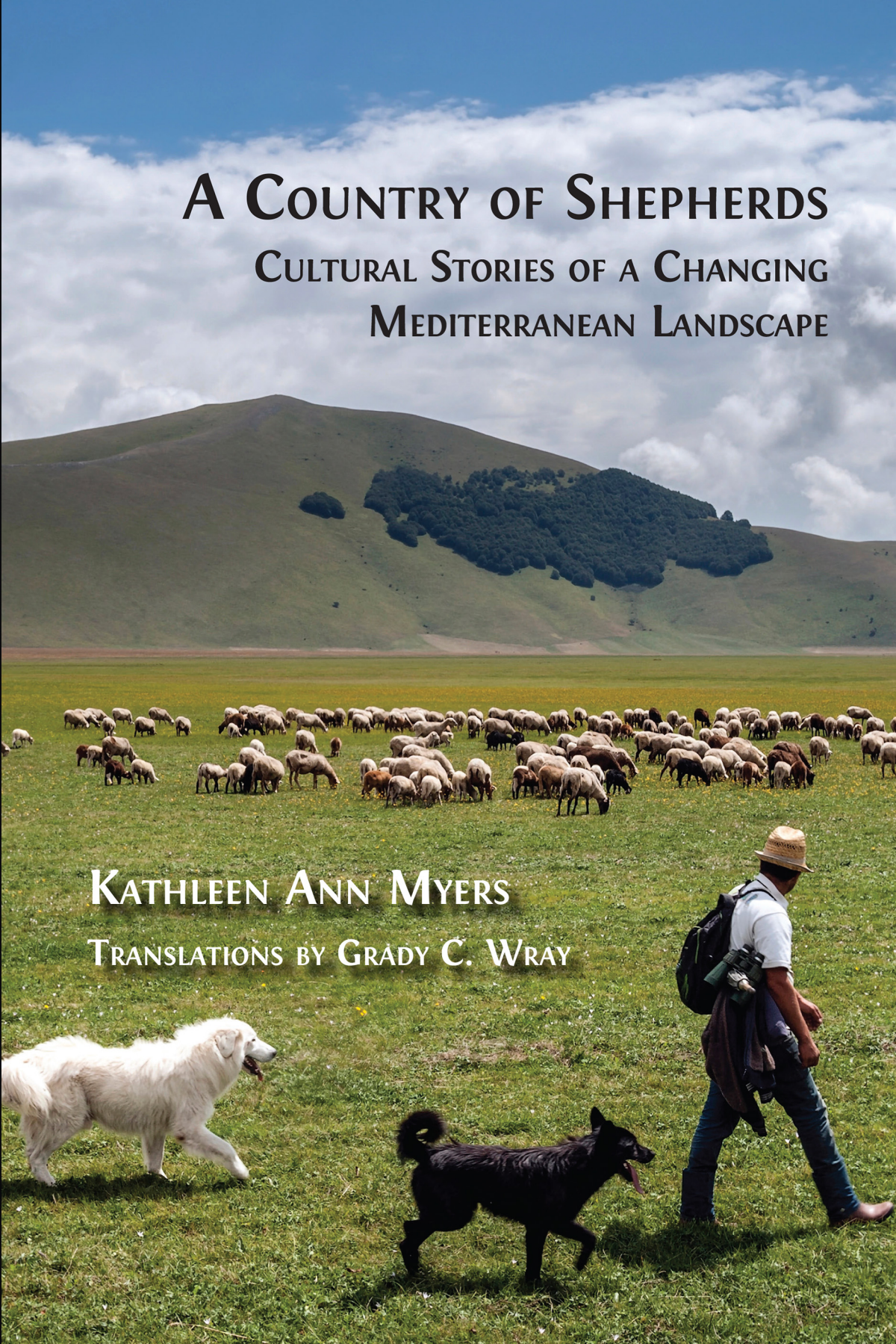
A Country of Shepherds

Cultural Stories of a Changing Mediterranean Landscape



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1. New Directions in the Sierra Norte de Sevilla: Juan Vázquez Morán and Family

> Every day I get up with the sun, and I always see something new. I get a lump in my throat when I think about all the rough times I've been through. It's not so much that it's good land, but it's your own, and no one around here is gonna tell you to leave. You can't do this alone. I couldn't have done it without my wife.
>
> Juan Vázquez Morán

Overview

When a colleague at the University of Seville, María del Mar Torreblanca (hereafter Mar, who drove and joined me in each the main interviews for Chapters 1–5), suggests that I talk with her friend that grew up in a shepherding family, I eagerly agree. I am up to date on recent media treatments about transhumance, but I want to explore more how people close to the practice live, work, and think about their vocations. I want to understand why it has captured national and international audiences, including myself. Without full awareness of what I am about to embark on, or even how to interview shepherds, Mar and I head to Constantina in the Sierra Norte de Sevilla.

The two shepherds featured in this chapter were the first I met and became my first teachers in what would become several years of changing expectations, understandings, and attitudes about who shepherds are and what they do. I soon realize these are not stories of lone shepherds working in isolation, but rather stories of families, communities, and landscapes. What began as an afternoon interview over a cup of coffee

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turned into a series of on-site interviews with Juan, his wife Manoli, and his shepherd friend Manuel. I also met Juan's younger brother, who, instead of taking up shepherding as a trade, decided to make and market local artisan products. I quickly grasped that to understand the intricate interaction of shepherds, animals, and landscapes in pastoralism, I also needed to understand family and community networks and how these enable shepherding to survive. Through them, I also began to appreciate how everyone has their own story to tell, even in the same family.

