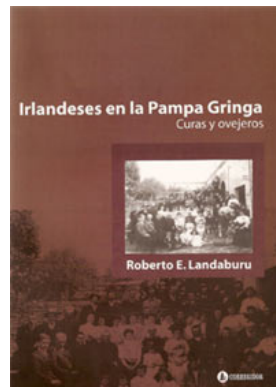


Review of Roberto E. Landaburu's
Irlandeses en la Pampa Gringa: curas y ovejeros

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Between approximately 1840 and 1880, a significant number of Irish people, the majority from counties Westmeath and Longford, disembarked in a nascent Argentine Republic. As early additions to the heterogeneous group of migrants arriving from Europe, they soon populated the countryside of Buenos Aires Province, the province with the richest soil in the country. They made a living through sheep farming, moving from the Southeast to Northeast, first as share-croppers or tenant farmers. From the 1860s, several of them became landowners linked to the export boom in their products.

In *Irlandeses en la Pampa Gringa: curas y ovejeros*, Robert E. Landaburu follows this well-worn path in order to recount the later experience of their consolidation as rural inhabitants of the Buenos Aires Pampa. He examines the movement of some Irish people into the bordering province of Santa Fe, following the colonising logic typical of the expansion of the frontier into lands suited to agricultural production. Moving in a sphere that he already dominates due to his residency in Santa Fe, and his previous works on rural immigration, Landaburu expands upon the foundation and development of the sheep-farming colony of Venado Tuerto in 1883 as a case study.

In the *partido* of General López, an immense expanse of fertile public lands recently seized from the indigenous people was bought for this very purpose by the Irish-Argentine landowner and businessman Eduardo Casey. He purchased the land between 1880 and 1882 with the aid of British capital, comprising Venado Tuerto, el Loreto (present-day Maggiolo) and the surrounding areas. This economic undertaking of seventy-two leagues - 270 thousand hectares - would be auctioned off in lots among its future settlers in 1881 and 1883, the majority Irish or Irish-Argentine. Many of these settlers had already been living in the Buenos Aires countryside for some time in the *partidos* of San Nicolás de los Arroyos, Salto, Monte, Lobos, Lincoln, Junín, Rojas, Navarro, Carmen de Areco, San Pedro, Pergamino and Ranchos, among others. Enticed by their wealthy countryman, these farmers, tenant-farmers and share-croppers accepted the favourable conditions and promises they were offered. Many ultimately succeeded in becoming owners of cheap land, with others worked for those who were better off for a time or for their whole lives, depending on their luck.

This work forms a fundamental part of the *corpus* of studies - Argentine and foreign - on this community in Argentina. The novelty of this monograph lies in its taking a rural micro-region practically ignored by historiography, and focusing on the settlement, customs and development of the Irish and their descendants in the Buenos Aires countryside. The direct and simple prose chosen by the author is far from rigorous academic writing, and makes it easier to get his points across to a much wider public. However, the specific nature of the theme and this linguistic register would seem to privilege an audience linked to the descendants of the Irish pioneer families and to Irish-Argentines in general, as well as the reader interested in rural immigration.

Underlining the will of its founder, Eduardo Casey, to create a settlement exclusively for Irish people and the children of Irish people, the author proposes to show the decisive role played by Irish Catholic priests in convincing their fellow countrymen to settle on these lands, experiencing the difficulties every agricultural settlement has with a congregation. Although the colony, due to the existence of other colonies, both foreign and native, naturally moved away from its original purpose of recreating a 'little Ireland', the tenacious shepherds and the leadership of their advisor-priests, who kept the faith of their flock in foreign lands, is the core of a description which, nevertheless, is slow to make itself clear to the reader, in favour of lengthy explanations, the aim of which is to frame the central theme within a context.

The various chapters, of irregular length, give the text a complex *leitfaden*. Instead of a predictable chronological organisation, the title and subtitle organise and announce smaller themes. These are interwoven in all of the chapters with a certain super-imposition and repetition in their explanation. Despite this, three main sections can be identified in this work.

In the first, Landaburu attempts to situate this local narrative by developing a wider framework which is as much historical as it is thematic. The wool trade, the development of meat-curing and of refrigeration along the River Plate, the movements of the frontier and the appropriation of lands in the *Pampa Húmeda* that were generally dedicated to production throughout the twentieth century, are interspersed with a brief description of the early Irish community, the reasons for its arrival and its most prominent representatives. This is based on an abundant 'Irish-Argentine' literature together with censuses and estimates, providing information on the number of arrivals, their demographics and distribution, figures (10-45,000) which are contested by those who study them in detail.

