

A full-page photograph of a shepherd in a wide, green field. The shepherd, wearing a hat and a backpack, is walking towards the right. A large flock of sheep is grazing in the middle ground. In the foreground, two dogs, one white and one black, are walking. The background features rolling green hills under a blue sky with scattered white clouds.

# A COUNTRY OF SHEPHERDS

## CULTURAL STORIES OF A CHANGING MEDITERRANEAN LANDSCAPE

KATHLEEN ANN MYERS

TRANSLATIONS BY GRADY C. WRAY



<https://www.openbookpublishers.com>

©2024 Kathleen Ann Myers



This work is licensed under an Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0). This license allows you to share, copy, distribute and transmit the text; to adapt the text for non-commercial purposes of the text providing attribution is made to the authors (but not in any way that suggests that they endorse you or your use of the work).

Attribution should include the following information:

Kathleen Ann Myers, *A Country of Shepherds: Stories of a Changing Mediterranean Landscape*, with translations by Grady C. Wray. Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0387>

Copyright and permissions for the reuse of some of the images included in this publication differ from the above. This information is provided in the captions and in the list of illustrations. Every effort has been made to identify and contact copyright holders and any omission or error will be corrected if notification is made to the publisher.

Further details about Creative Commons licenses are available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

All external links were active at the time of publication unless otherwise stated and have been archived via the Internet Archive Wayback Machine at <https://archive.org/web>

Digital material and resources associated with this volume are available at <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0387#resources>

ISBN Paperback: 9 978-1-80511-206-8

ISBN Hardback: 978-1-80511-207-5

ISBN Digital (PDF): 978-1-80511-208-2

ISBN Digital ebook (EPUB): 978-1-80511-209-9

ISBN XML: 978-1-80511-210-5

ISBN HTML: 978-1-80511-211-2

DOI: 10.11647/OBP.0387

Cover image: photograph by Costagliola (purchased from Deposit Photos, ID: 266971314)

Cover design: Licia Weber and Jeevanjot Kaur Nagpal

### 3. Transhumance, Diversification, and New Collaborations: Fortunato Guerrero Lara (Sierra de Cardena y Montoro [Córdoba] and Sierra de Segura [Jaén])

---

I've been at this for thirty years, but it's still the same. More new things to do, paperwork, registrations, land problems.... Young people have it really hard. We're fighting with our lives.

Fortunato Guerrero Lara

Organic practices are our future, especially if we want to live in a world that's not so cruel.

Rafael Enríquez del Río

#### Overview

When I interview Paco Casero, a life-long activist for agrarian reform and the environment, I ask about two key issues in pastoralism today: land usage and generational turnover. Instead of answering me, he just picks up the phone and calls Fortunato Guerrero Lara, a shepherd and land-rights leader who straddles tradition and innovation. After we are introduced, Fortunato extends an invitation to visit his family-based operation near the Parque Natural de la Sierra de Cardena y Montoro (a nature reserve between Córdoba and Jaén provinces), which combines private *dehesas*, mountainous pasturelands, and pine forests boasting diverse flora and fauna. Along with his father and son, Fortunato, raises three flocks of *Segureña* lambs, a

breed developed both for its frequent birthing of twins and for its easy adaptability to high altitudes. In summer, the family practices transhumance. They move their 1,200 sheep from Sierra de Cardena y Montoro, where I interview them, to pastures in the high Sierra de Segura near Santiago-Pontones (Jaén). These latter pastures are on land that Fortunato helped to negotiate collective rights to for shepherds in the area.

In this case study, we first visit his family's sheep operation and talk with three generations of shepherds. Next, we follow Fortunato to a *dehesa*, where he introduces us to Rafael Enríquez del Río, a landowner he collaborates with, and Rafael's daughter Isabel. As he says, "they are one of the few conscientious landowners" in Andalusia. Rafael, who inherited his *dehesa* after the Spanish Civil War, actively works to maintain its biodiversity and has hired Fortunato as his part-time foreman to oversee these efforts. The two men have distinctly different lifestyles and personalities but are united by a shared passion for their cultural and ecological heritage, evidenced by the way they care for the natural landscapes where they work. Through Fortunato, we will explore relationships between families of different socio-economic classes and the systems that support or restrict them, as well as glimpse what biodiversity on a multifunctional *dehesa* means.

## The Visit, Part I: A Family of Transhumant Shepherds in the Sierra

On the appointed day, Mar and I drive nearly three hours from Seville to the edge of a small farming town, Marmolejo (in the province of Jaén), to arrive at dawn. Fortunato Guerrero Lara and a jovial crew, including his father and son, a long-time colleague, and of course the family water dog, are waiting. They instruct us to follow them, and we wind through 20 kilometers of rocky pasture, deep into the nature reserve. As the spring mist lifts, signs warning of lynx crossings become visible in the early morning April light. Turning onto a gravel road, we climb higher to a plateau tucked between ravines and rocky land planted with olive trees. A white barn stands on one side of the plot, and a makeshift corral with several stalls stands on the other side. A red

plaid wool blanket and sleeping cushion hang from a tree, drying after the morning dew.

Fortunato's co-worker Juan García Pastor enters the corral to check on the new mothers enclosed with their lambs. It is birthing season in Andalusia, and they have to train some ewes to accept and nurse their own offspring and, sometimes, other lambs who have become orphaned: "It's like taking off one sweater and putting on another," explains Fortunato. The individual stalls help encourage acceptance. This bonding and nursing process is critical: if the newborns are not suckled soon, they won't survive when the summer heat arrives and their transhumance begins. While Fortunato's 18-year-old son, Javier, helps, Fortunato's 87-year-old father, Manuel Guerrero, dons his traditional shepherd's cap, picks up his shepherd's staff, and moves sure-footedly into the rocky pasture area, disappearing down a steep incline.

With everyone engaged in their daily routine, Fortunato begins to take inventory of his flock. Abruptly he stops and, without a word, also disappears down the ravine. A minute later, he shouts back to Juan: "We're missing three lambs!" A quick, efficient search ensues, and, within minutes, Fortunato climbs up to the plateau holding the body of a bloodied, mauled lamb only hours old: "It's a wild boar," he shouts and angrily continues, "only a wild boar would kill just to kill. A wolf would have eaten his kill." All hands search along the fence line and soon find the predator's point of entry. Fortunato explains: one glance at the ewes with remnants of birthing blood on their wool and a quick count of newborn lambs didn't add up, particularly because *Segureña* ewes often birth twins. His mastiff, who had always guarded the sheep at night so Fortunato could sleep in the village with his family, was stolen several weeks ago. Fortunato is training a new mastiff, but it is too inexperienced to be left to guard the flock all night alone. This *gadanero's* skill in training dogs becomes clear when his herding water dog fetches a bottle of water and tobacco from the truck for him. But while the water dog is smart and a good herder, Fortunato explains, he cannot offer the protection of a mastiff and is not powerful enough to ward off nighttime attacks by wolves and wild boars. The plaid blanket hanging at the entrance is now explained. Fortunato and his son took turns two nights ago sleeping next to the sheep. They

have killed one boar already. It is clear that today's massacre was the work of another.



