and 1930. At first, most migrant groups that chose Argentina as their new home arrived from Northern and Western Europe, but then most migrants came from southern and eastern Europe. Between 1815 and 1865 one-third of them came from Ireland.

The causes of such an extraordinary migratory movement can be attributed to two major worldwide revolutions that took place along the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. First, the progressive drop in the mortality rate and its consequent demographic explosion. Second, the technological advances and the increasing modernization brought into Europe by the Industrial Revolution. Industrialization also revolutionised economy: overproduction boosted new world markets, banks facilitated investment in other parts of the world, the internalization

of the market encouraged the importation of cereals, mainly, at very competitive prices, which led the European agricultural system to crises, losses and the rise in emigration rates, even after the Enclosure Movement. All these changes provoked that millions of workers decided to move from Europe, where low-paid jobs were abundant, mainly in urban spaces, but access to land was difficult for the peasant population, to developing American countries that had great extensions of land to explore and exploit but which were in need of capitals and working forces, both in the countryside and the main cities. In addition, the great improvements in communication and transport facilitated human mobility, since travelling became easier and faster in the nineteenth century.

The arrival of that massive migration wave took place at a very crucial point in the history of Argentina, as it was undergoing a huge process of national organization since achieving independence in 1816, which was later reinforced through the sanction of the 1853 National Constitution. By then, more than a third of the Argentine population was constituted by immigrants, which included the largest Irish diaspora within Latin America. Irish migrants had left Mother Ireland by the mid and late 19th century to establish in the Argentine countryside and the main industrial cities associated with farming activities. Thus, the aim of this paper is to explore representations of 19th century multicultural Argentina from the perspective of Irish migrants. It will be achieved through the analysis of private narratives from Edmundo Murray's 2004 collection of private letters and memoirs entitled *Becoming Irlandés - Private Narratives of the Irish Emigration to Argentina (1844-1912)*, testimonies from Marion Mulhall's travel book *Between the Amazon and Andes* (1881), and some stories from William Bulfin's *Tales of the Pampas* (1997). These three narratives offer rich insights of their migrant experience in Argentina and illustrate the initial cultural clash and the slow process of adaptation to the local manners, which evolved into new and richer cultural patterns for both local and foreign subjects.

The Irish diaspora

"Most countries send out oil or iron, steel or gold, or some other crop, but Ireland has had only one export and that is its people", claimed John F. Kennedy on his presidential visit to Ireland, in June 1963. In fact, no other European country has been affected by emigration over the last two centuries as Ireland. However, when we think about Irish migration, we cannot avoid referring to them in terms of "diaspora", since according to Laura Izarra (2010), diasporic subjects are immersed in a "process of identification that implies a cultural translation and assume an interstitial political position, 'in between cultures', becoming an agent of transformations in the social space he/she inhabits"[4].

There are several reasons for considering Irish migration as a "diaspora". First, because of the number of people involved in the different migration waves along the last two centuries, the Irish case is considered as one of the most significant migration movements in the history of Europe. Second, the term "diaspora" became of wide use during the late twentieth century to designate Irish people and their descendants who live outside Ireland. For Lloyd (2013), "Irish migration is, then, crucially bound up in a narrative of assimilation and citizenship" (10) since its narrative is thoroughly one of modernization and of the formation of the modern subject: "even though many Irish in fact migrate from urban locations, migration entails the notion of a movement from a backward and largely rural society to a dynamic metropolitan environment at the most advanced sites of capitalist development. It is a story of the economic modernization of the Irish worker *outside* Ireland" (*ibidem*). In addition, Mary Robinson, elected president of Ireland in 1990, had a key role in incorporating the concept of diaspora in political speeches with a positive sense:

> After all, emigration is not just a chronicle of sorrow and regret. It is also a powerful story of contribution and adaptation. In fact, I have become more convinced each year that this great narrative of dispossession and belonging, which so often had its origins in sorrow and leave-taking, has become, with a certain amount of historic irony, one of the treasures of this society. (Delaney 2006, p.39)

For Robinson, the key role that Irish diasporas have played in the development and modernization

of many cities around the world during the last two centuries seems to be a proof of the strength of the Irish character, which has been able to overcome complex situations as that of displacement and uprooting. In general terms, the concept of "diaspora" suggests a unitary phenomenon. However, the several Irish diasporas scattered along the world have evolved differently and kept a distinctive relationship with the Mother Land, proving it came out to be a very diverse and complex experience.

