



**Citation:** M.I. Arriaga (2021) Becoming Irish-Argentine in the Argentine “pampas”. Identity Representations in Private Voices in Edmundo Murray’s *Becoming Irlandés*. *Sijis* 11: pp. 33-51. doi: 10.13128/SIJIS-2239-3978-12872

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**Data Availability Statement:** All relevant data are within the paper and its Supporting Information files.

**Competing Interests:** The Author(s) declare(s) no conflict of interest.

## Becoming Irish-Argentine in the Argentine *pampas*: Identity Representations in Private Voices in Edmundo Murray’s *Becoming Irlandés*

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### Abstract:

During the nineteenth century, more than a third of the Argentine population was formed by immigrants, which included the largest Irish diaspora within Latin America. Personal letters and memoirs constitute invaluable first-hand testimonies of immigrants’ lives. *Becoming Irlandés: Private Narratives of the Irish Emigration to Argentina (1844-1912)*, formed by two collections of letters and two memoirs plus contextualized and historical information, edited by independent researcher and writer Edmundo Murray (2006a), offers rich insights about their local experience and culture. The purpose of this paper is to analyse strategies of identification in the discourse of those Irish born or Argentine of Irish descendency, through a postcolonial studies perspective and a narratological approach.

**Keywords:** Diaspora, Emigration, Home, Identity, Representations

### 1. Introduction

The nineteenth century was marked by the outburst of great migration waves from European countries to the Americas. At first, most immigrants came from Northern and Western Europe, but between 1815 and 1865 one-third came from Ireland. The history of Ireland in the last two centuries has been marked by the ghost of massive emigration, especially since 1845, as the country experienced the Great Famine (1845-1849) that left Ireland economically devastated for years. This trend would continue till the first half of the twentieth century, due to the lack of available employment in Ireland, enforced by the tradi-

tional agrarian culture fostered by president Eamon De Valera<sup>1</sup>, which would change by the late 1970s, with the phenomenon known as the Celtic Tiger<sup>2</sup>.

The favourite destinations among Irish emigrants were undoubtedly the English-speaking countries, such as England, the United States of America and Australia. Between 1820 and 1930, almost 5 million Irish migrated to the USA, settling in cities along the east coast. In Argentina, during the nineteenth century, about 40,000 emigrants left Ireland to colonise the Argentine *pampas*, initiating a flourishing Irish-Argentine community. Although Irish migrants were not a majority in comparison with other immigrant groups, they certainly became an important diaspora and set their cultural mark on our country.

The proposed paper will analyse identity patterns in the private narratives of those Irish born or Argentine of Irish descendancy – compiled and edited by Edmundo Murray –, through a postcolonial studies perspective (Bhabha 1994; Brah 1996), a narratological approach (Bal 1999; Genette 1970, 1980, 1991) and a brief approach to Cultural Studies, through some of Hall's main concepts. The research will focus on the representations of identity in Murray's selected letters and memoirs under three categories of analysis: the Irish diaspora in Argentina, the process of adaptation they underwent and the idea of home that prevails in the voices of the Irish-Argentines in mid and late nineteenth-century Argentina.

## 2. Edmundo Murray's Work

Edmundo Murray is a writer and independent researcher, who was born in Buenos Aires in 1955. He studied in Argentina, Switzerland and the United States. He is a lecturer and frequent contributor of articles in cultural history, regional cultural integration, and in Irish and Latin American Studies. He is also a founding member of the Society for Irish Latin American Studies, and member of Sociedad Suiza de Estudios Hispánicos and the Société Suisse des Américanistes. First editor of *Irish Migration Studies in Latin America*, a journal focusing on relations between Ireland and Latin America. Among other pieces of writing, he is the author of *Devenir irlandés: Narrativas íntimas de la emigración irlandesa a la Argentina 1844-1912* (2004), which has been published in English as *Becoming Irlandés: Private Narratives of the Irish Emigration to Argentina 1844-1912* (2006a) and *Becoming Gauchos Ingleses: Diasporic Models in Irish-Argentine Literature* (2009). *Becoming Irlandés* has been widely praised by important members of the Irish Studies community in Argentina, Brazil and Spain, such as the historian Hilda Sabato, literature professors and scholars Laura Izarra, Inés Praga Terente and Juan José Delaney, and journalist Sergio Kiernan, as the first work of compilation of this sort, emphasizing the richness of the multiplicity of voices involved in it and the portrayal of the everyday life of these Irish-Argentine, which constitutes a very useful source of analysis for researchers in the field of Irish studies, from a variety of different approaches within cultural studies.

<sup>1</sup> Eamon De Valera was one of the leaders in the failed 1916 Easter Uprising. He founded the opposition political party Fianna Fáil. In 1932, Fianna Fáil was elected to power in a coalition with Labour politicians. During the 16 years De Valera was to remain Ireland's Prime Minister, he tried to totally cut Ireland from any form of British linkage. De Valera kept Eire neutral during World War Two. Fianna Fáil won the 1951 election and De Valera returned to the Prime Minister's office until 1954. He was Prime Minister again between 1957-1959. In 1959, he stood for and won Eire's presidential election – an election he won again in 1966. De Valera was the first Irish leader to address America's Congress (1964) and he gained considerable prestige abroad. Under De Valera's rule, the cultural identity of the Irish Republic as Roman Catholic and Gaelic was asserted (Trueman 2015).

<sup>2</sup> Kevin Gardiner is credited with first using the term "Celtic Tiger" in a report for Morgan Stanley in 1994, forecasting more than a decade of surging economic growth for the countries which were undergoing rapid economic expansion (Burke-Kennedy 2014).