These first two shepherds, Juan Vázquez Morán and Manuel Grillo, are as different as night and day, but somehow, like those two natural states, they seem to work in an effective unison and highlight each other's strengths. The two of them have a shared history as hard-working Andalusian shepherds, though played out decades apart. While Manuel (now in his mid-60s and retired) has lived his whole life as a transhumant shepherd and often experienced the prejudices of others, Juan (in his late-40s and still active) is now experiencing a major shift in the cultural acceptance — and even celebration — of his trade, at least at the national level. The two shepherds illustrate the cultural and social shifts across generations. There are very few transhumant shepherds working today in the way that Manuel and Juan used to work; even as the practice is now receiving wide recognition for its importance, it is disappearing from the Spanish landscapes. As a retired transhumant shepherd, Manuel is firmly rooted in the traditional. Juan still has one foot in the traditional practices and has also moved in new directions.

First, we will trace Juan's story and how, as a currently active shepherd, he has transformed a family tradition. He first learned the trade from his father and practiced it with thousands of sheep and goats for decades. Later, he left the transhumant practice to tend to animals on other people's farms, so that he could live in town with his wife and daughter. In the last few years, Juan has established his own small *finca*. Most of his sheep — eighty Merino mixed with Ile de France sheep, known for their good meat production, and a few pure-bred Merino sheep, kept for the milk they produce that makes good cheese — graze on rented pastureland near town, but Juan is most proud of his fifty Seville Florida goats, which graze on the small plot of land he owns. This breed of goats, he explains, adapted over centuries to the extreme heat and cold, lack of water, and rocky outcropping of the Sierra Norte

de Sevilla. Juan's career trajectory, from transhumant shepherding, working for hire, and finally to maintaining his own small farm to graze his animals — with no government funding — has not been a common path in the last century. While one of Juan's brothers left shepherding 10,000 animals in Extremadura to buy his own tavern, and another brother never went into the profession to begin with, choosing instead to market specialized local fruit products, Juan's love of animals has kept him in the profession. But, he explains, he is equally motivated by the daily tasks and the educational nature of his work: "I learn something new every day." His story showcases the opportunities and challenges of small-scale shepherding and rural development.

In what follows, I describe two visits with Juan. The first is a sit-down interview with him and his shepherd friend Manuel. The second visit, onsite at Juan's barn and in town, gives us a vivid glimpse of his life and accomplishment in moving from shepherding for hire to having his own animals and land. We also see the importance of family and witness new initiatives in rural development as we meet Juan's wife Manoli and brother Patricio. The last section provides brief updates from November 2021, after eighteen months of living with the COVID-19 pandemic, and a final update from May 2022 that includes a hopeful glimpse of a new entrepreneurial generation entering pastoralism.

Fig. 1.2 Juan Vázquez Morán and Manuel Grillo (2017); Juan on his newly acquired land parcel (2019).

The Visit: Traditional Shepherding and Retirement from Transhumant Practices

Filled with anticipatory excitement about our first trip, I check my recording equipment and hop into Mar's small Fiat at dawn. Leaving Seville's early fall heat behind, we pass the dry, white cotton plains of the intensive farming zones and see Carmona's medieval watchtower in the distance. Soon, we begin the gradual climb into the green Sierra Norte de Sevilla, past grazing pastures that resemble nothing I have ever seen in the U.S. I soon learn that these traditional Andalusian *dehesa*s are large expanses of land that mix groves of olive and cork trees with grazing lands and low forest holm oak, hosting a variety of the distinctive black Iberian pigs, sheep, and occasional cattle. *Dehesas* are the essence of biodiversity and sustainability, new buzzwords for ancient practices. We pass at least six flocks of sheep herded along dirt paths and fields by shepherds carrying their traditional *cayados*, a long, curved walking staff, and accompanied by their dogs. The shepherds' earth tone clothes blend with this landscape and are a stark contrast to the neon yellow jerseys worn by the occasional cyclist on the road. We pass a sign for a *vía pecuaria* — the Cordel del Herrador that starts in Carmona and passes another important *vía* (the Cañada Real de Robledo in Constantina), finally ending in Extremadura — marked with a red triangle with an image of a cow in the center. The wide dirt path passes through areas filled with cork (*alcornoques*) and holm trees and continues into the horizon. It eventually will lead to Carmona. As my guide Mar describes the stringent requirements that govern the production of the prized "*Pata Negra*" ham (it must be produced from 100% Iberian pigs, which are 100% acorn-fed), the hilltop ruins of a castle come into view, looming over the white-washed village of Constantina. This castle was built by Muslims in medieval times during their long occupation of the area but was Christianized by Fernando III in the fourteenth century. Like much of Andalusia, this was frontier land for centuries. Small castles in various stages of disrepair dot the landscape.

We arrive at the small town's center and enter the restaurant, which specializes in local grilled lamb and pork. Here, we first meet Juan Vázquez Morán and his coworker and friend Manuel Grillo. They invite us into their world as they alternately joke and recount experiences of

a lifetime of working together as shepherds. As they talk, I sense they enjoy having an audience with which to share stories of hardships, along with moments of levity. Juan is clearly the "man in charge" as he still is actively involved in shepherding, while Manolo is clearly the "man of experience" with the flexibility that retirement has afforded him. Their easy camaraderie is contagious, and we spend hours talking as servers and locals look on with more than a little surprise. I'm guessing that it isn't often that a foreigner shows up in the restaurant with a video camera to interview a pair of shepherds. In fact, after an hour there, the owner sends over a second *café con leche* "on the house." Although my own inexperience shows — the battery fails on my recording camera, and I have no backup for the last part of the interview — this first foray into such a radically different world from my own leaves me eager to know more.

As we talk at the restaurant, Juan recalls his childhood as one of eleven children growing up in makeshift huts built out of local vegetation while his father moved flocks of sheep and goats from Constantina to Marchena, Lora del Río, La Campana, Écija, and beyond. Juan was an early initiate into the world of transhumance: he remembers being just eight or nine on night watch, struggling with fear as he listened to night sounds in the pitch black before dawn. He vividly recalls one of his early experiences with another challenge of animal husbandry: by age ten he was expected to kill a goat he had raised as a pet

> When I found out they were going to kill it, I got up, took my little goat, put it under my bed, and crawled under there with it. And my dad said, "Where's Juan?" He pulled me out from under the bed and slapped me. After he hit me, he said, "You're gonna have to see this so you'll believe it." And he killed the goat. So, every time I kill a goat or a sheep or any animal, I remember that story. "You're gonna have to see this so you'll believe it." When an animal looks at me, I just can't kill it. I'm incapable. What hurts the most is killing a goat. They cry like people. You can see the tears fall from their eyes. You always learn new things.