According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM 2019, 49), the term "diaspora" can be defined as "migrants or descendants of migrants, whose identity and sense of belonging, real or symbolic, have been shaped by their migration experience and background", although its meaning has changed significantly over time. Thus, the original meaning of diaspora as a forced displacement has now been widely replaced by one in which migrants identify with a "homeland" but live outside it, a concept that focuses on both first-generation emigrants and foreign-born descendants that keep some kind of cultural bond with the parent country. Besides, David Lloyd argues that the application of the term "diaspora" to people of Irish descent living outside Ireland is of relatively recent use,

which came to replace a term of many connotations as that of "emigration". In addition, for Avtar Brah (1996) the idea of diaspora is related to that of a journey, which is concerned with settling down somewhere away from home. Brah focuses on the diasporic construction of home, as she argues that not all diasporas sustain an idea of return, as has occurred with the Irish case: "a homing desire which is not the same as desire for a 'homeland'" (p.180).

Similarly, James Clifford (1994) conceives diaspora as different from mere travelling in that it is not temporary (p.308) and compares this concept with that of exile: "diasporas usually presuppose longer distances and a separation more than exile: a constitutive taboo on return, or its postponement to a remote future. Diasporas also connect multiple communities of a disperse population" (p.304). Both authors see the diasporic culture as one crossing the borders in many aspects. Brah also introduces a model for thinking about diaspora beyond a dual territoriality through the concept of "diasporic space", which provides conceptual connections for historicised analysis of trans/national movements of people, information, cultures and commodities: "diaspora space" (as distinct from the concept of diaspora) is "inhabited" not only by diasporic subjects but equally by those who are constructed and represented as "indigenous" (16). According to Brah, diasporas are "composite formations" whose members belong to a single diaspora and are likely to spread to different parts of the world (196). Undoubtedly, the experience of migration is tightly related to that of identity. Life is a process of never-ending adjustments: scientific knowledge advances, technology improves and, in the same way, human beings' identity is in permanent construction (Hall, Du Gay 1996, 4).

As regards the concept of "diaspora", in which the history of Irish migrants is framed, it can be considered in two senses: a) from a literal and historical negative sense, it alludes to communities dislocated from their native homeland by some migratory process; b) etymologically, "diaspora" suggests fertility of dispersion, a definition Brah also agrees with. First, she argues that the word alludes to the trauma and dislocation that results from the experience of leaving one's homeland. Second, diasporas connote the positive idea of hope and of a potential new beginning, since they are "contested cultural and political terrains where individual and collective memories collide, reassemble and reconfigure" (193), giving place to a new hybrid identity that is constructed through a daily conciliation of meanings and values.

In this theoretical context, the letters written by Irish emigrants to their relatives abroad or their own personal memoirs offer a rich discursive and social terrain to explore how they negotiate values while they undergo a process of adaptation and cultural insertion into their new country. They do not only offer testimony of a lived time in first person, but they are also interesting as regards feelings and interpretations portrayed from a personal point of view. Thus, as Mieke Bal (1999) expresses, "a narrative text is a text in which an agent relates ('tells') a story in a

particular medium, such as language, imagery, sound, buildings, or a combination thereof " (p.5). This allows to understand the selected texts as a mirror of mid-nineteenth-century Argentine society and a representation of how Irish migrants or their descendants saw themselves and constructed their new identity here.

The Irish in Argentina

The favourite destinations among Irish emigrants were undoubtedly the English-speaking countries, such as England, the United States of America and Australia. In fact, between 1820 and 1930, almost 5,000,000 Irish migrated to the USA, settling in cities along the eastern coast. However, the language barrier proved not to be an impediment for the Irish diaspora to establish in Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay, since thousands of emigrants left Ireland to colonise the Argentine pampas and nearby southern countries. While Edmundo Murray (2006) estimates that between forty and forty-five Irish left the Irish Midlands (Westmeath, Longford and Offaly) and from Co. Wexford in the nineteenth century to settle in these countries, McKenna (1994: 210) as well as Sabato and Korol (1981: 48) argue that the numbers were significantly higher. About half of them chose Argentina as their new home, whereas the rest moved again to Australia, the United States or back to Ireland.