Fig. 3.2 Fortunato and his water dog, Sierra de Cardaña y Montoro (2018).

Fortunato now moves quickly to pair the ewes with other newborns. The precariousness of life here dampens the early-morning optimism. As an outsider to this life of shepherding, I am struck by how quickly an idyllic spring morning can change and reveal the dangers of the trade. There will be no comfortable bed in town tonight as they are forced to keep vigil again.

### Tradition and Transhumance: Manuel Guerrero

While Fortunato leaves us to address the new situation and set up plans for the ewes left without lambs, we interview his father Manuel Guerrero, who has been quietly watching the drama unfold. Under the shade of his traditional cap, his weathered face looks out over the flock. He leans easily on his staff as he settles into a morning watch. Manuel and his generation are the image that most of us have of a shepherd. Now, in what a government official referred to as a “dialect of an old-time shepherd, a language of few words,” the spare conversation of

some old-time shepherds when they talk to outsiders, the octogenarian who has spent all his life as a shepherd outlines his life story. His own father was a shepherd, and, as a child, Manuel worked alongside him on the transhumant process. When he came of age and married, poverty was widespread. Opportunities were few in a largely rural, post-Civil War Andalusia. There was no choice involved in becoming a shepherd, Manuel explains. "Here, you either picked olives or worked with livestock." He chose his father's profession and lived for decades as a transhumant shepherd, tending others' flocks. He was away from home six months out of the year. "I don't know what it's like to be in town for winter," Manuel remarks matter-of-factly as he briefly describes his transhumant lifestyle.

I did transhumance from Pontones to a *finca* called Centenera. You can get to it in twelve days walking. I went on horseback. There weren't many cars back then, and I'd be there half a year. Six months away from home. That's a lot, but it had to be done. There was no other way to eat. I didn't have sheep. The sheep were somebody else's. I stopped doing transhumance on foot when life got better, and there were cars, trucks, and trains. But I started out bringing them in on foot. Ten, twelve days on the trail. If you got tired, you had to sleep. If it was raining, you pitched a tent. If not, well, if you didn't have a tent, you slept outside with all the other shepherds. Sometimes there were three, four, or five others, depending on how many sheep you had. Some of us would sing. We'd get a little sunburned... And the family? My wife was used to me being gone. What are you gonna do?

For years, Manuel worked for landowners. He would lead their flocks and a few horses, each summer, on a twelve-day trek by foot to higher elevations. Bit by bit, one sheep at a time, he also built his own flock to a few dozen. It has been about fifteen years since Manuel has completed a full transhumance by foot.

When Fortunato rejoins us, both father and son talk together, saying they would like to once again perform a complete transhumance. The distance to Santiago-Pontones is just 198 kilometers, so walking with the flock would be cheaper than renting a truck, which now costs well over 5,000 euros. Even with their large herd, they would not have to buy feed or worry about scorching heat in the summer. They do still complete a shorter seasonal migration using two pastures:

In the summer, we go to the pastures ... that are 80% public *monte* along with some rented fields. In winter we go to rented *fincas* where there's a lot of rockrose shrubs, rosemary, thyme, the *monte mediterráneo*.

Much of this movement is performed by truck but, whenever possible, they undertake part of the trip by foot:

[We sometimes move the flocks by] taking advantage of the planted fields, the roads, and the trails. In summer, we see a lot of brush and meadows, and we have two spring seasons. We leave when the lower spring ends, and we go up higher when the mountain spring begins [in Santiago-Pontones].

New highway construction and housing projects, however, have cut off continuous access to the *vías pecuarias* (droving roads), which would make the longer journey more challenging. In addition, recent laws requiring blood tests to aid disease control, birthing and death licenses, and other restrictions make the traditional transhumance by foot logistically difficult and expensive. Transhumance by truck only cleans and fertilizes their two pastures, which means the ancient routes are no longer kept clean.



Fig. 3.3 Manuel Guerrero watches over the flock, Sierra de Cardena y Montoro (2018).



Here, Fortunato and Manuel remark on a positive change in their own lives: after doing transhumance by foot throughout Andalusia and La Mancha for decades, they can enjoy their own houses, one in each town. As his own family grew, Fortunato explains, he needed a stable home in town so his three children could attend school and have access to career opportunities that were not available to a shepherd's children when he grew up. Father and son split their time between Marmolejo and Santiago-Pontones, and Fortunato has worked on his own at the same farm for twenty years. Yet Fortunato states that this relatively new way of doing transhumance and making a living has its own challenges: "At least we haven't had as many problems. It hasn't been as stressful. But as we've gotten more ambitious, life's gotten more complicated."

### Shepherd and Land-Use Expert: Fortunato Guerrero Lara

With the morning routine reestablished, Fortunato invites us to walk with him as we talk further about not only his family and shepherding, but also his advocacy in pastoralism and land use. Fortunato notes that, although he learned shepherding from his father, many significant changes have occurred since he took the leadership of his father's carefully built flock. After studying the complex and ever-changing government funding opportunities, he became adept at navigating bureaucracy, especially the CAP of the European Union and its funding for entrepreneurs in extensive grazing. With this funding, he acquired three *explotaciones*, flocks of about four hundred sheep — one each for himself and his wife, and more recently his son, who decided to carry on the family tradition of shepherding. Due partly to the new opportunities of the maturing democracy, his own life has improved upon the static traditional role of an Andalusian shepherd left to live in poverty much of his life, working in isolation for a landowner. These positive changes have allowed him to support a better lifestyle for his own family. Besides having a house in town, he proudly notes his children can study at the university. Nonetheless, he admits: "It hasn't been easy to send my children to college. One daughter's a

civil engineer, and the other one's a social worker. Both of them are working." As I soon learn, even though shepherds increasingly own their own flocks, many must take on extra jobs in order to support a more middle-class lifestyle.