Although he can laugh now as he tells the story, Juan becomes somber when he confesses that it is still hard for him to kill the animals he raises. He prefers raising goats for their milk.

Though the life of a shepherding family was never easy, things got much harder for his large family. One night, they awoke to a fire in their

hut, and all their belongings burned. But, as word of the disaster spread, nearby shepherd families brought food, clothing, and materials for shelter and cooking. He observes: "You don't see that level of solidarity today." Although the other families had little, they shared what they had. The community of shepherds was strong, but Juan shares painful memories of the more general social stigma of being the son of a shepherd. Echoes of the shame he felt as a boy seep through the story as Juan recalls being an outcast. One year, for example, when Juan's family was living and working as shepherds on a private farm, the owner prohibited his own young boy, who was vacationing at the farmhouse, to play with Juan and his siblings.

> The truth is, when I think about it, I get emotional. I got so tired of crying. Just remembering it.... And it's not that I don't think about it now. It's just that so much has happened in town and out in the country that you feel powerless and looked down upon. Now, anyone can have access to a degree. It used to be that that wasn't the case. It used to be that whoever could go to college was some rich kid's son. And the shepherd's son, on the other hand, had been born to raise sheep, pigs, goats, cows.... I was born to do that. I was a shepherd's son and was thought of as an insignificant little animal.... One time, the boss came and locked my mother and us up in a room so we couldn't play with his children. They treated us like we were little animals. He came in from Córdoba to spend the weekend at the farmhouse.

Later, when Juan began to date, girls refused a second date when they found out he was a shepherd. He adds, in a voice quiet with indignation, that some people in town still will not talk to his friend Manuel because of his profession.

Juan left the shepherd's life for his mandatory two-year military service. Upon his return, he decided to work in construction but found himself looking at his watch all day long. So, he decided to take up shepherding again as his true vocation. Juan says that he loves tending to animals, being out in nature, constantly learning new things, and having a degree of freedom. Today, he does not own a watch, and, though he works longer hours, he loves his work.

Juan and ten other men used to be away for months at a time, moving 3,000 sheep from the Sierra Norte to rented lands in the plains of the Guadalquivir, an area where cereals had been harvested and the fields needed to be cleaned and fertilized. He notes that he still works from

sunup to sundown seven days a week, but at least he is never away from home overnight. He chokes up and his eyes glisten as he recalls years of ill treatment and the sacrifices he and his family made to buy their small parcel of land:

> I get a lump in my throat when I think about all the rough times I've been through. It's not so much that it's good land, but it's your own, and no one around here is gonna tell you to leave. You can't do this alone. I couldn't have done it without my wife.

While on the one hand Juan is forthright about very real sacrifices they endure, he explains that he perseveres because he loves his work and has fulfilled his own vision of becoming a small farmer raising his own livestock. He credits his wife Manoli, more than government funds or helpful employers, for helping him in his life project. His face softens as he describes how Manoli has always supported him. "We have always been a team," he repeats often through our interviews.

Whereas Juan stopped living as a transhumant shepherd years ago, Manuel spent over half a century in the countryside, often for up to ten months a year with only brief visits home. He jumps into the conversation and exclaims with a wide smile: "I've been a shepherd since the day my mother bore me." Five years ago, he retired to live in town with his daughter's family. He now enjoys walking down the street for a cup of coffee, sitting in the town's central square with friends, and having a cell phone. But his face still lights up with delightful nostalgia when he describes his feeling of freedom spent camped out under the starry night skies in his little pop-up tent where he slept during his long months away from home. He acknowledges the difficulty of having a family life when he was gone so much of the year, but he knew no other life than that walked by his father, grandfather, and even great-grandfather. The years of being out in the countryside with little pay or access to health care show in Manuel's toothless smile, but his quick, agile movements and gestures reveal a strong vitality. The two men have worked together closely for many years: as Manuel talks, Juan finishes some of his sentences. In between laughter and jokes, Juan recalls bathing with his brothers in the Guadalquivir River one warm night, while their clothes floated down river, leaving them in shorts as a mean bull chased them off the land. As the two friends continue their banter, they describe half a dozen close calls: tending to the birth of a Siamese

lamb, performing emergency surgery, and carrying out other work that most people would need an advanced veterinary degree to perform. The skills they have acquired and the range of life-and-death issues they have dealt with are just part of life as a transhumant shepherd. The bond formed over years of shared experience is deep but playful.

When Manuel retired, Juan continued tending the livestock of wealthy farm owners from Seville and Córdoba. But many things have changed. Where he was once "looked down upon" as a shepherd and treated like an "insignificant little animal," he now demands respect and is given it by many. What becomes clearer with each story and quick-witted comment is that Juan actively models the dignity of his vocation and the parameters for building and maintaining mutual respect between himself, livestock owners, and townspeople. When I first met Juan, he was tending to 1,000 sheep for a wealthy Sevillian man, but this particular owner does not treat Juan as if he were a possession. The man is about Juan's age, well-mannered, and regards Juan's work highly; however, Juan remains vigilant after seeing too many situations in which he or his family were not respected. One landowner even insisted that Juan always address him with the honorific title "Don." Juan says that if this owner now slips into using the informal "*tú*" to address him, Juan reminds him to keep things formal:

> Some of them make us call them by the title "Don" or "Sir." Once, one of them used "*tú*" with me and said, "Hey you, Juan." I corrected him: Let's keep things formal. We're not on a first-name basis. If I use "*usted*" and "Sir" with you, you use "*usted*" and "Sir" with me." He was shocked. Now we respect each other.