Bearing in mind the concept of "diaspora" in which these personal narratives are framed, there is no doubt that these Irish-born emigrants or their ancestors shared two of the main features involved in it: first, a forced or voluntary migration from the country of origin in search of work, progress or to escape conflict and, secondly, a collective memory. In Murray's *Becoming Irlandes*, Edward Robbins' memoir mirrors how frustrations and debts of mid-to-upper social classes of farmers moved many Irish people to leave Ireland when previous economic security at home starts to fail. Thus, he writes: "1846. This was a fearful time for the poor of Ireland ... I had a good harvest of corn" (Murray, p. 34). Two years later, he claims: "I began to think of leaving Ireland. My family was large, my two farms too far asunder and both too small apart to support my family, and I could not brook the idea of getting into difficulties and perhaps into prison for debt. The Young Irelanders attempted a revolution. I do not understand them, nor did I then; they were mad, or traitors to their Country, I believed them then, and now, mad" (35). Thus, considered from an Irish point of view, Irish migration could be seen as the failure of Mother Ireland to retain its children and consolidate a national identity. However, from a foreigner's perspective, "the story of the Irish in America is a chronicle of the triumph of the human spirit over adversity" (Coogan 2001, p.254) because although ravaged by war, famine and centuries of economic decline, the Irish managed to make their way successfully in America and were able to initiate a flourishing Irish-Argentine community. Irish migrants were not a majority in comparison with other groups of

immigrants but they certainly became an important diaspora and set a strong cultural mark on our country.

By the time of the Spanish colonization and the British Invasions in Buenos Aires, a few Irish migrants had already arrived in the territory of the River Plate. The first huge Irish migration to Argentina can be traced to 1840. Those Irish immigrants were mainly moved by starvation, poverty, the scarcity of industries in Ireland, poor agricultural production or the desire of getting rich in a hardly known but young country. In the early nineteenth century, most of them were single men who were employed as farmers or sheep breeders in the Argentinian Patagonia or in the central *camps*, as portrayed by William Bulfin in his *Tales of the Pampas* (1997). In her introduction to this collection of stories, Susan Wilkinson describes them as follows: "Here were stories of Irish sheep, and cattle-breeders – mostly unmarried – living in isolation in the pampas, of ne'er-do-wells a little too addicted to drink and not enough to work, of matrimonial "matches" going hopelessly awry, of horseraces, gambling and fatal stabbings, of tragedy and death". Like Bulfin, who emigrated to Argentina with his brother when he was about twenty, many of those men came through some contact in this country. Like him, they found jobs on various huge "estancias" in the pampas - that were sometimes as large as Irish counties - and his experiences provided him with rich literary material for writing these stories in his free time. In some cases, those vast "camps" – as he calls them – were owned or managed by Irish people who had come to Argentina penniless but had become rich by herding cattle, a situation that is described in the story entitled "The course of true love":

> Full sixty years ago the first Irish sheep-farmers went fourth from Buenos Aires city into the teeming wilds of the Pampa, and made their pioneer homes in the track of the frontier cavalry regiments that were fighting back the Indians. The success of these hardy settlers induced their kinsfolk to follow their footsteps; and now, for leagues and leagues inland from the banks of El Rio de La Plata and the Parana, north and west from Buenos Aires, stretch the estates, or *estancias*, of men of Irish birth or parentage. (Bulfin, p.135)

These Irish landowners also used to employ their fellow countrymen as hand labour: "On these estates or "camps", not only are the proprietors and managers Irish, but the shepherds and estancia hands as well" (Ibidem).

Most of these traits of nineteenth century Irish migration to Argentina that Bulfin recreated through stereotyped fictional characters can be verified through the interesting collection of original letters and memoirs of four families of Irish-Argentines in Argentina compiled by Edmundo Murray. Thus, Edward Robbins made a living in Buenos Aires city at first to later move to what he calls a *Quinta*.

The Murphy brothers settled in agrarian areas and incipient industrial towns related to farming production near Buenos Aires, such as Salto, Cañuelas, Rojas, as well as in Venado Tuerto (southern part of Santa Fe province). The Garrahans settled mainly in Lujan and Lobos, although there is reference to their lands in General Paz, Marcos Paz, Saladillo, General Rodriguez, Las Heras (all of them in the province of Buenos Aires) and also, in the province of Cordoba. However, those were difficult political times in Argentina and they certainly affected the local and the immigrant population alike. In this sense, Robbins' narrative exposes his frustrations and fears from his experiences in a new country after a time of economic improvement: "I was going on pretty well when on the 6th December the town was blockaded and so for 8 months during the blockade and Rosas war, I lost at least 30 to 40,000 dollars; a bad beginning for a poor man and he getting old" (Murray, p.35). This example shows that not all the stories of Irish migrants in our country were ones of success and happiness. For many, an economic relief came several years after their arrival; for others, moments of upheaval and loses were a constant and a minority never changed their initial condition of rural or factory workers.