As we continue touring Fortunato's farm, watching him set new *Segureña* lambs to pasture with their mothers, he talks about his advocacy work. He describes the complex web of relationships that those who work with sheep and goats must navigate and expands on his role in leading this dialogue. For years, he has been a spokesperson for the fight to increase access to pasturelands. He once worked with the "Cooperativa del Cordero Segureño" (named after the Río Segura in Jaén) established by his ancestors as a collective for shepherds raising traditional livestock in the region, yet it was through his work as president of the "Sociedad de Transformación Pastos de Pontones" that he and others successfully negotiated for access to both public and private pasturelands. Working with both park officials and private landowners, the collective helped them all understand the benefit extensive grazing offers to the value of land. Fortunato's extensive knowledge of shepherding and the landscapes that maintain his own flocks drives his collaboration with associations, collectives, and landowners to help people see how land use and shepherding practices go hand-in-hand. The sheep keep the fields and pasturelands well fertilized and clean of dry (and flammable) underbrush, and the olive trees provide much needed shade in the hot, arid summers. In the mountainous pasturelands of Andalusia, he frequently repeats, sheep and olives go together.

As Fortunato talks, he often uses a key phrase to describe all aspects of his work, philosophy, and vision: "We're collaborators." He is an articulate advocate for his profession and understands at a practical, as well as visionary level, what must happen with both private and public lands in Andalusia for their way of life and their precious natural environment to flourish. Nonetheless, he knows all too well that there are frequent misunderstandings between the different parties he mediates. Even shepherds compete with each other, he explains, when bidding for pasturelands:

It's an area where all the pastures are communal, so you can graze different flocks there. And then, you pay according to land use. The objective is for *ganaderos* not to outbid each other. There are some statutes and some rules to follow so no one individual can establish his own pasture.

His experience has convinced him that the competitive relationship between landowners, the government, and *ganaderos* must change so that everyone comes out ahead. Indeed, while the collective was successful in attaining a handful of public lands near Pontones, where he now grazes his livestock in the summer, the program failed to expand into other regions:

There were great results, at least for the *ganaderos*. For my land, I don't think it was that beneficial. I left as president right after we came to an agreement, and then, it all stopped. It hasn't started up again. Nothing's come of it. I left my position because it makes no sense if they don't value the Sociedad's communal pasturelands. And I don't think either side was willing to negotiate. Neither for the *ganaderos* to keep using the communal pasturelands nor for the government to keep offering them, which, in that aspect, is unfortunate because it could really benefit both. So surely, if we sit down together and negotiate and talk it through, then I think we can reach some type of understanding. It's for everyone's benefit, especially the livestock, which brings profits for everyone.

He primarily blames some of the greedy landowners in the area, who still fail to see the mutually beneficial dynamics of pastoralism and good land stewardship. Worse yet, some of these same landowners receive valuable government subsidies to allow grazing but refuse to provide a place for livestock farmers to live. They expect sheep and goats to clear unusable land of overgrowth but then want to charge shepherd-*ganaderos* excessive rent to do this work. For its part, the government did not help move the program forward; instead, it taxed shepherds 3,000 euros per flock to use the newly available public lands. He paints a grim picture as he speaks on behalf of all shepherds, switching to the collective "we" form:

There are *fincas* where it's impossible to put a program together with the landowners because they charge outrageous prices. Some friends of mine are paying unreasonable prices for using the *fincas* for four or five

months. And these are places where there's no equipped housing, so *ganaderos* are living in the farmhouses because what else are we supposed to do? Stay out in the snow? There's nothing left but for us to leave. And the landowners know it, and they pressure us with costs that are way out of reach for us.

Although he is disappointed that the program did not develop further, he still holds out hope for future dialogue and mutual understanding. In the end, he still believes that if people can understand how the practice benefits everyone — shepherd, farmer, private landowner, government (*La Administración*), society, and most importantly, the future welfare of the land — change can happen. Mutual, collaborative efforts are the future for a more productive, sustainable agricultural and livestock ecosystem, he insists, yet this work requires that all sides understand the unique conditions and contributions of the rocky Andalusian pasturelands and how it differs from the lowland agricultural lands.

To raise people's awareness, you'd have to say to the landowner: "Look, this is a *finca* with organic olive trees. If you graze sheep here, you get a bonus." In fact, it should be required because these native olive groves are compatible with the native sheep who graze here. The landowner should consider this and say: "I've got a *finca* with organic olive groves, and as part of the environmental awareness I've been developing for years, I acknowledge that the olives I grow here on the mountain alongside grazing livestock are more profitable than the ones I have in lowland farms." That all seems clear, but how do you get people to see it?

While many shepherds are increasingly active in collectives, Fortunato has worked at a level that many shepherds have not, negotiating with a broad range of stakeholders. Through his work, he has developed concrete ideas about how to improve land access issues at a systemic level. He believes one effective way forward is to provide more official mediators who can help shepherds apply for and acquire rights to public lands for grazing. "I'd say that now it's due to a lack of understanding between the government and us. I think it's a mix. We need people to negotiate for us."

Transhumant shepherds need even more support, he argues, because they work in two distinct geographical regions, each with its own set of

regulations for pastoralism. That, and being absent six months out of the year, can often result in lack of access to the best land. Lands rented sight unseen may end up being in poor condition. Good lands may be offered one year only to have the rent double the next year. Fortunato describes the dizzying and discouraging array of roadblocks to land access, especially for transhumant shepherds:

So, what's the problem? Well, we have to manage the communal pasturelands in the Santiago-Pontones region. We're the ones who do the transhumance, so, we should work together with landowners because one person has a *finca*, but another person doesn't have access to land. And then there's someone else who doesn't have the right licenses, etc. But with public lands, if you could come to an agreement with the government, and say, "What *finca* is available?" Or, so there's access to all *fincas*, "What *fincas* do you have?" Then, that's it. They open it up for competition and say, "we have this *finca* here and that *finca* there." But some of those *fincas* aren't ready for the best use by the *ganaderos*; they have a lot of brush; there's no access; they've got pine groves that don't make good pastures for livestock. So, if the *finca* isn't worth saving, why should they want to preserve it? It just remains out of use.

So, we know which *fincas* are the good ones, and those that are good for us are also good for livestock. We want the ones that suit our needs: this one and that one. The others can be used for wood, or they can be left for the *monte*, or even some other *ganadero* can use it. Landowners could say, "I'll give you a five-year contract, and you do with the *finca* whatever you want. I'm not going to charge you anything. You clear it, get rid of the brush, and if you want, you can plant something on it for your animals, and you give me some." And then, even more important, there are individually owned *fincas* that are not used, and that's simply because they're privately owned, especially in our area. But then again, there are *fincas* where due to the nature of the terrain, the rocks, and the ravines, it's impossible to use machinery. Manual labor is extremely expensive.

So, then, what's happening? These folks own their *finca*, but on top of that, you pay them money, and on top of that, you pay them to get their land in good condition for fire prevention. We create a benefit for them by grazing our animals and clearing the land, so we should also receive a part of that benefit. We collaborate with them, and we do it for free. They need a fire prevention plan, which costs a fortune, but isn't that what we do for free? Yet, we still end up paying to graze our animals on top of everything else, and they get fire prevention too.