As part of a generation that came of age during the transition to democracy, Juan has participated in a social movement that has challenged unwritten rules about social class. Now, more young people — even his own daughter, the daughter of a shepherd — have access to higher education and can choose their own career path. Juan announces with fatherly pride that, although his daughter loves tending to the livestock, she is now studying for a career in nursing. Juan, and even more Manuel, represent the old guard of shepherds who have watched democracy change the political landscape and still fight to conserve the cultural and ecological landscape of shepherding.

Increased social status and mobility have been accompanied with another significant shift for Juan. After decades of making sacrifices, Juan and his wife bought a small parcel of land a few years ago in the hilly countryside outside of Constantina. Now he has a small barn for livestock and poultry, which he tends to daily. As our interview wraps up, Juan invites us to visit his *parcela* [plot] and animals in a few weeks when the late fall season brings less work with the animals.

Walking Around the *Parcela*: From Tradition to Private Ownership

Three weeks later, on a chilly November morning shortly after dawn, we meet Juan and Manuel again at the town's center. Mar and I are on our second cup of coffee and bundled up in layers of fleece (and we soon learn we are contributing to the problem of the declining market value of wool). Juan pulls up in his 4x4 truck with Manuel in the passenger seat. "Hop on in and pardon the smell; this is a farm vehicle," Juan jokes. His big warm smile and twinkle in his deep brown eyes let us know we are in for a treat. As they banter back and forth, Juan impishly tests his friend's knowledge: "How can you tell a Merino sheep at birth?" Manuel does not recall and Juan laughs good naturedly but waits to give us the answer. That comes about an hour later when we look in the mouth of a sheep and Juan states: "You can tell by its black tongue."

As we wind through *dehesa*s and pastures, we pass a flat, lush green field enclosed by a stone wall. Juan slows and points to the field: "I rented that for years, it was beautiful, easy land, and it was for sale, but I didn't have the money to buy it. I knew how to keep the land in good shape with grazing, but they only wanted money." As a shepherd, he earns barely enough to build a small house for his family and make ends meet. We then stop at the entrance to a small grassy plot with cork oaks where Juan hops out and opens a gate to introduce us to his sheep. He explains that he has a variety of breeds (known as *razas*) and jokes with word play: "I'm not a racist" ("*No soy racista*"). Juan then makes a trilling sound that I recognize from watching shepherds moving sheep through Madrid's central streets at the Festival of Transhumance. About a dozen sheep come running when he shakes a blue plastic bag, but they stop suspiciously when they realize the bag is empty and does not

contain feed. "They know when you try to trick them," Juan explains, "they're smart." We climb back in the truck and hang on as it climbs a steep, deeply rutted 300-meter dirt road. As we pass a family shaking an olive tree, letting the black ripe olives drop to a blanket below, Juan gives a friendly wave. We climb through the holm oaks, olive, and fruit trees, to a small plateau where the road ends. A small new barn is tucked into the hillside on the 20 × 50 meters flat niche that now holds Juan's earnings and dreams. He bought the parcel a few years ago. His eyes tear up when he reflects on years of hard work that he, his wife, and daughter have performed to achieve their dream of private ownership of land. He comments that they never have a day off: "I've only got my wife and my daughter, and I can't go anywhere. Saturdays, Sundays, holidays.... I've got work to do every day."

Despite difficulties raising money to start his own small livestock business, Juan has never applied for government funding. The grant process favors those who already have time and money, he says. As we will hear in other chapters devoted to people who moved from traditional shepherding to owning their own livestock business as *ganadero*s, the amount of paperwork and ever-changing rules make it extremely difficult for a working farmer to apply for funds. Juan cites examples of farm owners who own an *explotación* of sheep or goats — that is, a herd consisting of at least two hundred animals — and receive subsidies from the European Union's agriculture and rural development funds. Although these owners receive relatively large sums of money, they continue to pay shepherds very little to take care of their livestock and often do not follow the European Union's own guidelines. Many people I interviewed also mentioned that most of the CAP monies to date had not gone to small-scale landowners for sustainable shepherding. I soon learn in subsequent interviews that there is deep disagreement about these funds between those who support and depend on them, and those who disdain the way they are set up to favor people who already have more resources (see the "Contextual Background and Terminology" section of the Introduction for more on CAP funds).

As the sun warms the hillside, the early morning mist gives way to blue Andalusian skies and reveals miles of valley below. Juan describes how at night from this vantage point the lights of Córdoba — even sometimes Granada — twinkle in the distance. This morning there is

a commanding view of the rolling *monte mediterráneo* countryside. This steep semi-arid plot for grazing his animals is a stark contrast to the grassy, wooded land he rents for his sheep below, but Juan now owns this land, the barn, and all the animals he raises here: a few sheep, dozens of goats, a few pigs, and the ducks, chickens, and geese in the coop out back. While Juan talks, Manuel quietly begins pulling a weed that looks like thyme but that neither sheep nor goats will eat; even after five years of retirement, his hands aren't accustomed to being idle.

The first animals to greet us are Juan's dogs, a mastiff and a Saint Bernard, who follow us everywhere. Shepherds' dogs are expensive — often over 300 euros to purchase — and they require breeding documents and take up to two years to train. Juan loves working with his dogs and gives a command to the Saint Bernard to show off just how clever this canine is. He names a certain lamb and asks the sheepdog to retrieve it. Juan is delighted when the dog chooses correctly. But Juan's face turns grave as he recalls how another mastiff was gravely wounded. Rather than directly report the story, Juan becomes vague about the details, but he concludes: "It was a crime committed by a two-legged wolf [i.e., a human]."