*Becoming Irlandés* is a revised edition in English that not only includes the original letters and memoirs of four families of Irish-Argentines in Argentina but also a deeply informative introduction, illustrations and appendixes of genealogy, chronology and a glossary. Letters are rich in their dialogical structure and are full of the narrator's intentions whereas memoirs are described by Murray as "accounts of the writer's own life with an emphasis on the witnessed events, instead of his or her own personality or life (autobiography) or the justification of his or her own faults" (2006a, 15). The book closes with an epilogue titled "Gauchos irlandeses", which recovers the main theoretical concepts Murray dealt with in his introduction, a comparison between *gauchos* and Irish *estancieros* and a conclusion about the book title.

### 3. Theoretical Framework

During the nineteenth century, about forty-five thousand emigrants left Ireland to settle in Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay, the majority of whom came from the Irish Midlands (Westmeath, Longford and Offaly) and from Co. Wexford. About 20,000 of them settled in Argentina, whereas the rest moved again to Australia, the United States or back to Ireland.

To start with, it is worth defining two key terms related to migration: emigration and diaspora. Defined as "the act of leaving one's own country to settle permanently in another; moving abroad" by the online Oxford dictionary, emigration is probably the most general of these terms. On the other hand, the International Organization for Migration (IOM 2019, 49) defines diaspora 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 it recognises that 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, in his dialectics of diaspora and Irish emigration (2013) American professor and author 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 the idea of diaspora is related to that of a journey, which is concerned with settling down somewhere away from home. However, although Brah focuses on the diasporic construction of home, 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 thing as desire for a 'homeland'" (1996, 180). Similarly, James Clifford conceives diaspora as different from mere travelling in that it is not temporary (1994, 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" (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" (1996, 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). In *The Location of Culture* Homi Bhabha argues that "the social articulation of difference, from the minority perspective, is a complex, on-going negotiation that seeks to authorize cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformation" (1994, 2). Thus, the socio-cultural space of diasporic subjects is always marked by plurality, difference and hybridity, which determines a constant negotiation of values in the permanent process of redefinition of their identity.

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" (1996, 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 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" (1999, 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 see themselves and construct their new identity here.

Another important aspect to consider about the discourse of these letters is their mainly narrative style. Scarcely any description of Argentina and local customs or celebrations are present in the narratives of these Irish-Argentines. This could be explained following Gérard Genette's article entitled "Fronteras del Relato" (1972). According to Genette, the difference between narration and description is one of content since the former has to do with actions and events considered as mere processes and, therefore, focused on the temporal and dramatic aspects of the story; in contrast, the latter centres on objects and beings considered simultaneously and focuses on processes seen as spectacles, which seems to stop the perception of time over a central role attributed to the spatial configuration (201). In this way, the narrative genre that predominates in the texts written by these Irish-Argentines reflects the active involvement of these people in the historical or personal events that had the greatest influence on their lives, chronologically portrayed.

Finally, the narrative texts selected by Edmundo Murray not only deal with everyday aspects of Irish-Argentines in Argentina but also portray the process by which they assimilated the new cultural patterns and develop a new hybrid system of values and beliefs, as well as their degree of attachment to the local community. Since both the construction of oneself is always under development, Murray uses the performative verb "becoming" or *devenir* in the title of his book so as to imply the continuum behind any process of identification that takes place within migration: "becoming-Irish through the discourse is a process represented by narratives of one's own and others' identity, and of the mutation of that identity" (2006a, 6).

#### 4. *The Irish Diaspora in Argentina*

One of the most dramatic yet reaffirming trait of the recent history of Ireland is, undoubtedly, massive emigration, especially between the mid-nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth. Considered from an Irish point of view, this 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, 254) because although ravaged by war, famine and centuries of economic decline, the Irish managed to make their way to the top of political and economic success.

Originally defined by the Greeks as "expansion through outward migration and settlement" (Delaney 2006, 36), the term "diaspora" was later associated with the forced dispersion of the Jews, that of the Armenian (1915-1916), the Palestinian exodus after the formation of the State of Israel in 1948, as well as the movement of the Irish during the Great Famine (1845-1849). But why is it that we talk about Irish migration in terms of "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, "Irish migration is, then, crucially bound up in a narrative of assimilation and citizenship" (2013, 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, 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. Thus, the Irish in North America mainly settled in mill towns and railroad centres like New York, Boston, Chicago, New Orleans and San Francisco. They became perhaps the most urbanized group in America, as only a small number went west to engage in farming. Curiously, the Irish diaspora since the 1800s was one of the few formed by a high rate of female emigrants. In the UK, Irish migrants could be mainly found in southern Scotland and south Wales. Three-quarters of Irish immigrants were unskilled labourers or farm workers. Many ended up living in Irish areas of towns, especially in Liverpool and Glasgow, where many suffered from racial and religious discrimination. In contrast, the Irish that came to South America were attracted by the vast extensions of green plains suitable for

farming that resembled the Emerald Isle and, mainly, the possibility of enjoying true freedom and improving their lifestyles. As regards the authors of the private narratives collected by Murray, Edward Robbins made a living in Buenos Aires city at first to later move to what he calls a *Quinta*<sup>3</sup>. 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 Luján and Lobos, although there is reference to their lands in General Paz, Marcos Paz, Saladillo, General Rodríguez, Las Heras (all of them in the province of Buenos Aires) and also, in the province of Córdoba. Finally, the emotional and geographical space of the three female cousins of John James Pettit (Sally, Kate and Fanny) is restricted to Buenos Aires and its nearby countryside.