Beyond the complexities of land access, in the end, Fortunato echoes what every shepherd, farmer, and *dehesa* owner experiences: the harsh economic reality. The price of lamb plateaued for years at fifty euros in the early 1990s. During the following years the price of land, food, transportation, licensing, and veterinarian costs nearly quadrupled, and unlike other products, fresh lamb has short shelf life. Considering the added ecological and environmental benefits of sheep grazing, with its cleaning and fertilization of vast regions of the countryside, a fair market price would be at least double the hundred euros it is today. Although the prices of Spanish lamb briefly approached this target price in recent years, Fortunato notes that he still can't keep up with inflation due to climate change, skyrocketing energy costs, and market speculation. He has had to change his business model to just one birthing season per year rather than two. New market models need to be developed.

You can't break even. I no longer do August birthing. I don't think it's worth it for what it costs. So now I just do spring birthing, and only with financial assistance. The whole food sector is like that. It's a big imbalance. The wholesalers buy cheap grain from the farmers, but they sell the feed to us, the *ganaderos*, really high. The costs of energy are going through the roof. Lamb is at 110, but you don't know when to buy or sell. And to add to all of this, there's the drought, and up until last week it hadn't rained. The only good thing, and the reason we keep going at it, is because the *ganadero* works so much that he doesn't spend anything. He doesn't have time to spend.

You have to keep in mind exports because if you don't, it doesn't make sense. Outside of Spain they already pay a higher price for lamb. That's a very important point in the sales process because it makes you lose money if you don't keep that in mind. With better management, it could turn out better. The whole market thing is very complicated. When you have a product like, for example, oil, you store it in a barrel, and you sell it whenever you want. When you have canned or frozen goods, which have a time frame in which to sell, the market gives you a certain amount of time to negotiate. But our product is different. Meat has to be fresh. With lamb, you have to eat it when it's ready. With *Segureña* lamb, which is free range, in order for it to have its true delicious flavor, you can't freeze it and eat it as a lamb chop three months later. It's not viable for all the work it takes, for all the sacrifice. You're raising it organically, and you should enjoy it at its best for many

reasons. Get it today and eat it right away. What's happening? When you produce a fresh product, you have less margin for maneuverability. And then there are the speculators who are in the mix who say: "I buy, I owe, I have my grain seller, I sell it just a certain way...." People need to be more aware of what's going on.

I have heard this observation in every interview so far: "People need to be more aware." The public must be willing to pay fair market value for sustainable food production and back government policies that support this. It is Fortunato's passion to inform others in the face of huge challenges that drives him to take time to talk with people like me. Like Pepe Millán's dedication to teaching a new generation of shepherds and public (see Chapter 2), Fortunato believes fundamental change can only happen with more public awareness and new models for marketing.

Everything can always get better in life. That's what we've always said. This could be a very, very long conversation, and we could talk about a lot of things. We wouldn't stop until tomorrow. There are always more things to improve. For the government's part, there's a lot to be done in the livestock sector. They're always doing some things, but everything could be improved. We also are very beneficial for the monte. Livestock greatly benefits the monte for its biodiversity, for its fertilization, for sowing seeds. Livestock has alleviated the fire threat greatly. Pasture density is reduced in the summer where livestock grazes. In fact, where there is livestock, there's a smaller percentage of fires. On the lands where I have grazed flocks, there haven't been any fires in the last forty or fifty years. If they could compensate public *fincas* without charging us for the pastureland, giving us a little assistance, it would help out a lot because this sector is now on the edge of disappearing. In just twenty years, livestock on this land, our land, has disappeared. Just twenty years; I'm not exaggerating. I've worked at it for a long time. What's happened is that the *ganaderos* who have stayed, we've stayed because it's what we love. You've been raised around this, it's what you love, and the truth is it takes a lot out of you. It's no longer about what you earn or don't earn. We make the sacrifice, and sure, we live with the costs of the sacrifice we're making.



Fig. 3.4 Fortunato Guerrero Lara with son Javier inside the historic farmhouse (2018).

## Generational Legacies: Generational Renewal and Javier Guerrero Vilches

Later, resting for a moment in the shade of an old oak tree, Fortunato talks about another major challenge: the unmet need for more shepherds as his father's generation retires. Fewer than 2% of his partners are being replaced by a new generation. Although he is concerned about the survival of the profession in general, he admits to mixed feelings about the unusual choice his youngest son, Javier, has made to follow in his father's footsteps:

One thing is very clear, families who are retiring aren't leaving a new generation. My case is an exception. My son continuing to do work like this is an isolated case. And I'll tell you something else, I didn't want my son to be a *ganadero*.

Fortunato and his family are from a town that depends on *ganadería* to survive, yet even though Fortunato loves his work, he still urges his children to complete their education and prepare themselves for another vocation. He knows all too well the precariousness of birthing season,



the social marginalization, the economic hardships, and the instability of travelling seasonally with the flock. He understands the need for more shepherds so that this way of life and this ecosystem can survive, but he also wishes an easier life for his own family.

Fortunato describes his views about the decrease in shepherds throughout Spain, as well as his own feelings about his youngest son's determination to work as a shepherd.

I didn't want my son to be a *ganadero*. I did my duty: the best inheritance I can leave him is his career. The best inheritance is for him to get something out of this because I don't have anything else to give. His inheritance is his training. The future of *ganadería*, at least on land around here, has a tendency to disappear because there's nobody left. When the *explotaciones* let up and the older folks start retiring, there's no generational renewal. It's only by chance when a child comes along like mine and stays and becomes part of the legacy. It's a coincidence. Maybe there are two percent or less of *ganaderos* who retire, and their son takes over because the *Junta de Andalucía* has motivated them to do it with assistance that's there for new or young farmers. They give them some subsidies that they don't have to repay. They help them out some. That's motivated them a little.

My son was going to finish his last two years of high school to earn his *bachillerato* [high school advanced diploma]. He had already started his second year, but suddenly, overnight, he tells me he wants to be a *ganadero*. I tell him, at least finish the *bachillerato*. "Dad, I'm not gonna need it because I want to work." So, since he dug in his heels, I discussed it with him since he seemed 100 percent set on doing it. He knows what he wants, and he's not a kid. He doesn't want to spend all day out driving around and wasting all his time in town. He works just like me. He gets up at the same time I get up. He works some weekends if he wants, but not many. He worked yesterday and Saturday too. I don't know what time he'll work tomorrow. He was taking night courses to finish his *bachillerato* so he could be in the fields during the day. He's eighteen. He had a birthday in December. He was very clear about it. The idea came to him as a child, and it just kept growing on him. He knew his dad didn't have weekends or vacations or anything like that, but look what he's gotten himself into. He knows what he's doing. And he works every day with me. He gets up and goes to bed when I do. He went out last night, but he knew he had to work the next day, and he was in by 12:00.