Another incident illustrates the often-uneasy coexistence between shepherds and their neighbors. When a neighbor's Chihuahua came on his land and barked at the sheep, Juan's mastiff charged. When the small dog's owner put herself in between it and the much larger dog, she was bitten and had to get fifteen stitches in her arm. Even though the neighbor had trespassed, Juan still had to get rid of his valuable dog. He shakes his head, saying, "See what bad luck I have?" The mastiff was just doing its job, but Juan still had to pay the price. Finishing the story, his wry sense of humor about his profession emerges again: "Just like I told you, every day there's something new." Even though his dogs do not work as hard as they used to when he practiced transhumance and had larger flocks, they are still essential, and their loss threatens both the livestock and the shepherd's livelihood.

As we near the barn, a sheep retreats in a frightened panic, and we see its still blood-stained side. This is a sheep that was attacked several nights ago, even though there was a guard dog standing watch. Wolves and wild boars are the usual culprits. We then walk inside the barn to meet some of Juan's goats and sheep, and even a baby pig. Juan's lively

wit and knowledge show themselves as he intersperses a discussion of the genealogy of his prize Merino sheep and the life cycle of his goats with gripping tales of delivering a crossbreed goat from a miniature goat. He also dispenses practical advice: always look at a sheep's teeth to determine its true age before buying it; they grow a pair of teeth each year, accumulating them until they have a full set, around the age of four. As we continue walking around the stable, Juan tenderly picks up a dwarf goat, explaining it is his favorite. Next, he cuddles a baby lamb, describing its birth two days earlier. He has a story for nearly every animal in the barn: "See that sheep with the goats?" he asks. "She thinks she's a goat because when her mother died, she nursed from a goat." A lifetime of learning and dedication pour through his words and gestures.

Juan's extensive experience is well known and respected locally. Friends, farm owners, and the occasional veterinarian consult him when they cannot solve a livestock problem on their own. Recently, he recounts, a friend told Juan that his flock was going lame and the vet had not cured them. The long-time shepherd easily diagnosed the problem as "foot rot" (*pedero* or pododermatitis) and prescribed bathing the animals in sulfur. The sheep were soon walking again.

Even after decades of working, Juan remains an eternal student of his animals and is generous about sharing his knowledge with others. He observes:

> When you're working with animals, it's not about theory, it's about practice; theory is not the same as practice. I've studied through practice, experience. Every day you learn something new. It's practice that's valuable.... You have to live it. And besides, you have to pass it down from generation to generation. You can't learn it from a book.... Now they've even got shepherding classes. It's the strangest thing!

Part of this knowledge includes what seems (to an outsider) a secret language between Juan and his animals. After our tour of the livestock in the front barn, we move back outside to a small field adjacent to the barn. Juan laughingly invites us to give a shot at calling to the animals grazing nearby. Though loud enough to be heard, our calls and whistles do not provoke even a momentary raised head or glance from the animals. But when Juan emits a peculiar "rrup," the sheep reply immediately with a series of "bah bah" (although not a single goat responds). He

then uses another distinctive call for his goats—a clicking of his tongue. They respond with a succession of bleats. Later, another *ganadero*, Pepe Millán, explains this ancient shepherd language to us (see Chapter 2). We have just glimpsed an elaborate art form, learned and practiced over centuries, highly effective for herding many animals with just a few people and dogs.

Next, we move behind the main barn. Here roosters, peacocks, ducks, chickens, and rabbits greet us. Juan again smiles, saying "I've always been someone who really likes animals." He tenderly talks about sharing this world with his daughter as she grew up. "My little girl has been raised around country life. Farm-raised chickens, farm-raised eggs." She had fresh meats, eggs, and milk and learned the "language of the countryside." He continues, saying that it is worth the price he has had to pay in hardships. Juan begins another story of a former employer cheating him before cutting himself short and turning back with joy when a sheep comes up to him and bleats. He reveals again, "if an animal like this looks me in the eye, I can't kill it for meat." Juan uses this prize Merino, like most of the ruminant animals in the barn, for milk and cheesemaking.

Every day — sometimes twice a day — Juan milks each animal by hand instead of with a machine, saying it causes less suffering. He gets about 100 liters of milk per day. The animals eagerly come to him for milking, knowing that his hands notice when the milk is gone. This trust between Juan and the animals is critical for good quality milk and for the welfare of the animals, he explains. Machines can continue to milk goats even after the milk is gone, and people using the machines can often be inattentive. "They'll give more milk if I milk them, and I do it more for them than for me, so they don't suffer too much." He laughs, saying he likes to see his animals "fat and happy." The animals may suffer less, but Juan pays a deep price: his knuckles are swollen and cracked from decades of milking. Arthrosis makes his hands ache, and he has another doctor's appointment the following day for cortisone shots. It is clear that Juan loves his work and wants others to appreciate that it is a choice, a vocation, one that is valuable — and that should not bear a stigma. There is dignity in what he does, and it should be neither minimized nor idealized.

After this comprehensive tour, it is time to head back into town. As we pass the Cañada Real del Robledo that Juan, Manuel, and Juan's father have all traveled, he reflects on why they stopped practicing transhumance: they had to make too many sacrifices with family life, social status, and physical hardships. According to Juan, too much "has happened. [Transhumance] has been damaged. A small-scale shepherd can't do it." There are too many obstacles today. Each animal, for example, must have an identification document and pass a blood test to be bought or sold, and a shepherd can't have more than a few animals unless they have property or a landowner who will give them a license. If a shepherd is caught moving livestock without identification documents, there is a heavy fine. "They ask for this form, that form, and more forms on top of that. You've got to get a guidebook before you start doing transhumance, or they don't let you do it." What is more, the droving routes that leave from Constantina are impassable, overgrown with underbrush and spiny bushes from lack of use. Recounting the new trend of everyone saying these droving routes can be saved through hiking (*senderismo*), Juan is highly skeptical:

> Now everybody's talking about *senderismo*, but it won't work. Nobody clears the routes. Not even a mouse can get through. The routes are all going away because livestock doesn't come through here anymore to eat any of the brush; you just don't see any animals come through to clear anything.