Undoubtedly, early immigrants played a key role in the transformation of Argentina, particularly in the *pampas* region, as documented by Hilda Sabato and Juan Carlos Korol (1981). The River Plate was the final destination for a multiplicity or immigrants of diverse origins, such as Italian, Spanish, German, Basque, French, Russian, Welsh, Scottish, English and of course, Irish. Each group followed a different migratory pattern and made their own path in a variety of economic activities, but all of them greatly contributed not only to the developing productive structure already established here but also, to the emergence of a flourishing multicultural society whose legacy lasts even today. Fortunately, many aspects of their life in Argentina can be reconstructed through their personal narratives, official records and the abundant research that many historians and Irish descendants continue doing today. Those letters and memoirs are a rich proof of how deeply involved they were in the construction of the Argentina nation along the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth but in so doing, they were also helping in the process of rebuilding Ireland away from Ireland, while assimilating some cultural traits and rejecting others.

According to Edmundo Murray (2006a): "Migrations impose a continuous pace, a fluid process that does not stop: becoming" (p.131). When thinking about socio-cultural processes involved in migration, it seems inevitable to consider the complex issue of identity, an ongoing aspect of the self. In the Introduction to *Questions of Cultural Identity*, Stuart Hall defines "identities" as never unified […] increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic discourses, practices and positions. They are subject to a radical historicization, and are constantly in the process of change and

transformation" (Hall & De Gay 1996, p.4). That means that our circumstances can make us change our identity when we stop believing in a set of values and adopt another, or as both systems achieve a synthesis. The fact that identities are always in process means they need the resources of language, culture and history to be interpreted. Thus, the question of identity is not about "being" but about "becoming", about how we have been represented or how we might represent ourselves. Bulfin also illustrates this process in "The Course of True Love":

> Exile has, of course, modified some of their idiosyncrasies and accentuated others. The wilderness has taught them some of the mysteries, has sharpened some of their senses and faculties that would in other conditions of life have remained comparatively dull; has, to some extent, increased their natural sensitiveness and deprived them of their spirituality, as well as taken the corners and angles off their Celtic mysticism. (p.136)

Therefore, identities are constructed within discourse, through differences and in relation to tradition: "They relate to the invention of tradition as much as to tradition itself " and "arise from the narrativization of the self " (Hall & De Gay 1996, p.4), for which they are constructed also in the imaginary and the symbolic. Besides, this process of becoming all human beings are subject to relies on identification. To Hall, identification is constructed on the recognition of some common origin or shared characteristics with another person or group, or with an ideal, and with the natural closure of solidarity and allegiance established on this foundation: "the discursive approach sees identification as a construction, a process never completed – always 'in process'. It is not determined in the sense that it can always be 'won' or 'lost', sustained or abandoned" (p.2). From a psychological point of view, Hall follows Freud as he argues that identification can be understood as a "moulding after the other" (p.3), which compensates for loss, in this case, of one's previous identity, and is grounded in projection and idealization. To Murray, "the emigrants" discourse is key to understanding their identities" (2006a, 3) because while writing about their experiences they articulate discursive lines of representation in which several aspects of their identities are involved.

In addition, the socio-cultural space of diasporic subjects is always marked by plurality, difference and hybridity. Although the Irish tried to keep culturally distant from local influences from the very first moment of their arrival, they could not avoid assimilating local countrymen customs like having *mate* or eating tough beef and hard "camp" biscuit, as those men shared most of their lives with the *gauchos* in the countryside. Similarly, they could not avoid becoming linguistically "contaminated" either through the assimilation of Spanish words or slang uses, as portrayed in Bulfin's tales through phrases like these: "Francisco was behind the

counter when I went into the *pulperia*" (Bulfin, p.23), "*El* high-life and I became tolerably friendly" (p.53) or "Barragan would have suspected something at once, for he is a great fox, and then – *quien sabe*? (p.89). These issues related to linguistic assimilation present in the unavoidable process of adaptation that immigration involves are explicitly explained by Bulfin:

> Spanish phrases and idioms have inflected the English they habitually use; but the brogue of Leinster and Munster has remained intact. Spanish and Creole customs have, in a greater or less degree, insensibly woven themselves into their life; but they are unwilling to admit this, and their struggle to preserve the traditions of the motherland is constant and earnest. (p.136)

Although written in the standard English Irish migrants spoke in the nineteenth century, Bulfin's tales shows the intrusion of Spanish words, mainly in reference to elements related to their daily rural life or greetings, such as *señaling*, *puesto*, *puna and paja brava*, *compañero* and *rosillo*, among many others. As regards the way in which Irish immigrants recorded their experiences, Edmundo Murray claims that language is the common element that provides cohesion to the corpus of letters, memoirs, travel diaries and other private documents of the Irish in Argentina: "Their authors, as diverse as emigrants can be, follow the shared rules of language, which is the strongest social convention for any group" (p.22).

Besides, the private narratives compiled in *Becoming Irlandés* portray three kinds of common discourses among the Irish that give account of the different stages comprised in migratory processes: "oppression" discourse (motives for leaving home), "compensation" discourse (how they turned from frustrated emigrants into successful immigrants) and, sometimes, "contribution" discourse (how they contributed to the development and growth of the new community). It can be said that the "oppression" discourse prevails in the memoir of Edward Robbins; the "compensation" one in the memoirs of Tom Garrahan, a typical Argentine born *estanciero* to Irish parents and grandparents. But it is certainly in the letters written by J.J Murphy to his brother Martin and other relatives and friends at home that the three categories can be fully appreciated. Thus, the slow process of mixing up with the local community and the remarkable cultural and economic contribution made by the Irish diaspora can be noticed in the following lines: "I believe I mentioned in a previous letter of us having got an Irish priest amongst us in Salto. We are now collecting to build a Church […] The Irish has subscribed very liberal toward the Church […] When they finish the Church they are to build a bridge over the River Salto, which is much needed, as it is a dangerous river to pass when flooded" (p.53). Undoubtedly, once settled, Irish migrants started to contribute to the development of the receiving country, in order to be accepted by the community: "We are as usual

very much respected here both by the authorities and the respectable people of Salto, but we shall have more to do for the future to retain their respect, as there are many Irish rather rum characters come into this neighbourhood of late" (*Ibidem*). This reciprocity allowed them to be acquainted with governing elites, to make business but also, to set their mark in the society they had chosen to make a new home away from home.

The preceding examples from the selected texts clearly highlight representations of the Irish diaspora in Argentina, their in-between identities and their main traits as members of a community of migrants of the same nationality. First, Irish migrants were determined to achieve the progress they were denied at "home" (real or imagined), usually as sheep farmers first, and landowners then, as they knew the value of work ethic and sacrifice. If achieved, success acted as a compensation for what they had left behind and their own effort. Second, the Irish diaspora had a deep sense of community, with strong bonds of brotherhood among themselves. However, when addressing his fellow countrymen as "the Irish", J.J. Murphy creates a distance between them (local people/other diasporas) and us (Irish people/descendants). Similarly, the use of a third person verb form when referring to "foreigners" or "the Irish", also suggests the conception that Irish migrants constitute a group, a psychological and cultural unity as diasporic people. Certainly, as Murray claims, "emigrants are space makers" (6) because they create spaces of oppression and assimilation, of emotion and emptiness, which can take years or even generations to be achieved, and which give them the possibility of evolving from an initial condition of colonised to one of colonisers. Murray illustrates his view in these lines:

> My hypothesis is that the greater part of the Irish who emigrated to Argentina were, more than anything, *ingleses*. When they left the British Isles they identified particularly with that European nation that had oppressed them at home. This identification was strengthened after the confrontation with the Argentine natives, gauchos and Indians. The stress provoked by fears of being different to their perceptions of themselves precipitated a return to their cultural mind, which was particularly English-centred […] In Ireland, the English became their enemies. At this climatic moment in the historic negotiation of Irish identity, the Irish family began to perceive themselves as Argentines in order to have access to the status of the local bourgeoise. (p.135)

The fact that they were *ingleses* in the eyes of Argentinians gave them a certain status for being Europeans. To a certain point, it provided them with certain cultural superiority compared with that of the different ethnic groups that inhabited Argentina by the 1800s, an incipient independent country still trying to consolidate

itself as a nation. However, this perception of themselves as a homogeneous cultural group against the different "other" postponed their process of integration with local people, which is portrayed in all these narratives.