So, when Fortunato heads over to consult with one of the other shepherds, I interview his son, Javier, who is determined to work alongside his

grandfather and father. Javier says when he finished his last two years of high school, he decided to carry on the family tradition. He is well aware that he is the key to keeping the family legacy going because his older siblings chose other vocations. Despite his parents' hopes for him, Javier is both clear-sighted and practical about his choice. He loves animals and the outdoors and spends all his weekends and vacations working with them. "If you like it, it doesn't sting so much," he smiles. The sting includes the teasing he has endured from classmates, who see only the stigma and hard work of the shepherd's life, and missing out on college life, parties, and freedom. Still, he firmly repeats his choice: he'd rather be a shepherd — and after all, he jokes, he can still go out on a Saturday night.

I like this, and I always told myself that when I grew up, I wanted to do something that I liked. I like this a lot because I've grown up doing it. On vacation or on the weekends I always come here with my dad. In general, I like being in the country, and I like the animals. I have no doubts. In Spain right now we're still feeling the effects of the economic crisis. Things are bad. I'd like to have some training for a career, but even if I had it, I'd still want to do this because it's what I like. Already at eighteen I know what I want. If you have a career, people judge you better than if you don't have one. In life it takes all kinds: construction workers, engineers, shepherds. And *ganadería* is at the base of it all. If that goes away, then everything goes away.

I had to go about convincing my family a bit at a time. It wasn't hard to convince my dad, but my mom was a little harder, although now she's gotten used to the idea. If you're not doing what you like, it's better not to do anything.

Society looks on people who work out in the country as village idiots, but you can have just as much culture as anyone. You read, you watch movies etc. I don't see why going to school is any better than not going to school. I see what a student's life is like, and I don't like it. I might get home tired, but it's something I've chosen. If you're doing something you like, then time goes by really fast. My dad's been doing this for 25 years, and I'm eighteen. The image people have of someone who works in the country isn't completely right. People don't know what it's like to take care of sheep. Not everybody values it. The trick is knowing your sheep. What's nicest, and hardest, is what's coming up now in April, during the birthing season. You've got to be up all night keeping guard.

Besides, even though my dad lets me do whatever I want, I'd rather work than go out partying, and eighty percent of my social life is with my dad. We work together, and we have a beer together. It's a special

relationship, and your friends don't understand sometimes. I'm doing what I like, and I don't care what others think.

Javier has also closely observed the life of friends who dedicated years preparing for a career only to be unemployed. For nearly a decade after 2008, Andalusia's post-crisis job market remained stagnant, with an approximate unemployment rate of around 40% for young adults aged eighteen to thirty. Most of the work they can get is part-time, low-paid, and often precarious. His generation has lived half of their lives in the grip of "La Crisis," a situation that had started to improve just as the COVID-19 pandemic hit in spring 2020. More than a few university-educated friends, Javier admits, are now looking to return to the land to find work and meaning in what some refer to as a neo-ruralism. And, he continues, why would he leave what he loves? He repeats with a smile: "If you like it, it doesn't sting so much."

Javier admires how his father is working to transform shepherding. He points to what Fortunato himself has described going from "being a shepherd for the landowner" to "owning an *explotación*" (a sheep herd large enough to attract government subsidies), from "being the son of a transhumant shepherd" to "owning a nice little house in town". It has been a transition from a solitary pastoral life to being a key organizer in a collective effort to improve the precarious economic conditions and relationship to landholders that have been part of a long history of marginalization. Although Javier is just starting to establish his own *explotación* as he works with his father, he also has his eye on the future. Javier is also working to help increase land access and promote a better understanding of pastoralism in general. In the meantime, however, the 18-year-old is focused on starting his own business as a shepherd. He has inherited his grandfather's simple philosophy: "You have to live."

As we wrap up the morning interviews with three generations of shepherds, I recall Fortunato's joke about his name and his good fortune to work alongside his father and son. I too feel fortunate to have witnessed their work with them and to have heard their stories. Together they demonstrate the resiliency of a family who works to protect tradition but also to accommodate new realities.

## The Visit, Part II. Dehesa la Rasa and Multifunctionality: Landowners Rafael Enríquez del Río and his daughter Isabel

As we have seen, the economic reality of shepherding for Fortunato and his family, though limiting, has also been a catalyst to seek out new opportunities so they can afford to continue doing what they love. Fortunato not only manages his flocks and actively advocates for pastoralism; he also works part-time to manage a nearby *dehesa*. While it is difficult to find landowners who understand the delicate pastoral ecosystem and value Fortunato's expertise in good land management, Fortunato's drive, clear-sighted vision, and experience as a negotiator are appreciated by some. He has teamed up with one of these local landowners, Rafael Enríquez del Río, on his private Dehesa la Rasa. Rafael, Fortunato emphasizes, is "someone who's aware of what works. He's seen the benefits thanks to livestock grazing. He doesn't have to use fertilizer, and the sheep keep his *finca* cleared. But it's only one case. It's an isolated case." Fortunato is now equal parts shepherd and businessman in a productive collaboration with this landowner to diversify the *dehesa* and the mountainous pasturelands through sustainable practices.

So, as noon approaches, and just as I think we have wrapped up for the day, Fortunato invites us to join him at this land-management, his second, job. To reach the *dehesa*, we wind back through the hills, turning toward Cardeña as the landscape of mountainous pasturelands and olive groves become intermittent pine forest. We enter another part of the Parque Natural Sierra Cardeña y Montoro that adjoins the Parque Natural Sierra de Andújar. Almost 80% of the 38,500 hectares in this area are privately owned because the land was designated as a park in 1989, and many landowners were able to have their property legacied to keep in the family. We soon pull into the driveway of a nineteenth-century farmhouse where we meet our host. Rafael proudly brings his guests on tours through the small house and invites hobbyists and professionals to use the space for a variety of projects. Perhaps that is why, when curious academics like us arrive, the locals barely bat an eyelash. No one seems surprised that we had traveled across the Atlantic to visit Fortunato and

Rafael, as they appear to have a constant stream of visitors — though most come from across Andalusia.

The people who surround Fortunato and Rafael, two practitioners of the socio-ecological system of *ganadería extensiva* (extensive grazing), are also brought together by the land — both public and private — that they carefully cultivate. Beekeepers, wood processors, shepherds, and hunters all benefit from the bounty of this land. Rafael controls his property with a vigilant eye for monetary value. Without making some profit, the land would have to be abandoned, but his multi-use approach has made the vast land surrounding the *finca* even more valuable for its natural production.