Although the Great Famine was certainly a key motive for the Irish emigration along the second half of the nineteenth century, massive migrations to England and the Americas started between the 1830s-1840s, as the economic stagnation prevailing in Ireland due to poor agricultural production and the scarcity of industries led thousands of young Irish – including many women – to leave the native country in search of better opportunities, not only for themselves but also for those who remained at home. But why did they choose Argentina as a favourite country to start their new life? First, the majority of immigrants that settled in this country along the nineteenth century were mainly “the younger, non-inheriting sons, and later daughters, of the larger tenant farmers and leaseholders. Usually, they were emigrating from farms which were in excess of twenty acres, and some were from farms considerably larger”, claims Edmundo Murray in his article “The Irish Road to South America: Nineteenth-Century Travel Patterns from Ireland to the Río de la Plata region” (McKenna qtd. in Murray 2006b, 29). So, the likelihood of acquiring land in Argentina attracted them. Many of those farms were located in the rural areas of Ballymahon, Abbeyshrule, or Edgesworthtown (Longford), Ballymore, Drumraney (Westmeath), Kilmore, Kilrane and other towns in Co. Wexford, usually referred to in the narratives here analysed. In these areas and among those social groups, nineteenth-century Argentina enjoyed a reputation similar to that of the United States: “the real or perceived prospect of acquiring land in Argentina (generally called at that time Buenos Ayres or the Provinces of the River Plate) was a powerful appeal to children of tenant farmers in Ireland, who would never have other means to climb the social ladder” (*ibidem*). Second, since Argentina was not part of the British Empire, “most legal burdens at home would not annoy the emigrants in their adopted country” (30). Therefore, emigrants realised that in Argentina they would be free from debts that obliged them in Ireland. Third, letters from early emigrants, newspaper articles in English, and travel handbooks contributed to create this image of Argentina abroad.

In his article Murray states that migrants from Midlands and Wexford sailed from Ireland to Liverpool first and, after staying at the port for some days, they initiated a long journey to the “Río de la Plata”. Occasionally, the ports of Dublin and Cork were used to sail directly to South America, but the majority used Liverpool as their port of departure due to the greater availability of shipping frequencies, fares and accommodations (*ibidem*). Thus, Edward Robbins describes this route like this:

1849. Early in the month of March I left for Liverpool and I arranged for a passage to Buenos Aires for myself and family with Michael McDonald. On the 4<sup>th</sup> of April all my family arrived at Liverpool and were kept there until the 8<sup>th</sup> of May, on which day they sailed. (Murray 2006a, 35)

<sup>3</sup> According to Murray’s Notes (2006a, 175), in the mid-nineteenth century, a *quinta* was a small farm located near the cities, where vegetables were produced.

As regards the Murphy brothers, in the introduction to chapter 3, Murray argues that in 1844 John James and many other young men from Kilrane sailed to Liverpool and from there to the River Plate, where they arrived two months later in the *William Peile* (2006a, 37). There is scarce information related to this event since Murray's collection of Letters to Martin Murphy starts with just an epistle from John James to his father Nicholas (dated in Liverpool, April 1844):

Dear Father and ever affectionate Mother,

I am happy to make known to you that our fortunes have not turned out as we expected but have made a greater progress to our happiness than we expected [...] I have the pleasure of telling you all that we are in the best of spirits and expect to meet with good fortune wherever we go [...] I do not think I'll write until I reach Buenos Aires. (38)

On the other hand, the case of James Pettit (chapter 4) portrays a different though common geographic dynamic in the Irish diaspora. So, when the chosen destination did not work, they went back to Ireland or moved somewhere else because re-emigration was always possible. Thus, James Pettit and his wife left their native land in 1831. Pettit organised a private emigration scheme between Argentina and Ireland, through which John James Murphy and many other young Irish people emigrated some years later. Pettit's only son – John James (to whom the letters by the three female cousins are addressed) – was born in Argentina in 1841 and a few months later Mrs Pettit died. Then, in 1852, James Pettit and his son moved to Australia, settling in Melbourne never to come back to Argentina. Little is said in the letters written by the female cousins about the economic activity developed by the Pettits there. However, the postcards, the photos and newspapers received by the cousins from Melbourne suggest an urban environment and commercial activities instead of farming. In fact, Murray argues that James Pettit was probably a merchant in Ireland before emigrating to Argentina and that he had business links with Patrick Browne and John Mooney, of whom the former was responsible for the early Co. Wexford emigration to Argentina, together with James Pettit.

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: a forced or voluntary migration from the country of origin in search of work, progress or to escape conflict, and a collective memory. On the one hand, Edward Robbins's memoir (1800-1853) mirrors how frustrations and debts of mid-to-upper social classes of farmers moved many Irish people to “begin to think of leaving Ireland”, as Murray entitles chapter 2 of his book. When Edward Robbins' previous economic security at home starts to fail, he makes the sad decision of emigrating in order not to lose the few assets he still possessed:

1846. This was a fearful time for the poor of Ireland. Fever and dysentery to an awful extent in many parts of it. Provisions of every kind doubled the usual prices, the poorhouses filled to overflowing. I had not one rood of potatoes sowed this year and, those who had, met with a poor return. I had a good harvest of corn. (34)

1848. On the 23<sup>rd</sup> day of March my sister Rose died and was buried at Noughville, Co. Westmeath. I was at the September fair of Banagher and dined at uncle John Deehan's for the last time. 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)

The memoir of Edward Robbins does not portray hope or enthusiasm at the idea of emigrating. In fact, he seems to have been forced mainly by his economic decline and the reality of Ireland, which offered few prospects of improvement. In his notes, Murray explains this through the “push-pull” theory:

The considerations to emigrate taken into account by the writer are predominantly economic, of the *push* type, i.e. factors restraining the continuation of lifestyle in the origin (number of family members to feed, strategic difficulties on farm management, potential risk of default). There is no clue in his account about the writer’s *pull* factors that attracted him to Argentina as a destination. (174)

Moreover, being a middle-aged man by those times, and after the loss of his first wife and his mother in the previous years, Robbins decided to move to Argentina with his second wife and his eleven children in 1849. Unfortunately, they arrived in Buenos Aires in quarantine due to cases of fever and dysentery on board, ten out of thirteen members of the Robbins family had to go to the Irish hospital - built the previous year - where his wife and two of his children died a month later.