Finally, women were also an important part of nineteenth century Irish migration to Argentina. Technological advances and a new social order that came with modernization made it easier for women to leave their mother country either in groups, with their husbands or even alone, just as travellers in the American lands or in search of working opportunities not available in small Irish towns. Marion M. Mulhall was one of those first Irish women who arrived and established in Argentina in 1868 with her husband Michael Mullhall, editor of "The Standard", a newspaper for the English-speaking population of Buenos Aires. Their arrival took place by the time the War of the Triple Alliance or Paraguayan War (1864-1870) was still being fought, and two months before Domingo Faustino Sarmiento succeeded Bartolome Mitre as president. At the beginning of her book *Between the Amazon and the Andes* (1881), she writes: "My first impressions of this place [Buenos Aires] were unfavourable, owing to the difficulties that attended our landing" (Mulhall, p.1), although she praises the great hospitality of the inhabitants (p.10). In the preface of her travelling book we can also notice her identification as an English migrant, in an attempt to distinguish herself from others in the multicultural space of Buenos Aires, as she claims: "I was the first Englishwoman to penetrate the heart of South America, travelling for thousands of miles through untrodden forests, seeing the Indian tribes in their own hunting-grounds, visiting the ruin shrines Jesuit Missions", all of which gave her the courage to write about her experiences in these southern territories for others who have not explored them yet.

Another example of the cultural distance between the Irish and the local or foreign communities is also portrayed in the fact that many Irish families settled in mostly Irish neighbourhoods and they continued marrying only Irish or Argentine born people of Irish families. Single Irish women also started to rear orphan children from Irish parents after the 1870 cholera epidemic in Argentina. Besides, in *Becoming Irlandes* Sally Moore tells her cousin James John Pettit in Australia: "although we mix very little with the people of the country I like them better than the English perhaps because they are Catholics that we have more sympathy with them" (87), and calls them "native people" to describe the devastating effects of the War in the local population. Her description of the "country people" (*gauchos*) as "ugly, dark, with dark eyes and hair", "savages" and illiterate is completely biased and emerges from a strong Eurocentric perspective, which reinforces the fact that the processes of adaptation of the Irish migrants to the Argentinian customs and inhabitants took a certain time. A partial integration between both cultural groups can be noticed as Kate A. Murphy praises the talent of *gauchos* for playing the guitar at the "*bailes*" or dances where men and women gathered at night in the shearing season by

Christmas time. In most of these texts stereotypes and prejudices or rivalry towards other migrants' nationalities are part of the identity negotiation process migrants undergo. Like Bulfins' characters, Irish migrants were between two cultures, as they have left their own one partly behind in the process of dislocation they faced but, at the same time, they rejected and even resisted the one of the host country.

Conclusion

Since Irish immigrants spoke English and were legally British, they were among the earliest European groups to cross international frontiers, which gave them the advantage of being able to insert themselves in the agrarian, the industrial or the commercial structures. Argentina emerged as a favourite destination for young Irish migrants despite the linguistic barrier that made adaptation an extra degree of complexity. Besides, once they established and achieved a certain economic stability, Irish immigrants encouraged other countrymen to emigrate, forming well organised migration networks, usually with the help of Catholic priests already established in the Irish community. But while negotiating values of their own cultural background with those of the host country, they undeniably contributed to the economic, infrastructural and social development of our country. The idea of recreating home away from home implies a gradual process of reconstruction of identity in a new context, marked by plurality, diversity and tolerance. In this reciprocal process of identification all migrants are faced to, the Irish ended up adopting many cultural traits they rejected at the very beginning and have had a profound impact on Argentina, whose legacy is still continued and enhanced today by the numerous Argentine-Irish community centred in Buenos Aires and other important cities in central provinces as well as the way in which their traditions, food, music and symbolic elements have been widespread till they became part of our Argentinian culture as well.

The selected texts for this paper portray systems of values and ideologies that compose the identity of Irish immigrants, which obviously collide with a local and different cultural system, at least in certain aspects. And it is in those points of clash or encounter where a new hybrid identity starts to develop. The difficulty for Irish migrants to mix with native groups in Argentina was very gradual because they perceived themselves as different and were afraid of becoming "contaminated" by those differences. For these diasporic subjects, the need of "transplanting" Ireland abroad is a must, which is represented in the determination to keep their cultural heritage as pure as possible but also, in their involvement in the development of their new community.

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