Instead of using the droving routes and needing so many papers to use roads all too often blocked or overgrown, shepherds and owners have turned increasingly to the trucking industry to move their animals: "They bring them in a truck from another *finca*, and it all happens in one day to avoid fines." While activists like Jesús Garzón and other shepherds who carry out longer transhumances further north are having a degree of success with keeping the droving routes clear and alive, the practice of shorter movements of livestock in Andalusia (transterminance) seems to be disappearing at record speed, even though the region has the most kilometers of officially protected routes.

When I ask about the future of transhumance and extensive grazing, Juan's and Manuel's faces grow grim. The efforts to train a new generation of shepherds, they believe, do not go far enough. These two lifelong shepherds believe that if those who have not grown up with

this tradition will always be looking at their watches. Juan elaborates, observing that not many people have a vocation to work with animals in this way and the few that do must withstand economic hardship, oppressive restrictions, and continuing prejudice. Just the previous night, he recounts by way of offering a practical example, he went home to shower and eat after a long day tending to the animals but then returned to work at midnight: Juan had to move a sheep about to go into labor to an enclosed corral so that she and her newborn lamb would be safe from outside attacks while in their weakened states.

> There are very few of us. Who wants to work on a Saturday night? Who likes that? You have to be ready, always ready. Sheep are not like cars that you can park at night. If you don't like doing this, it doesn't work. That's why there aren't any new shepherds. There just aren't any more of us. There are people who want to have sheep, and then they call me because they don't want to take care of them.

In addition to the long hours and the need to be available seven days a week, Juan describes how many landowners of pasturelands and large herds have made things worse by continuing to mistreat shepherds and pay them poorly. Juan gives the example of a man promising a "big" bonus for him and the other shepherds who moved a large flock, but Juan was given just fifty euros to pay all three of his men. He forfeited his third to give the other two a better bonus. "It's just not worth it," he and Manuel say in unison.

On our way back to town, we pass a house on the outskirts with no electricity or running water. Juan tells us that his family moved there when his father fell ill and left transhumant shepherding. We pass two large semi-trucks labeled "livestock transport" on the edge of the road into Constantina. It is November and time for flocks to be moved from summer to winter pastures. The flocks that used to be herded along the Cañada Real are now loaded into trucks and driven to the winter pastures further south. We are witnessing first-hand the huge change to the ancient transhumant tradition.

Before arriving at Juan's house, we pass by two key centers for this centuries-old village known for livestock: the town's farming collective and the meat processing plant. Juan wants us to meet his wife Manoli and to sample the cheeses she makes by special order. We step inside their house in town and gather close under a traditional Andalusian

camilla, a heavy cloth draped over a table, with a heater underneath it to keep us warm in the late autumn chill. No longer in constant motion as he was on at his barn, Juan relaxes while Manoli shows us a striking 1954 black and white photograph of a handsome, strong, young man shearing a sheep (see Fig. 1.3). This is Juan's father. It is not the stereotypical image of shepherds with weathered faces. Next, she proudly shows us miniature cork carvings of villages that Juan delicately crafts as a pastime, as his hands permit. I realize the bookshelves display many of these traditional artesian cork villages. While once common, they are rarely found outside of private homes now. As Manoli showcases her husband's past and current work, I recall his story of meeting her in a night club and how she did not flinch at dating a shepherd. After decades of marriage, she still wholeheartedly supports his vocation.

Fig. 1.3 Juan's father shearing a sheep (1954). Courtesy of the Morán family archive.

Juan, in his turn, is eager to show us his wife's work. He ushers us into the kitchen to taste the small, home-batch cheese Manoli produces from the liters of milk Juan gets each day. First, we try a creamy fresh goat cheese made the previous night, then another highly flavorful goat cheese she has stored in olive oil for two weeks, which gives it a hard, dry consistency. For our final local treat, we try the Merino sheep cheese, which is the couple's favorite. We see a variety of cheese molds, hear about recipes, techniques, and how Manoli handcrafts cheeses for individuals who have placed special orders. Tasting these high quality, very local products make us all consider how much could change if policies about cheese processing and marketing better supported small-shepherding farmers and producers. As we will hear again in the case of Pepe Millán and his daughter's *Payoyo* cheeses, there is every possibility for better cash flow, better use of local milk production (instead of export sales to France), and, ultimately, a bit less depopulation of rural areas.

Branching out with Local Products and Stemming Depopulation: Patricio Vázquez Morán

To further our understanding of the broader dynamics of rural life and pastoralism, we meet later with Juan's youngest brother, Patricio. I am curious why he did not follow in his father's footsteps. He is the only brother in the family who never took up the family profession, and his story and memories are markedly different from Juan's. Patricio recounts that, as the last of eleven children, he was only five years old when his father became debilitated with cirrhosis of the liver — a disease associated with the drink that often accompanies the solitude and hard work of shepherds — and moved the family into town. He has only vague memories of their life in the countryside, but he has some fond memories, for example, of the bonds formed while sharing Christmas with other shepherd families. Patricio also recalls growing up in town, hating school, and learning to work in the kitchen at the nearby convent. Years later, when his mother suffered a stroke, he began making preserves so he could work from home and care for her. He slowly built up this new business thanks to innovative combinations of hazelnut jam, dried oranges dipped in chocolate, and lemon-orange marmalades. Soon, Patricio expanded the business with his sisters and

nephew and began selling products to tourists escaping the Seville summer heat for a day in the picturesque castle town of Constantina, to consumers at Seville's outdoor organic market on the Alameda, to shops in the international airport in Seville, and even to a handful of restaurants and shops in the United Kingdom.

Patricio may have broken from family tradition, but he has stayed in Constantina and continued to expand his multifaceted business ventures. After his initial success, Patricio opened a beautiful modern café, *Cafetería Obrador Valle de la Osa*, boasting an outdoor patio right on the Alameda, a store full of his handmade preserves and pastries, and an inviting upstairs area tastefully decorated for breakfasts and mid-day snacks (*meriendas*). After touring a smartly organized kitchen outfitted with stainless-steel fixtures and filled with fresh vegetables in preparation for the day's dishes, we sit by the large modern wood-burning oven (*chimenea*) upstairs as it removes the morning chill. Here, Patricio serves abundant platters of fresh, local cured serrano ham (*jamón*), artisan breads, a few of Juan and Manoli's goat cheeses and a Merino sheep cheese — all paired with his own homemade jams.