In contrast, many of the letters of the Murphy brothers (1844-1879), reveal the perspective of the successful migrant, in which economic and social progress seem to compensate the dislocation and solitude that voluntary emigration involves. These images continuously clash with the failure and frustration undergone by those who remained in Ireland, to whom John James usually sends money in order to contribute with their daily subsistence and well being. Besides, as Murray claims in his introduction to chapter 3, ten years after his arrival in Argentina, John James managed to buy a huge *estancia*<sup>4</sup> in Salto, making of it a model sheep-farm that was the base of his prosperity:

Dear friends, My previous letter contained a great deal about this country, and the prospects that is now before us. The people are flocking here from all parts, many without money, others with capital, of which there is a great field open here for investment. The investment of capital in land & sheep and the business is considered so safe now a days, that the foreigners with money and those that can get it even at high interest, are eating up all before them. This business would have been still carried on to a greater extent were it not for the last extremely bad season that prevailed through almost all parts of this country (I mean the drought, which still prevails in many parts of this) yet delightful country [...] But the interest desired and obtained in this country are so remunerative that it make labours light and toil an interesting object [...]. (42)

In this letter, as well as in many others, John James is usually enthusiastic about the unique possibilities foreigners had in Argentina, even during seasons of bad weather or difficult economic and political times, as he expresses in that same letter:

You may say that I have enough to live where I like by selling it off and come home, but first just consider that your positions are at home and how your holdings are a mere source of slavery<sup>5</sup>. Secondly, if you could only consider the real state of both countries, you would naturally say what could be the object of making a choice of that country wherein I should be only a looker on at your toiling ill-fed and ill-paid industry. Of course this country has its own inconvenience and newcomers frequently entertain

<sup>4</sup>The word *estancia* is used in many South American countries (Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay and Paraguay) to refer to a huge rural settlement, usually dedicated to the breeding of cattle (mainly sheep, horses, cows), which are kept in the open air all the year round and fed with natural grass.

<sup>5</sup>The land tenure system in mid-nineteenth century Ireland made it almost impossible for tenants to buy their lands (Murray 2006a, 179).

strong feeling on their arrival. But in a year or two these notions vanish and people only then come to see the great preference this country is entitled to. (*Ibidem*)

Some years after John James emigrated, his brothers William and Patrick followed him to Argentina and also started their own business through farming and land acquisition, as it is expressed by William Murphy in this 1862 letter to his brother Martin, who remained at home as their agent:

Dear Martin, I suppose you know the whole particulars about the place I am now living in [...] Nor had I the remotest thoughts of buying land until the 11<sup>th</sup> or so in the month of February nor then until I weighed well the difficulties I was liable to meet with against the many advantages in my favour by buying an article that at any moment I can make sale of to advantage even a few days after I settled for it. [...] It's a good land as there is to be found, well watered and suitable for sheep [...]. (39-40)

In addition, the story of the Garrahan in Argentina, written by Tom Garrahan (known as Tom or "Don Tomás") in his estancia New Home (Lobos) between the late 1920s or early 1930s, constitutes another example of hard work and achievement among Irish migrants:

We lived then on Juan Lagos' camp, partido<sup>6</sup> of Luján. Afterwards this camp joined part of General Las Heras, and since 1875, it was taken into the new partido of General Rodriguez. My father, as soon as he started on his own, was on shares with Lagos in three or four flocks of sheep. A few years before this, my grandfather bought 1,500 squares of camp from Lagos and the 'puesto'<sup>7</sup> that my father occupied joined the Garrahan camp. [...] Father rented the 'puesto' where we lived for several years and all the family were born there [...] In 1879 my father started buying sheep for a 'grasería' in Rodriguez, belonging to a man called Reyna, and at the end of the first year he owed my father a lot of money so they went in partnership and so built a new 'grasería' on halves (apparently, there was no value given to meat at this time, so all was boiled down for grease, hence the name 'Grasería'). (115-116)

Sheep-farming and commercial activities associated to cattle breeding seem to have been the main activities Irish emigrants engaged in along Buenos Aires and nearby provinces. There is scarce reference to cultivation in Murray's collections of private narratives, which appears not only as a secondary activity but also, as one intended mainly for family subsistence. Thus, in Garrahan's memoir, the author says:

In those days we had very few vegetables, excepting potatoes and onions. Peaches of the old criollo type were plentiful at Grandmother's. There were about four hectares of peach-mount and they used to cut a quarter every year for fire wood, and in three years it would give fruit. Again, I used to gather peaches in my bag and carry them home on horse-back and they would arrive as sound as when taken from the tree. (117)

It is in a 1869 letter from Patrick Moore to his cousin John James Pettit that a clear reference to Irish farmers investing in cultivation appears. However, it seemed not to be a favourite economic activity for them, probably because it was a risky one when thinking of weather conditions and other distressful factors:

<sup>6</sup> *Camp* is an ambiguous word with different connotations, according to Murray (24), commonly meaning "countryside" or estancia in these narratives. Loanwords from Spanish populate many of the letters and memoirs in Murray's collection, especially those by J.J. Murphy and Tom Garrahan. Tom Garrahan uses a richer Spanish vocabulary than the other writers, probably because he was born in Argentina and his purpose is to recount his experiences and speak of his feelings in a *camp style* (115).

<sup>7</sup> Outpost on a large farm. *Puestero* is the person in charge of that outpost.

You will see by the papers some clever articles about this country, it is coming down fast, sheep are worth nothing, wool ditto, and the only hope is in agriculture, people are very much afraid of going into this business, as last year the wheat failed owing to the heavy rains, and workmen are so scarce that it requires some capital to start the business at all. (106)

Similarly, Edward Robbins describes agriculture as just a way of earning a living though denoting how unstable economic success could be for emigrants and the consequent sense of frustration and fear it produced in them:

1851. By the end of a year working at the Quinta I had it all sowed under alfalfa, and some fit for sale. I thought I was going on well.