The 1887 census in the province of Santa Fe, in this sense, becomes his official, objective and most reliable source for calculating the number of people who resided in the area in question. Thus Landaburu reconstructs this successful economic development between 1870 and 1890 with essays and research into national origins, primary testimonies and several other specific studies on regional rural history, as well as others on agricultural economic development during the immigration era.

What is lacking is the use of recent and foreign sources; in his selection the author has recourse to Argentine historians writing from a nationalist historiographical approach. They belong to a school of thought more critical than others when it comes to dealing with the conduct of English capitalists, their large territorial investments, and the financial goals of the British community in Argentina. In his approach in this section, as at the end, the author resorts to a verbal style through the use of a certain subjectivity, and comparisons with the immediate present, which distance the work at times from the basic objectivity that is required, and which does indeed characterise other segments of the research.

Landaburu provides previous studies on the life of Eduardo Casey, underlining his financial abilities and his characteristics as an adventurer. Confirming the latter's profile with the testimony of his descendants, he makes great use of the historical interview, a resource which constitutes one of the pillars of this work, consistently used to corroborate his affirmations. A man of great reputation amongst the British business class and the native large landowners, Casey is shown to have been the main agent in the realisation of this colonising endeavour. Acknowledged as a *primus inter pares* among his community, Landaburu paradoxically informs the reader that, while Casey was making his countrymen rich, the speculative fever in land sales during the 1880s and the economic crisis of 1890 divested him first of his fortune and then of his life. This section closes with the process of buying land, dividing it into lots, propaganda and the auction of this extensive area. The advertising sought to attract - according to the author - exclusively Irish people between 1881 and 1883.

In the second part, Landaburu focuses on the core theme: the beginnings of the Venado Tuerto colony and the settlement of its 'founding' families, together with its religious dynamics. He provides the names of these lucky buyers. They were already *estancieros* in the *partidos* of the Province of Buenos Aires. Favourable purchasing conditions and the affordability of the land would allow them - according to their capabilities - to own between thousands and hundreds of thousands of hectares in the Santa Fe plains.

This land was suitable for fattening calves and growing the finest feeds - such as the new crop, alfalfa - and cereals, as well as the opportunity that an unstable market for land afforded for resale values. The difficulties in driving such large herds of sheep from Buenos Aires, the precarious life and the scarcity of resources, are part of a lengthy and colourful collection of stories which the author gathers through an exercise in oral memory via the testimonies of the relatives of these pioneers. Through their language that has become Spanish-American, they recreate, as if using brushstrokes, the quotidian aspects of these Irish people: their standards of behaviour, habits and customs, their religiosity and their attitude towards the 'natives', their experiences and the ties of solidarity between them.

The religious dimension of the work makes its appearance here, returning first to the actions of the men of religion in the Province of Buenos Aires. He recounts their arrival, names and activities between 1825 and 1879, highlighting the legendary Anthony Fahy, resident in Buenos Aires from 1844. Fahy had wide-ranging parochial duties, and acted with the permission of the local diocesan clergy. With patriarchal qualities he spurred on and reorganised the community, setting up institutions and providing services for its basic functioning. The services required were both

material and spiritual, financially maintained by the Irish themselves and under the leadership of their compatriot clergy.

With the arrival of priests requested from Ireland in 1856, Fahy decentralised his duties, creating the Irish chaplaincies that divided the territory of the Province of Buenos Aires into four zones, each one in the care of an Irish priest who would live there and attend his compatriots.

In order to discuss the creation and the dynamics of these rural chaplaincies, the author takes his bibliographic focal point from the classic studies of Santiago Ussher. He underlines the main role that this man would play, along with his benefactor countrymen, in sustaining and creating rural chapels and parish churches in the *estancias* and towns of the *partidos* under his leadership. Thus an independent and parallel church organisation to the local one was constituted, and well described by Landaburu.