Fig. 3.5 Rafael Enríquez del Río with his daughter Isabel on their Dehesa la Rasa (2018).

As Rafael shows us around, we come to understand how the history of twentieth-century Spain, the *dehesa*, and Rafael's own personal story are intertwined. He recounts how the farmhouse dates to 1897, when his grandparents bought it and some of the surrounding land. The family lived in Posadas, Córdoba but spent vacations on the nearby farmhouse. Everything changed with the Civil War. Rafael was born in 1937, just months after a group of militants shot more than twenty townspeople, among them his father: "They killed him in the war. He was a judge; the reds, the commies, killed him early on. The anarchists, the reds, all those kinds of people, killed some twenty some odd people in the town. He confronted them." By age eight, Rafael had also lost his mother and was living with his grandmother. He remembers spending hours by himself hunting and exploring the mountainous pasturelands surrounding the farmhouse. It was this childhood love of nature, and in particular hunting, that formed the basis for his later vision of stewardship.

When Rafael came of age and inherited the *dehesa*, he began to buy up adjacent parcels of land and learn more about the local trees and animals. As a keen observer, he also witnessed many, at times illogical, laws and practices governing the area that were mandated by the Franco regime. Rafael offers the example of the planting of pine forests that were meant to protect the land but also disturbed the natural ecosystem of the area. Nevertheless, the practice contributes to his income and continues to be part of his overall business plan. Rafael points out another difference from the earlier era. Franco's prohibition of hunting did not represent good stewardship of the land, he feels. Today, selling licenses for controlled hunting, he says, helps to balance the ecosystem and to maintain the economic viability of his land.

Although he spent much time on the *finca*, Rafael was a full-time company owner in town until his business collapsed with the 2008 crisis. At the age of seventy, he retired and dedicated ever more time to his farm. Now, he and his daughter Isabel, together with Fortunato, are setting an example of good private-land stewardship, applying a well-informed multifunctional approach in which pastoralism is a key to stabilize the natural environment of the *finca*, as well as the surrounding rural area. From the veranda, Rafael expands on his

vision of sustainable diversification and the proper resourcing of land. We gaze out over the *dehesa* and level pastures of about 1,200 hectares, green from the spring rains and home to sheep and Iberian pigs that graze under olive and cork trees. Rafael explains that, while normally the *explotación* (herd) numbers around 150–200 sheep, recent wolf attacks have devastated the flock. Only about sixty sheep remain. With resignation, he awaits the lengthy reimbursement process from the EU, which he hopes will be in the thousands of euros. He is encouraged that there is now support from the EU for keeping sheep. Rafael's bank has also become more receptive: if at one time they only made fun of sheep-keeping, the bankers now see the value of his flock not just in potential for profit but in its recognized value to the environment. The bankers have heard of the government program that pays shepherds and flock owners to graze animals and clean public lands to prevent forest fires. The last time he went to the bank, Rafael recalls how his banker said appreciatively: "You guys are the firefighters for our forests."

To help make his *finca* economically sustainable, Rafael now harvests cork bark and has 100 hectares planted with olive trees. He points towards an extensive, hilly forested area just beyond the pastures. There he maintains a varied habitat for big game hunting; it attracts wildcats, deer, and boar, as well as partridge. People pay a good fee to hunt there, yet these initiatives are still not enough to make a reliable profit now:

Right now, it's not organized very well because if you have a *finca*, you don't make much money, and it's even harder to make it an organic one. Nevertheless, organic practices are our future, especially if we want to live in a world that's not so cruel.

Still, Rafael sees benefits beyond trying to make a profit from his land. He is at heart a true conservationist. Proudly, he enumerates to us the wide variety of species his land supports and describes his active cultivation of autochthonous varieties of oak trees. He wants to leave a lasting natural monument to Mother Nature through good land stewardship, as well as through working with community members involved in rural development. Land ownership, he argues, cannot be driven solely by "big bucks". Like another landowner we will hear from later, he recognizes that mountain pasturelands depend on adopting

systems for an ecologically sound future not because it is trendy now, but because it is the only hope for the future.

Rafael has remained a good steward of the land he inherited as a young man. He is a traditional landowner who has contributed to the continuation of a large functional *finca*, but, unlike many other landowners of his generation who abandoned their land in favor of jobs and higher incomes in cities, Rafael still spends much of his time on the *finca*. His approach today falls somewhere between micro-management and delegation: he stays involved in every aspect of the *finca*'s production but depends on Fortunato and other workers to take on the responsibility of day-to-day tasks.

### Site for *Empresas Agrícolas Familiares*

Rafael and his daughter Isabel are also the beneficiaries of a law designed for *empresas agrícolas familiares*, that is, family farming businesses. The law encourages local collaboration with a wide range of small businesses, including beekeepers, wood processors, shepherds, and hunters. Fortunato helps Rafael and Isabel to manage these new initiatives. Today we meet two new families working on Rafael's land.

The first pull into the *finca*'s driveway in a sleek, black SUV. A stylish woman dressed in a black leather jacket, Ester Vázquez Estela, steps out along with her husband, José Martín Pérez García. Fortunato calls this couple from Cazorla in the Sierra de Jaén the "timber folks" because of their interest in harvesting the farm's non-native pines—a legacy of Franco's 1960s policies that have not been helpful to the natural ecosystem. Some years ago, the couple began in the wood-chip business, harvesting pines for both planks and biomass for renewable energy. They work with a collective and a forest ranger all over Jaén, Granada, Almería, and Córdoba. José Martín explains that, after two decades in restaurant work, the financial crisis led him to team up with his business-minded wife. Needing a stable income to support their two kids at home, he and Ester began a new initiative in the area that just five years earlier would have been unheard of — especially with a woman heading the business. He recounts with satisfaction his journey from restaurant work to working in the countryside:



I worked for twenty-six years in the hospitality business. Let's just say from the time I was born. My father had a wedding hall, and we'd do weddings. It was a restaurant and a hotel too. Part of it I liked, and part of it I didn't. It's a life that wears on you. When there are a lot of parties, you have a lot of work. The hours are hard. And dealing with people..., there are some clients who come in, and you say, "crap, these folks are really nice and polite." But there are others who are just shameful. You have to put up with the drunks. You have to put up with people on drugs. Things can get pretty bad at the bar.

When I turned twenty-seven, I decided to follow my own path. I bought equipment and put together a small business. Then I was self-sufficient, but something happened, and I went a year without pay. I lost everything. I was ruined. They took away all my equipment; they took away everything. I had a *finca*, I had a place of my own... everything..., but then someone threw me a lifeline. And since then, we're getting along a little better. Slower, but a little better. The truth is I'm not interested in having a huge business. With my experience, I prefer to have something that I can handle on my own, where I can control everything, because I prefer to have equipment on one *finca* and not more than that because you can't control it. I'm a worker. I'm a businessman, but I'm a worker too.