Fig. 1.4 Patricio Vázquez Morán and his sister, Conchi, selling homemade preserves at the Organic Market in Seville (2019).

A savvy businessman, Patricio reports that he now also serves late-night pizza to bring in more young customers. Business is picking up, he says, and he looks forward to the summer tourist season. Patricio hopes the café will become a new hub of activity for the town. What began as a strategy to work from home is now a booming family business. Having the vision, talent, and local support to open a place like the *Café Obrador Valle de la Osa* is one of the best ways to help remedy the trend toward depopulation in the area.

While townspeople are proud of Patricio's work, and he has received an award for being an outstanding entrepreneur in Andalusia, it is typically the tourists who visit Constantina and Seville who are willing to pay for the added environmental and nutritional benefits of locally sourced and high-quality artisanal products. Patricio points out the ironic contrast between his own success and the fact that his brother cannot sell his local milk products to tourists due to the numerous and often costly bureaucratic regulations.

> It is crazy that livestock farmers cannot do the same thing I've done. Rather than sell milk to the co-op and have them re-sell it to industrial markets to make cheese, local farmers, who have cheese recipes and practices that go back generations, should be allowed to sell their own cheeses to local markets without so much expensive and time-consuming bureaucracy blocking their efforts.

Patricio tells the story of the local cheese business his nephew's family attempted to start but that was quickly shut down because of these stringent guidelines. Patricio's husband, who is also present for our interview and very attentive to the discussion, now interjects his own story. Having grown up on a farm that raised cattle, he remarks:

> As for me, I escaped country life as soon as I could; studying set me free.... We need to support people like Juan and Patricio who want to stay in Constantina and other rural areas. We depend on them to maintain our ancient landscapes for the future and our own leisure.

If towns like Constantina are going to survive — the population has dropped 14% (from 7,400 to 6,100) in just ten years — new solutions need to be implemented, and soon. "This is the future," Patricio observes. He and his husband believe that the way to stem rural exodus is to ease regulations and support the production and marketing of local

foods, as well as to raise awareness about the added environmental and nutritional benefits these provide. A fair market price for such products would provide rural communities with more economic stability and help them preserve their populations.

Before leaving Constantina and returning to Seville, Mar and I decide to try a short hike along the official droving road that leads directly out of the city center. We soon find that Juan is right: we have to pick our way through deep underbrush for half a kilometer and then come to a field that has encroached so far into the *vía pecuaria* that it is hard to see where the ancient droving route is. After more laborious attempts to stay on a narrow path, the growth is so thick that we recall Juan's description of the droving route: "Not even a mouse can get through." Where once these rights of way were well transited, they are no longer used by shepherds like Juan and Manuel, and they have fallen into deep disuse and, at times, overplanting; the undergrowth has become a fire hazard throughout Spain, especially in these hotter (and, at times, more arid) regions of the Iberian Peninsula. Yet, as we leave Constantina, we cannot help but reflect on how Juan and his brother Patricio have made a successful transition from being the sons of a shepherd who lived on the social and economic margins to local businessmen who enjoy their chosen vocations. This shift has, nevertheless, come at a great, ongoing cost — especially for the shepherd brother — and, as Juan reminds us: "You can't do this alone." Strong family and community support is critical. These two brothers are modeling a future by choosing to stay in their hometowns, adding to local sustainable food production, and owning their own businesses and land.

A mixture of old traditions and new beginnings permeate the stories heard in Constantina and the precariousness of life in this small Andalusian town. Although Juan believes in general that the hours "just aren't worth it," he is still dedicated to his chosen vocation and enjoys the learning it affords him. After completing these interviews with Juan, and later other shepherds and landowners, I began to understand the challenges of personal sacrifice, economic viability, new levels of paperwork, poor land, and deteriorating access to droving routes as some of the many roadblocks to traditional pastoralism in Andalusia. But I also see hope as a few young people take the profession in new directions and a larger system of support emerges.

Updates and Conclusion

Several years later, in November 2021, I check back in with Juan by phone. We are a year and a half past the onset of the global COVID-19 pandemic that rocked the world. He reports that his family became nearly destitute when the main buyer of his animals' meat and milk stopped buying from one day to the next. Juan had nowhere to sell these products; the milk went bad, and he still had to feed his 150 animals daily. Markets crashed for shepherds' products, as we will see in interviews below, but, in most cases, they bounced back quickly when science had swiftly proven that coronavirus could not be transmitted through animal products. Shepherds suddenly became "essential workers" who were depended on by local supply chains. In Juan's case, however, the situation took longer to bounce back. When his in-laws fled the stricken city of Madrid to stay with Juan's family, they unwittingly brought the COVID virus with them. Juan himself fell ill. Being an honorable man, he told his buyer. Even though he reminded the buyer that milk could not spread the disease, the buyer refused any form of contact for a drop off and cancelled the contract. "It was a dirty trick," Juan says, and we hear the hardship still on the tip of his tongue.

> It hit us hard, really, really hard. We were on the brink of tears. Thank God we're alive, but it hit us really bad because the animals have to eat every day. You have to pay the bills. But you can always find friends and a little bit of help.

Juan and Manoli closed up the house in town and moved to the country. Friends helped them get through the period, loaning things they hardly could afford to loan. I cannot help but see a parallel. Juan, the son of a shepherd whose family had all their belongings destroyed by fire and survived because the support of the shepherd community, has himself survived a different disaster, again with the help of a local community. The continuing precarity of the profession (along with an ongoing stigma of it as unsanitary) is still present despite national campaigns promoting pastoralism as both a treasured patrimony and the key to a sustainable future.