The author then examines those clerics who were involved in the creation of the colony in Santa Fe, summoned from Dublin by Fahy in the 1860s: Patricio José Dillon, later Dean and provincial member of parliament for Buenos Aires, who was his aide in the city of Buenos Aires and natural successor, on his death, to the leadership he had exercised over the whole community. Head of the chaplains and closely related to the political leadership and the Argentine clergy, Dillon was a great promoter of this undertaking through the newspaper he founded for the community, *The Southern Cross*. Largo Miguel Leahy, chaplain of the zone with its centre in the *partido* Carmen de Areco, was a great propagandist for Casey's project among his parishioners, and even bought some of the fields himself.

Edmund Flannery, chaplain since 1869 of an extensive area comprising the north of Buenos Aires Province and the south of Santa Fe Province, accompanied his parish through the first years of the colony's foundation until 1887, when a chaplaincy was created in Santa Fe. Flannery's occasional assistant, Santiago Foran, was assigned to the Falkland/Malvinas Islands. Friends of Eduardo Casey, all these men gave financial advice, spiritual attention and encouragement to their countrymen during the colony's initial stages. Landaburu stresses the status of 'gaucho-priest' that these men acquired. The desolate landscape demanded that they not only be good priests, but also good horsemen and in full health in order to travel large distances through unfamiliar territory.

The new Chaplaincy of Santa Fe, with its base in Rosario, was under the leadership of Juan Morgan Sheehy since 1887, whose long pastoral activity is described. This secular Irish clergy was gradually reinvigorated and renewed with the arrival of religious communities to attend to the English-speaking Catholics in the 1880s, like that of the Passionists (1879) and later that of the Pallottines (1886). Financed by the economic and material help of a well-off Irish minority, within which Eduardo Casey stands out, Passionists and Pallottines acted to reorganise the dynamics of missionary work in the *partidos* of the countryside. They visited *estancias*, and called 'missions' and 'meetings'; they founded educational and novitiate institutions, first in the Province of Buenos Aires - like those in Capitán Sarmiento and Mercedes - and later in Santa Fe. The Sisters of Mercy, a religious order at the service of the community on and off since 1856, would only arrive in Venado Tuerto in 1930, to take over the Santa Rosa School.

Without proposing a specific analysis, Landaburu thus hints at the process of control that the Argentine diocesan Church will slowly exercise over the autonomy achieved by the priests, their chaplaincies and their *modus operandi*. This titanic sacramental and pastoral task is complemented by the work of other priests of the secular Argentine clergy. In this sense, the arrival of the first parishioners with a permanent base in Venado Tuerto, dependants of the diocese of Rosario, is recovered, as is the construction in 1889 of its parish church, now a cathedral, beside the first church built in 1884 with Eduardo Casey's money.

Throughout his narrative, Landaburu interweaves the surnames of the pioneer families and the most illustrious landowners, as much as for the number of hectares as for their beneficent acts, traditionally linked to religious activity: the Cavanaghs, the Maxwells, the Leahys, the Murphys, the Downes, the Kavanaghs, the Caseys, the Gahans, the Hams, as well as Eduardo Casey's agent, the powerful Basque businessman and rancher Alejandro Estrugamou, linked to this community, and several others which have descendants there. Many were seedbeds of future vocations.

The author briefly outlines the Irish and Irish-Argentine priests who, at the turn of the twentieth century, acted for the parishioners of this area, among many others, José Tomás Maxwell and José Boyle. Interspersed within this analysis of the religious experiences of the colony, there are various specific themes, such as the nationalist and collaborative attitude of some settlers and priests with regard to events in Ireland, or the skills of some and the difficulties of the majority in speaking Irish Gaelic.

In what can be differentiated as a third section, the author places long lists at the disposal of future researchers. By way of conclusion, these lists provide information about the older members of the Irish community who lived in the Venado Tuerto zone and its surrounding area, and about their descendants, according to the Provincial Census of 1887 and the Civil Registry of the Province of Santa Fe. Valuable death certificates and attached documents demonstrate the existence of family trees that cross branches, demonstrating the strong tendency towards endogamous marriage that many of these families maintained well into the twentieth century.

Landaburu has not proposed an exhaustively analytical work, nor a work that establishes specific issues, but rather an explanatory and descriptive monograph, the essence of which resides in the factual and in the oral. His idea is to unfurl in a simple manner the origins, evolution and vitality of a colonising migratory group, part of a frontier society, supporting his account mainly with a visual structure derived from the memories of its descendants.