Now I have a better quality of life. Even though I have to be away from home from Monday to Friday, and I don't get to see my son or my wife, I come home on the weekends, turn off my cellphone, and completely disconnect. Two whole days to be with my kid and rest. You enjoy the days you spend at home relaxing more than during the week when you can only be there for a little while in the afternoon.... Working with my wife has been the best thing that's happened. I used to have a partner who took me for seventy thousand euros and wiped me out. So, since my wife is now my partner, I'm in heaven because we're both on the same page. And things are working well for us. I don't take advantage of her, and she doesn't take advantage of me. We're both going in the same direction. That's the formula for a high-quality business. I'm sorry I didn't do it ten years ago. What happened wouldn't have happened. I'm in heaven now, and it's great. Just here working. No one bothers me. No one comes by. I'm all by myself. I'm in heaven. I've got incredible inner peace.

Like his collaborator and farm manager Fortunato, Rafael has also enlisted the next generation in his family enterprise. His daughter Isabel del Río, a trained biologist, now runs the vast farm alongside her father and continues to develop his vision of a sustainable multifunctional farm. Isabel now joins us and leads our caravan up into the deepest

part of the pine forest, which needs to be thinned so that other growth can flourish. After both owners, Fortunato, and the husband-wife team survey the area, Isabel and Ester strike a deal over the pines and report the transaction to Fortunato. We have just witnessed the kind of negotiation that Fortunato says must happen more frequently with land use in these rocky pasturelands: multiple interests can be served at the same time. Rafael needs to thin his forest to prevent forest fires, the new company needs raw materials, and the biomass will help with the production of sustainable energy.

As they close the deal, two people in full beekeeper suits seem to appear out of nowhere. Rafael and Isabel have recently opened access to their land to beekeepers further down the ravine. Victoria Gámiz is a beekeeper at the University of Córdoba, who also works in the area with the hives she is developing along with her business partner Enrique Medina, who learned the trade from his father. Victoria hopes that, within three years, this part-time venture will become full-time business. For them, beekeeping is integral to extensive grazing and essential to the health of the ecosystem. Both are trained scientists; they respect and utilize traditional knowledge but are willing to experiment with new techniques and with varieties of hives. Enrique, who works part-time in nearby La Mancha as a forestry engineer, sees the need for increased coordination between landowners, shepherds, beekeepers, businesspeople, and government. With all but 4,000 hectares of the 35,000 in the Parque Natural in private hands, its future depends on partnerships with owners like Rafael and Isabel, who, as he says, “know how to and want to diversify” their land. More landowners need to understand how critical biodiversity is to “better resource everything in the *monte* to make it profitable and sustainable.” A lively discussion continues among all the people gathered in the pine forest mixed with rocky pasture: multiple generations of landowners and shepherds, beekeepers, and wood-processing partners. My colleague from Seville, Mar, even jumps in to discuss the future, the need for government support of small family projects, greater recognition of the key role of shepherds, and collaborative work to encourage biodiversity. I just try to listen and learn. The owner of the biomass company explains:

Many times, hunting management doesn't let shepherds in. There are very few people like Rafael who bring both together; they're completely compatible. High pasturelands can be very big. Let's say you've got 1,000, 2,000 hectares. There's enough space so we don't have to be at the wrong place at the wrong time. It's a matter of organizing and coming to an agreement with all involved. When you better resource the pasturelands, the more profitable they become and the more biodiversity you're going to have. It just works better. And at the end of the day, it's better for the pasturelands too because they're being used and cared for, not abandoned. If it has a use, it works well, and the *monte* stays in good shape. It's what you have to do. It has to be that way for it to be sustainable. And the biomass will be profitable when the processing happens here and stays here in the region.

He agrees that many interests can be served by adopting multifunctional approaches to land management.

With a simple statement, Rafael summarizes the role of local workers in the formula for encouraging biodiversity and resisting rural depopulation: "A fundamental building block are the people who live on the land." Rafael and Isabel's avid interest in collaborative projects has helped several groups of people find a livelihood in post-crisis Andalusia and contributed to the sustainability of a fragile natural area at risk for massive forest fires, the extinction of flora and fauna, and desertification. Rafael has long been a guardian of this corner of the natural park. Now, he actively seeks out new ways to diversify and develop his rich natural patrimony by encouraging at least three families to use these resources to develop their own visions of a future in the countryside—entrepreneurs who respect the land as more than just a means to make a living. Rafael sees pastoralism and extensive grazing as critical to stop, or at least slow, the acceleration of rural flight and the deterioration of culture:

We can debate about the whole idea of going back to the traditional way of doing things. Transhumance has always happened, but now it could easily fail because there isn't a population who gets their products from transhumant livestock. Now there can't be millions of transhumant sheep. Hundreds, yes, but it's not the same. In the past, there were people who'd buy goats and meat and related products, and the shepherds sold everything: sheepskins, milk, etcetera. When people leave the rural areas, what happens? You lose your culture.

As a conservative landowner, Rafael also looks to the past to understand the age-old problem of maintaining the economic viability and local culture of the countryside. He tells us that, over five hundred years ago, Carlos V “solved rural problems with the countryfolk by sending his administrative advisors into the area.” If only society still listened to the elders, he muses: “One of the worst things that’s happened to our civilization is that the counsel of our elders has disappeared.” Poking fun at his own nostalgia for the distant past, Rafael wryly quips: “Let’s buy ourselves an old man, eh?”, but he still relates his own work to an ancestral history that goes back millennia in the region. He offers the tradition of hunting on his farm as an example of historical continuity: “Just look at the Roman mosaics that depict partridge hunting.” Even with his nostalgia for the past, Rafael realizes that “organic practices are our future, especially if we want to live in a world that’s not so cruel.”

It is now well past the usual dinner hour, and we head back to the farmhouse, where Rafael insists that we have a fuller tour of their small, meticulously maintained home, an integral part of his vision of bringing together tradition with innovative sustainability. We step inside a turn-of-the-century house which is, quite literally, a movie set: the film *Entrelobos* (<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1417582/>), among others, was filmed here. All along the hallway and into the receiving room, the mounted heads of deer, bear, and antelope overpower us with a sense of man’s dominance over, but ultimately reverence for, the natural world. Moving into the dining room, antique, green-patterned Córdoba ceramics line the cabinets. An ivory-carved cross with a disfigured Christ hangs on the center wall. With a mixture of bittersweet nostalgia and family pride, Rafael explains that the crucifix dates from the Golden Age. His ancestor, one who had made his fortune in Mexico and returned to Spain as a man from the “Indies” (an “Indiano”), brought the cross with him. When Republicans assassinated his father, they also defaced the cross. The family keeps it prominently displayed as a reminder of their resiliency throughout a difficult history.