Notably, just a week before our call, more than eighteen months after the pandemic, the buyer who canceled his contract asked to purchase

Juan's products again. Juan flatly refused. With the loosening of government regulations on local cheesemaking and sales over the prior year, Juan had found other markets and now sells all of his cheeses and milk directly to consumers through home deliveries. What began as a crisis has turned into a more profitable business — a middleman no longer cuts into Juan's profits.

Next, I check in with Patricio, who, as an adept businessman, was able to pivot to a carry-out menu for his cafeteria when the pandemic hit. In fact, he is still growing his business and plans now to open a rural hotel that will honor Constantina's pastoral history, where visitors can experience nature and develop a keener awareness of local landscapes and ecology. He has been granted a license to convert an old army building located at the highest point of the Sierra Norte de Sevilla into a hotel with a restaurant and a farm school. His nephew, who now has a few animals, wants to leave his trucking job to make a full-time living raising goats. The nephew plans to establish a small livestock farm on the land adjoining the hotel, tend goats, offer rural tours of the farm's sustainable practices, and provide fresh milk and meat for his uncle Patricio's restaurant. Together, these enterprises can bring employment to Constantina by expanding markets for local products. They plan to educate tourists from larger cities in the area about the role of pastoralism in the countryside. No one in the family is interested in reviving the transhumant practices of their ancestors for themselves, but they are finding new ways to keep extensive grazing going. As Patricio observes, they are finding their own way of passing the legacy from one generation to the next. Juan and his wife, Manoli, Patricio, their sister, the nephew and his wife, are all finding ways to stay in Constantina and keep alive the traditional forms of production as well as the products themselves.

In June 2022, I returned to Constantina one last time to share a draft of *A Country of Shepherds* with Juan and Patricio. Ever the great host, Patricio and his sister Coronada turned the visit into a delicious early summer meal of fresh tomatoes pureed into a cold soup called *salmorejo*, pig cheek, and a sampling of their in-house marmalades and Juan's fresh goat cheeses. As we were finishing our meal, yet another family member, Patricio and Juan's niece-in-law Vanesa and her youngest daughter, Paola, stop by. In her 30s and energetic, Vanesa

explains how, as a result of the 2008 recession, her husband (Patricio's nephew Juan Carlos) lost his job as a highly trained carpenter. To make ends meet, he started as a truck driver transporting goods across Europe. After years of this grueling work and being on the road much of the week, they devised a plan to raise goats that would allow him to stay in Constantina. Although neither Vanesa nor Juan Carlos had any experience in raising livestock, three years before our meeting they bought three goats with their savings. Now their native *Florida Sevillana* goat herd has grown to 120 goats. If all goes well with birthing season, Vanesa continues, they will reach 200 by fall — the magic number needed to establish an *explotación*, a herd size which makes them eligible for substantial government subsidies. Once that happens, Vanesa's husband will quit his driving job and work full-time on the farm. Vanesa laughs as she describes the steep learning curve and the five or six days a week she works hands-on to manage its operation while Juan Carlos earns the necessary capital to grow their investment. She tells us about spending nights out in the rain tracking down sick goats, liberating goats caught in wire fences, milking a hundred goats by hand when the machine broke down, and aiding in difficult births — all stories of sacrifices made for this profession that parallel Juan's own. She laughs now, saying:

> It's very hard, and I've shed a lot of tears.... the goats can be really sweet, and really mischievous and wild. I've got enough to write a book. But now I just have to laugh.

Her own "book" about pastoralism, she notes, also includes what she has gained as a person from doing this hard work:

> I'm super happy. I've gotten into shape in the country. I'm nervous sometimes, and being in the country relaxes me. It's another world. And it gives me another outlet as a mother.

She likes the physical nature of shepherding and having her own work outside of the home. Vanesa's nine-year-old daughter Paola now jumps into the conversation, enthusiastically listing all the pets she gets to have now that they have a country life. Besides four cats, a dog, and several rats, Paola has her own goat that she likes to ride.

Fig. 1.5 Caring for their growing herd of *cabras floridas sevillanas* are Juan Carlos Vázquez Morán (2022); Vanesa Pablo Fernández (2022); their daughter Paola (2022).

The family's new venture, Vanesa emphasizes, requires dedication and the understanding that "you need to be always looking out for the animals and aware of the time implications," as well as the need for a sense of ownership in pastoralism. "It has to be your project," she insists. She and her husband developed a five-year plan to expand their herd to a sustainable level. Having a personal investment in pastoralism helps support you when the risks are overwhelming, and the situations are volatile. Just last month, for example, they had to find new pastureland for their goats because the owner of their existing pasture decided to repurpose it for housing horses instead. Enlisting Patricio's help, Vanesa and Juan Carlos then asked permission from city hall to graze their goats for a month on city land just up the hill from Patricio's shop. The city accepted, wanting both to support a new business venture in Constantina and to have the land cleaned by the herd. As we talk, she points to their goats, which are visible from the terrace. Next month, the herd will move to a higher elevation — an elevation above which all land

is public — but they are still searching for a longer-term solution until they can open their agrotourism hotel at the old military installation near town. It will have plenty of room for grazing, a rural hotel with great vistas, and the separate areas required by law for making cheeses for market. Access to pastureland and a good business plan go hand-in-hand, remarks Patricio, who now chimes in. He explains that any strategy should always evaluate the "payoff" of investing in expensive machinery if the work can be done easily by hand at first and, also, should always include efforts to sell directly to the consumer with no middleman involved. These two precepts have worked for Patricio, as he reminds us: "My father was a shepherd, and I didn't inherit anything. I started from zero.... You have to start bit by bit." This family's observations encapsulate many of the issues and trends in pastoralism now: the challenges of a changing economy in a global market balanced against the new opportunities for direct-to-consumer marketing and increased demand for agrotourism. Even still, the support of a strong, multi-generational family network cannot be overestimated.

Fig. 2.1 The town of Zahara de la Sierra, Cádiz (2017).