1852 [...] I was going on pretty well when on the 6<sup>th</sup> 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. (35)

As it can be noticed, different voices in these letters and memoirs are plenty of representations of successful ranchers or businessmen. Tom Garrahan's memoir describes how, sooner or later, most Irish migrants were able to become landowners in our country when a chance was available:

In 1874 or 1875, rents began to rise and the runs for sheep curtailed to 100 squares to every flock [...] In 1874, my grandmother bought La Espadaña camp in Lobos. It belonged to Justo Villegas and was about 4,000 squares with the material for wiring on the camp. It cost \$ 2,000,000 old money". (117)

Even John James Pettit's relatives, who lived a life half urban half rural, ended up negotiating with lands and became landowners, at least temporarily:

I think that I told you before that when we sold our house in Parque we bought some land in the camp, it has turned out most advantageous purchase, 850 squares of ground, we paid 350 dollars a square for it and we have sold it at 3,500 dollars a square, lands especially near town have gone up so much that we thought it better to sell and buy land further out for my brothers Robert and John [...]. (110-111)

However, not all nineteenth-century Irish emigrants were so successful as the Murphy brothers or the Garrahans. For those like Robbins with little capital to invest in animals, having a business associate could be a solution, but things were not always as they hoped:

1853. I was likely to go on middling with the Quinta until the blockade was put on, or the 6<sup>th</sup> December past, and was not taken off until the 14th July inst. Asked Mr. Ochoa, with whom I was on shares, if he would buy my part and let me go; he referred to Arbitration [...] I got \$3,000. Fortunately for me, my poor unfortunate friend George Ford introduced me to Mr. McClymont's and got with what money I could scrape a half of a flock of sheep. I left the Quinta about the last week of October or first week of November [...]. (35-36)

As Murray sees it, the fact that Robbins did not attempt more lucrative rural activities like sheep-farming or meat-curing as soon as he arrived in Buenos Aires may imply that he did not have friends or family among the wealthiest Irish settlers in Argentina. Also, cases like that of James Pettit's re-migration to Australia suggest a certain degree of disappointment or frustration on his experience as an Irish-Argentine, to the point of making the decision to start again in a new place far from any relatives or acquaintances. Then, at the other end of the migration

spectrum, were those less fortunate Irish emigrants, too, who either because of bad luck, lack of influential acquaintances who could help them open their own way in foreign territory or because they came from Ireland penniless and needed to survive, the truth is that they were just proletarians or “estancia hands and servants”, to put it in Murray’s terms (17).

As a whole, although these narratives are constituted by individual experiences and remembrances, they are also crossed by what Émile Durkheim calls “a collective consciousness”, formed by social facts: “the beliefs, tendencies and practices of the group taken collectively” (1982, 54), which are acquired through education and culture and, therefore, they exercise a certain control on individuals. This shared consciousness translates itself into a form of collective memory of their birthplace or homeland for diasporic people, related to how groups remember their past. This memory may be about facts or about their interpretations, but they certainly provide a sense of belonging. Since diasporic groups appropriate the places they choose to settle in order to make homes away from home, they have the tendency to reconnect with other communities with whom they feel united by a feeling of original brotherhood that forms the basis of their new identity and a sign of their territoriality. It is in this intersection between the individual and the collective where the new identities are built for diasporic subjects.

##### 5. *Becoming Irish-Argentine: In-Between Two Cultures*

“Migrations impose a continuous pace, a fluid process that does not stop: becoming” (Murray 2006a, 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, 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 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. 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” (*ibidem*), 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” (2). From a psychological point of view, Hall follows Freud as he argues that identification can be understood as a “moulding after the other” (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. The chronological arrangement of letters and events in both memoirs in Murray’s book shows this lengthy process of identification undergone

by nineteenth-century Irish migrants while trying to recreate a home away from home. Along the private narratives in *Becoming Irlandés*, we can see how the “oppression” discourse (motives for leaving home) usually articulates with their “compensation” discourse (how they turned from frustrated emigrants into successful immigrants) and, sometimes, with the “contribution” discourse (how they contribute to the development and growth of the new community). The “oppression” discourse prevails in the memoir of Edward Robbins, as there are several hints of the dramatic situation of Ireland that led many people to emigrate: cholera first appeared in Ireland causing many deaths in large towns (1832); the distemper that affected his cows and the losses he suffered shook his capital severely (1842); the potato crop almost all got black and unfit for use (1845) and provisions of every kind doubled the usual prices, the poorhouses filled to overflowing (1846), to name some causes. References to the “compensation” discourse are scarce in this text, as Robbins’ life in Buenos Aires is just described near the abrupt end of his narrative and shows an ambivalent progress with ups and downs.

Conversely, the memoir of Tom Garrahan, focuses on representations of the “compensation” category mainly, probably because since Garrahan was born in Argentina to Irish parents and grandparents, his reality is different to that of Robbins. Thus, his story is based on his personal diary and represents the values and views of a “typical Irish-Argentine *estanciero*”, as Murray claims (115). He does not mention events that indicate his grandfather Patrick Garrahan had emigrated out of debts, famine, or political persecutions.

It is in the Murphy brothers’ letters that the three categories can be fully appreciated at work, especially, in those written by J.J. Murphy to his brother Martin and other relatives and friends at home. When he says “There are many causes which induce people to remain at home longer than they should. The fear, or rather shame they so foolishly entertain of being thought by those neighbours of being under the necessity to leave” (65), Murphy implicitly alludes to the economic difficulties that had pushed many Irishmen outside their native land in the last years (oppression). Contrastively, these lines describe how much better life in Argentina proved to be for most migrants (compensation):

I last wrote in search of land to buy, but has failed in doing so [...] There are many foreigners has purchased land in Santa Fe of late, and has moved up their sheep. The feeling of sheep farmers at present are rather favourable to the scheme, as land is bought at 1/8 of current price of land Buenos Aires, and I believe not inferior in quality [...]. (52)

The last discursive category, “contribution”, emerges in lines like the following:

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. (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.