The rhythm of the book is thus characterised by oral traditions, personal correspondence and the perceptions of modern-day families about their ancestors and their actions. The perhaps excessive insertion of the narrator's 'I' in the account, together with broad statements about some controversial events in national history, lead him to compare the immigrants with those of recent times to the point of falling into, in some passages, the expected level of scholarship. This is clearly present - though he uses colloquial language - in the quantitative treatment of the themes and in the explanation of concepts with meticulous and detailed notes at the end of the book, data that greatly strengthen and enrich his work.

A very valuable contribution is the inclusion of a series of photographs that document marriages, family, religious and cultural celebrations, and shows the faces of the main players in this account. These photographs run throughout the pages as a result of the help offered by the descendants of families who settled in Venado Tuerto and its adjoining area. There is no lack of references, nor tables of statistics nor quotes from local papers. Extracts are frequently used from articles in the community's newspaper, *The Southern Cross*, and in the English-language newspaper *The Standard*, owned by the Mulhall brothers, invaluable first-hand sources.

Though the work does not neglect to mention basic cartographical information and adds a sketch, there is a notable absence of complete maps - modern and old - of the provinces concerned, and of some of the land in the south of Santa Fe. The geographical delimitation chosen by the writer makes these all the more necessary, especially for interested readers who, perhaps due to their regional or foreign origins, are not accustomed to imagining these landscapes and wish to calculate distance, size and coordinates. The result of persevering and fruitful research in censuses, personal, municipal, parochial and diocesan archives and long personal interviews, this work combines the themes and biographies of the lay and religious people related to the development of the colony, up to the year 1950.

Due to its nuclear approach the work can be located flexibly, on the one hand, in the already abundant bibliography on the history of rural immigration in Santa Fe, linked, in this sense - but in a local and cultural microsphere - to the classic and more rigorous work of Ezequiel Gallo, *La Pampa Gringa*. On the other hand, its decision to focus on a migratory community makes it fundamentally closer to a recent body of literature which proposes renewing interest in studying the development and behaviour of the Irish community in Argentine lands, revising the accepted assumptions, while at the same time delving into other connections and less-studied aspects.

Precisely due to this crossing of themes, this diverse information and material will be very useful to anyone who works in research on topics such as the general history of rural colonisation, or the specific story of other towns in Santa Fe Province. The book's detailing of networks of Irish-Argentine parentage will be opportune for those who take an interest in genealogical studies. With the religious biographies, Landaburu also makes an unexpected contribution to Argentine ecclesiastical history by providing interesting cues to be followed up on by those dedicated to the evangelising actions and internal dynamics of the religious orders in Argentina.

Ana M. Castello

Author's Reply

In response to the bibliographical summary provided by Ana Castello, I should emphasise *a priori* that it strikes me as a balanced and meticulous work that is testament to a precise and objective analysis. Due to this, I generally share and accept the observations and criticisms of said work, with the clarifications I will now expand upon.

It is true that I chose a 'direct and simple prose, [...] far from rigorous academic writing' because - as Castello points out so well - this work was aimed at every kind of reader.

Where 'lengthy explanations' are mentioned, this is correct and should possibly have been placed in an attached document, for readers who wished to expand, and thus not disadvantage those with a more synthetic and concrete approach. Regarding the comment that 'little use has been made of recent and/or foreign bibliography,' I do not believe this to be the case. In the index, works by foreign researchers who have dealt with the theme in recent years (for example, Román Gaignard) are cited. Castello is however correct in mentioning 'recourse to Argentine historians writing from a nationalist historiographical approach,' and this is so because it entails a personal attitude, rather than an all-encompassing general view.

The 'comparisons with the immediate present' made in some sections of the work should possibly have been recorded as final thoughts. Regarding the level of erudition that is demanded in some of the analysed sections, this is compatible with my academic training. I am not an expert in history, but rather an Argentine concerned and

occupied with *'lo nuestro'*, trying to express the history or events of what 'is no longer' through these essays. The evaluation is correct regarding oral traditions being fundamentally rescued through life testimonies, because this is an intangible cultural heritage, destined to be lost to the silence of the ages if it is not documented.

I fully share the view that insufficient charts or illustrative maps were included in the book, despite the data and identification in the bibliography section. This should be kept in mind for future editions. Finally the diagnosis is correct regarding the book's aim to be of use to coming generations, as a starting point for future research.

Roberto E. Landaburu