The preceding lines enhance the portrayal of the Irish diaspora in Argentina in terms of representations of identity beyond the discursive level and allow readers to infer many of its

features. 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. A minority got on business, like James John Pettit. Somehow, success acted as a compensation for what they had left behind. Second, the Irish diaspora had a deep sense of community, with strong bonds of brotherhood among themselves. Addressing his fellow countrymen as “the Irish”, Murphy creates a distance and establishes a clear distinction between them (local people/other diasporas) and us (Irish people/descendants). In addition, another interesting discursive trait that commonly appears in many of these narratives, as exemplified in the quotations above, is the fact that the author uses a third person verb form when referring to “foreigners” or “the Irish”, which suggests the conception that Irish migrants constitute a group, a psychological and cultural unity as diasporic people. Certainly, “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:

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 bourgeoisie. (135)

On the one hand, 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 other” postponed their process of integration with local people, which is portrayed in all the Narratives. Thus, many Irish families settled in mostly Irish neighbourhoods and they continued marrying only Irish or Argentine born people of Irish families. Single Irish women started to rear orphan children from Irish parents after the 1870 cholera epidemic in Argentina. Besides, Sally Moore tells her cousin 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 that population: “one meets in the streets about ten foreigners to one native among the male population and so many families in mourning” (93). 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. Kate A. Murphy praises their talent for playing the guitar at the “*bailes*” or dances where men and women gathered at night in the shearing season by Christmas time. However, when she claims that people coming out from England do enjoy listening and seeing them, she writes from a clearly detached and outsider perspective.

Also, as explained above, most nineteenth-century Irish migrants came to Argentina as part of a migration network organised by those who had emigrated some time before. Later, J.J. Murphy did the same as a landowner, recruiting mostly Irish workers from morally good families for his camps, with the help of his brother Martin, local Irish priests and other members of the Catholic Church in his native land:

With the plough, you will be pleased to send me out three men, as James, Joseph & Nick, leaving my place left me scarce of hands. I will mention one of you: Tom Laeler, that was with me in Crosstown. The other two may be of your own choice [...] If there were any three or four men of respectable family coming out, and choose to come to Uncalito, it would save you the trouble of arranging about the others [...] If not the conditions to be understood with others are that they serve me fourteen months hire, and I pay all expenses committed with their coming but the passage money. We must raise the time of their servitude, on account of the exchange so high. (47)

In another letter to his siblings and friends in Ireland, Murray claims that he could find work for more men as every good man you keep employed in Argentina “pay well for the expenses” (53). These quotes indicate what an organised association it was and how selective many Irish sheep-farmers were like at the time of getting hand labour.

A third trait of this diaspora is its strong bond with the Catholic Church both at home and in Argentina, which also describes their cultural separateness. In many passages, J.J. Murphy makes reference to the collection of money among Catholic Irish people to send for Churches at home: (To Martin Murphy) “Tell Father James that I have got 2 or 3 pounds from his parishioners in the country to send him for his church” (52). Peculiarly, Irish migrants resisted attending religious services presided by a non-Irish priest, even if a native parish priest was available:

The families within that space has<sup>8</sup> not seen a priest this last two years or had an opportunity to attend to their spiritual duties [...] I am sure if our good Bishop Dr Furlong only knew our situation here, I think he would send us a priest to comfort us, or if there is any charitable young priest that would undertake to come and relieve us I would willingly guarantee his expenses here. (46)

Murray explains that this fact created controversy with the Passionist Fathers and was a sign of how much the Irish feared opening their community to the Argentine society. Once an Irish priest arrived, the Irish congregation increased in the parish. A similar event is portrayed by Tom Garrahan: “Around 1875 there was a chapel built on Brown’s camp [...] There used to be a great gathering of Irish for Mass as the whole district was occupied by Irish families” (117). Its head was an Irish priest named O’Reilly.

Nevertheless, while negotiating values, the Irish continued contributing with the growth of their new community and even involving personally in it. J.J. Murphy even became a member of the municipal committee responsible for building a church in Salto. Besides, creating schools was another proof of their contribution: “we are now building a public school in Salto, [...] and is at present collecting to build a Chapel also, as Mass and all other religious sessionings is at present performed in a private house rented for the Municipality for that purpose” (50). The creation of that school by 1864 could be interpreted as an attempt to open to the locals and facilitate insertion because until late nineteenth-century education of children of Irish families was provided by religious organizations or private tutors at some neighbour’s house, as Garrahan remembers: “The first school master we had was an old man called Luke Lynch. He taught us how to read. This was about 1873. Afterwards we had a German for a few months, then Santie and I went to school at Mike Healy’s” (116). In spite of this, J.J. Murphy praises “facilities for educating children” in Argentina: “The daughters of all the respectable Irish families born [in Argentina] and those who arrive to it young, are educated in the Convent” (64). Thus, the ambivalent attitude of keeping separate from local people in certain aspects of

<sup>8</sup> Grammatically incorrect forms like this are quoted as they appear in the original text.

life but getting more socially involved in others represents a step forward in their process of becoming Irish-Argentine in the Argentine *pampas*: when thinking about negotiating identities in a foreign context, Bhabha's notion of "border lives" is also appropriate to understand how our identities in process are constantly moulded and enriched in contact with what we perceive as different. Bhabha agrees with Clifford (1994) in that it is theoretically and politically crucial "to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences" because "these 'in-between' spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of self-hood – singular and communal – that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration and contestation in the act of defining the idea of society itself" (Bhabha 1994, 1-2). And, in so doing, nostalgia about "home" and fear seem to weaken, giving place to a narration in which pride and satisfaction for their achievements prevail.

Another clear sign of this gradual social integration of the Irish into the Argentine community can be appreciated when Garrahan describes himself as a "dry" man who never attended dances at Irish families' houses and, though he enjoyed them when organised at home, he restrained his wishes of fun due to his responsibility as the eldest son. Later, by 1896 Garrahan became the treasurer of the Lobos Hibernia Club while it lasted, a fact that increased his social circle outside the Irish community. Besides, his eldest daughter was christened at San Miguel church and when his wife recovered her strength after childbirth in 1911, Garrahan and his newly formed family "went to Luján for the pilgrimage" (Murray 2006a, 130). Besides, he visited his friends in the Argentine military service camp, which would have been impossible some decades earlier because Irishmen were afraid of being recruited for the Triple Alliance War<sup>9</sup>, as it had happened with *gauchos*. Conversely, Sally's Moore's brother also describes to J.J. Pettit how city improvements in the last ten years and the consequent creation of clubs and societies made all town gather to attend the performances, which anticipates the beginning of a new plural and hybrid Argentine society.

*Becoming Irlandés* depicts this cultural articulation as a gradual and lengthy process marked by both assimilation and resistance, which is particularly noticeable through the language forms they use: "becoming-Irish through the discourse is a process represented by narratives of one's own and others' identity, and of the mutations of that identity" (6). First, although the Irish were not the only English-speaking foreign group in 1800s Argentina (British, Welsh and Scottish communities were also settled in different areas of the country and involved in a variety of economic activities), the Irish certainly identified more with the English than with the local people for a very long time. Thus, even though their private narratives were not intended to be published, they use English – the coloniser's language – to communicate with those that remained at "home", instead of their native Irish (Gaelic) language, excepted for place names in Ireland. Nevertheless, either as a sign of linguistic resistance or simply because they started to get "contaminated" by the influence of the varieties of English they heard around them daily, the standard English spoken in the first half of the nineteenth century in rural Ireland emerges in these narratives with a grammatical anomaly: singular verb form is commonly used instead of plural in phrases such as "the families within that space has not seen a priest this last two years" (46). In addition, as the Irish community began to establish identity ties with local people and to adopt many of their customs, letters home and memoirs are full of loanwords from Spanish or colloquial expressions used in Buenos Aires, mainly. In this sense, the insertion of Argentine

<sup>9</sup> The bloodiest war fought in South America, declared by Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay against Paraguay (1864-1870).

lexical items by the different authors in Murray's collection of private narratives is worth a quick reflection, although it does not constitute the main focus of this paper. This is mainly observable in letters by J.J. Murphy written after the 1860s (almost twenty years after his arrival), as well as in the second half of the memoir of Tom Garrahan. Thus, in a 1865 letter, J.J. Murphy asks his brother Martin to address his letters to "Don Juan Murphy", his Argentine name (63). One of the richest texts in this sense is certainly the memoir of Tom Garrahan, whose last part is full of Argentine words related to rural life, such as *ranchos* (121); *potrero* and *corrales* (123); *tambo* and *novillitos* (126); *tropilla*, *capones*, *agrimensor* and *borregos* (125); *capataz* (130), to mention some. Moreover, the names of the narrator's properties or those of their neighbours and acquaintances appear in both texts in Spanish by the late nineteenth century: *Estancia Bella Vista*, Salto (52); *Flor de Uncalito* (63) and *La Espadaña* and *Los Milagros* (121).

Last, Irish migrants and their descendants shared the need of keeping a steady connection to their country of origin, and fulfilled this necessity either through constant correspondence to those that remained at home or in personal memoirs. Therefore, the discourse of each text varies in style and content according to the reality of each writer. Whereas letters have a more dialogical structure since a reply is expected by narrators, memoirs display a more subtle one. As regards topics, J.J. Murphy's letters oscillate between economic achievements, plans for the future, interest in the well-being of his relatives at home and how their place in Argentina improved thanks to communal effort, in which the Irish had a key role. The letters written by the female cousins to their Argentine-born cousin John James Pettit, manifest an interest more in family news and their vicissitudes than in economic success, and contain references to the exchange of newspapers both in English and Spanish, and family photographs. They are determined not to lose contact with their cousin in Australia. In his friendly-like style, Tom Garrahan depicts his life in Buenos Aires, centring on his own feelings and works. In contrast, the memoir of Edward Robbins mainly recounts the story and genealogy of his family in Ireland, with just a few lines depicting his life after arriving in this country.

A last sign of Irish people's new *Argentineness* (6) can be found in their clothes. Murray (132) describes a 1880s photo of Irish farmers published in the Southern Cross<sup>10</sup> to illustrate an article entitled "Estancieros irlandeses", in which they appear wearing *chiripá* (Amerindian breeches), *chambergo* (a wide-brimmed hat), *botas de potro* (hand-fashioned boots made with the skin of a colt's hind legs) and traditional *ponchos*, together with leather lassos, a long knife, the typical *gaucho* clothes (6). This outfit symbolises the assimilation of customs and local traditions (like that of having *mate* with *bizcochitos*<sup>11</sup>) that took place when the different cultural groups in the Argentine society started to mix with each other. But there was still a huge difference between them: many Irish migrants became *estancieros*, landlords (as revealed in many narratives in *Becoming Irlandés*) whereas *gauchos* were proletarians. Irishmen saw themselves as English first, but they were not "gauchos irlandeses". In fact, as Murray claims, they were different and perceived themselves differently from the natives of the Argentine *pampas* (133). However, each of these stages represents the levels of identification they undergo: from Irish to English at first, and from English to Irish-Argentine, then.

<sup>10</sup> An English-language Catholic newspaper and one of the oldest ones still in production in Argentina, founded by Monsignor Patrick Joseph Dillon in 1875. Today, it is published in Spanish, but until the 1970s the newspaper was published in English, the language of the majority of the original Irish immigrants to the country.

<sup>11</sup> A *Rio de La Plata* hot infusion and traditional small salty biscuits, usually made of grease. This tradition initiated in rural areas in Argentina.

## 6. "Home" in Murray's Private Narratives

In *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities* (1996), Avtar Brah argues that 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 negotiation of meanings and values. The notion of diaspora implicitly carries the idea of home but mainly, home as a mental construction that may be different from reality; home as a "mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination" (192), as an idealised place where one feels safe and welcomed and one which encloses deep emotions related to past experiences. As regards the reach of the notions of "home" and "return" implicated in this term, opinions are divided. Whereas Safran's definition of diaspora includes the "desire of eventual return" (1991) and Lloyd (2013) understands the collective nature of nostalgia for the homeland, Brah claims that the idea of diaspora involves an intention on the part of individuals to settle down somewhere else. This is why for diasporic individuals the necessity of (re)creating home away from home is a question of reconstructing their identity, fragmented by the experience of displacement. Being so, for diasporic subjects a plurality of "homes" and places of belonging co-exist, since the very notion of diaspora carries the idea of ambivalence, dislocation and the avoidance of fixed boundaries.

But how do the discourses of nineteenth-century Irish diaspora in Argentina represent experiences of displacement? What idea of "home" do they bear in mind? How did they construct homes away from home? To start with, the representation of "home" each narrator holds depends on different factors, such as whether they are Irish migrants or Argentine-born children to them, their age, the place they settled in, their relation with "others" in the new community and the success or frustration derived from their respective occupations and experiences. For Edward Robbins, "home" is his native Ireland, the place where most of his memory goes back to while he writes his memoir and where his dead relatives rest. His narrative voice denotes nostalgia for the land and the life he felt forced to leave behind for economic reasons, which made him lose his social position and his family farms. The sad experiences he suffered on his arrival and the subsequent struggle not to fall into a deep poverty give his text a rather pessimistic tone. J.J. Murphy also has Ireland as "home" in his psyche and many of his thoughts are attached to it. However, he is able to build a new home in Argentina, which provides him with a feeling of pride and moves him to continue making plans for the future. In addition, Murphy manages to live on the border of the two cultural systems that surround his existence, since the experience of diaspora is characterized by "blurred boundary markers" (Lloyd, 2013). Similarly, Brah's concept of "diasporic space" alludes to a shared space formed by both immigrants and local people, who live between "boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, of belonging and otherness, of 'us' and 'them'" (209). In this cultural space, he is determined to recreate "home" in his neighbourhood through the multiple political and religious contacts he has that help make it possible for migrants and locals. About the desire of return, Murphy felt that need twice while living in Argentina and he even thought of settling again in Ireland thanks to the production of his farms in Argentina. On one occasion, he even stayed in Ireland for about five years. But the death of two of his children there made him come back never to return to his home country.

On the other hand, for James Pettit and his son John James, being diasporic subjects means that a plurality of "homes" is possible in the dynamic process of migration and identity construction. Little is known from the dialogic structure of the three female cousins' letters about father and son's feelings as regards their first new home in Argentina. For John James,

maybe Australia means “home” since he was a little boy when he emigrated, whereas for his father, Argentina has probably a deeper meaning, since he left many friends and relatives behind, when he emigrated for the second time outside home. As for the three female cousins, they were born in Argentina and live in an urban or semi-urban area of Buenos Aires. They have never been in Ireland. Therefore, their idea of Ireland as “home” is that of a mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination. In this case, the references to Ireland are missed probably because their ancestral land only lives in their imagination. Maybe Ireland is for them, the land of their ancestors, the place that psychologically speaking serves them all as a field of identification. Finally, for Tom Garrahan, “a typical Irish-Argentine *estanciero*, first generation born in the country” (Murray 2006a, 115), “home” is Argentina, specifically Buenos Aires and its rural environment where they live and work. As such, he perceives himself as belonging to this society though different from the native people of the pampas.

All in all, no matter what idea of “home” Irish diasporic subjects have, they certainly constitute a new hybrid construction, shaped by elements from their past and their present life, from their culture of origin and that of the receiving country.

## 7. Conclusions

The chronological arrangement of the private narratives in Murray’s book reveals the gradual and endless process of cultural assimilation that nineteenth-century Irish migrants underwent from the very moment they left Ireland. Even though each of these private pieces of writing is different from the rest and tells a unique personal story, all of them reveal moments of anguish, fear, frustration, solitude as well as of satisfaction, happiness and personal pride when looking at their lives in close or distant retrospection. They portray systems of values, beliefs and ideologies that compose their Irish identity, which obviously clash 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. As it appears in these letters and memoirs, it was difficult for Irish migrants to mix with native groups in Argentina 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. 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. This appropriation of the new cultural system manifests, mainly, in the way in which they become more involved in local celebrations and social causes, in the acquisition of land and other properties, in how they relate to local people over time as well as in the way their language starts to transform from a rather pure English-like style to a hybrid form, in which many Argentine words associated with their daily life “pollute” their narratives.

Since the collection of private narratives here analysed was not intended for publication, they deserve all our respect as readers because they are personal expressions of private experiences and a portrayal of their subjective perspective of the world around them. Therefore, their testimony is full of feelings, fears, hopes, nostalgia and frustration. From the socio-cultural point of view, these texts are rich historical documents, which provide readers with a priceless first-hand testimony, but have been historically relegated as such. Undoubtedly, they offer a rich portrayal of the life of nineteenth century Irish migrants or their descendants in its full process of *becoming* Irish-Argentine.

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