Moving through the kitchen with its large fireplace, wood-burning stove, and well-stocked shelves of preserves, honey, olives, vinegars, oils, and meats — all produced on the farm and conserved by Rafael’s wife — he leads us into the kitchen courtyard. Chickens roam freely

there, but his focus is the new water-collection system and solar panels installed to power the entire house. Even in an impeccably maintained traditional farmhouse there is room for new innovations. Moreover, his motto, “make the best of everything,” includes renting out part of the farmhouse as a “country home” to avid bird watchers.

Once we are in the kitchen, Isabel switches roles from businesswoman to traditional host, inviting us to taste the products of the *finca*. Noting how she has prepared herself to carry on her father’s work on sustainability of ecosystems and rural populations by studying complex laws and funding structures surrounding land use and farming animals, she goes into the pantries and quickly puts together a delicious mid-day meal from the pantry stores: cured meat, grilled pepper salad, and stewed pork. She offers us a cold regional Cruzcampo beer and homemade *picadillo* made from garden-fresh ingredients after our foray around the property.

As the food is served, the friendly banter between Fortunato and the *dehesa* owners continues. The shepherd-manager repeats his tribute to Rafael as “a visionary entrepreneur,” and Isabel in turn calls Fortunato “her best partner.” I realize that we are witnessing a team: a shepherd-businessman and landowners with very different backgrounds and personalities yet see life through the same lens of the land. Rafael and Isabel challenge the popular stereotype that most landowners have abandoned good stewardship of land, animals, and rural communities. For their part, Fortunato and Javier dispel the image of the shepherd as the “village idiot.” Rafael protects the land, property, and the natural world and exudes a deep respect for all the participants in the setting. As an orphan of the Civil War and a child of the Franco era, he draws on history and the traditional culture of the farm while providing access for a new generation of entrepreneurs in a rural setting. On the other hand, Fortunato is both the ideal of a “man of the people” in his passion for his family, home, and animals, and the astute business entrepreneur whose deep knowledge, insight, and intellect is moving pastoralism to new models. The stakes are high, but as Fortunato notes (and just as Javier had earlier echoed): “If you like your job and you do it with love, it’s not so hard. If you’re bitter about life, everything’s hard.”

As we drive back to Seville this spring afternoon, the sun is already hot, dry, and relentless. It is hard to imagine this landscape and sun in July, when it turns brown and arid, making it impossible to graze livestock. Rafael and Fortunato are lucky to have children who are following in their footsteps. Together, they are fighting a global trend toward urbanization and intensive grazing that, if unchecked, threatens the survival of the delicate *monte mediterráneo* and the rich culture of the people living here. In our one-day visit we have witnessed a family of shepherds working in the rocky pasturelands of Córdoba and Jaén, as well as *dehesa* owners actively engaged in good land-use through multifunctionality. Each group cares deeply about the environment, and each contributes their own vast experience and skills to a shared endeavor. Their story is not just about pastoralism and multifunctionality but also the multigenerational and multi-family teams of people that work together in the country to make a living — and to make a difference in environmental sustainability. On this trip and during later interviews, I continue to hear the recurring challenges of increased costs, lack of access, and oppressive regulations. Already, I am discovering how complex pastoralism is and how it involves a much larger community to keep land healthy so that flocks and herds can safely graze.

## Conclusions and Update

When I call Fortunato in November 2021, he immediately answers, only to say he'll call back after the conference he is attending in Córdoba. A few days later, when we do talk, it is clear that his optimism has waned since 2018. He reports that it is not because his collaborator Rafael has passed — there has been a successful passage of the family legacy onto Isabel, who continues to be a good steward of the land and continues to collaborate well with him. Nor is it the effects of the pandemic. Like Pepe, it had little effect on their lives after the first couple weeks. He admits:

It's almost like it didn't happen. We still got up in the morning, and we spent all day on the land. We came home at night, and we'd see it on TV. We were carrying on in the same way. We probably even worked a little

more peacefully. The Guardia Civil didn't stop us or anything. They'd just wave, and that was it.

Continued problems with government bureaucracy, however, have made things harder each year. Although his family could not continue shepherding without government aid, he says (echoing Pepe Millán) that with the amount of paperwork, documentation, and ever-changing regulations it is impossible to make a living just by shepherding. For example, the new law protecting wolves threatens his livelihood. They have lost 180 sheep to recent attacks. When Rafael's herd of sheep was decimated by wolves, he expressed resignation as he waited for reimbursement from the government. For Fortunato, however, who has fewer resources to support his operation, the loss threatens his livelihood. He reports that he and his son have spent the last four nights sleeping out in the fields because the solutions recommended by the government are useless in their region. Radios, lights, and fencing are not practical in the steep ravines and in an area without electricity. The government will eventually reimburse them for the sheep killed, but the amount of paperwork, documentation, and the lengthy process of receiving payment are only part of the problem. It takes time and energy to replace good breeding sheep that will allow them to re-form and retrain a flock affected in this way.

I'm fighting with the government for some compensation, but it's hard, and you have to be persistent. It's like we don't exist, the government doesn't do anything. They ask for a lot, but they don't give anything in return. Just bureaucracy, paying self-employment taxes, a lot of regulations — like microchips for the sheep — , paperwork, and more paperwork. There's no time for anything else. They're constantly changing the rules for the animal well-being certificate. If it weren't for the assistance, this would not be feasible. There are more and more requirements for new businesses to get aid and lands.

Fortunato offers another example of how new laws can stifle traditions and even threaten livelihoods. As a shepherd, he and his family can no longer perform the traditional *matanza*, the essential practice of slaughtering and preparing a full range of meats, fats, and byproducts from a sheep for family consumption over months.

Disgusted, he says: “I can’t even kill and eat a lamb I’ve raised for my own family.”

When I ask about the conference in Córdoba and his advocacy work, Fortunato explains that the discussions had been focused on the funds of the CAP and on the “transferring of grazing lands, expenses, costs, drinking troughs, and managing aid.” Yet, even as the EU offers these initiatives, he says:

It’s impossible. There is no time. New things are always coming out, and more paperwork. It’s a complete mistake forced on us by the politicians.

The irony here is striking. When I checked back in with researchers and government officials in fall 2021, many commented on the good progress in a general awareness of the plight of the pastoral ecosystems and the families who have worked within them. Meanwhile, every shepherd I interview continues to struggle.

Today, Fortunato’s disillusionment runs deep: he sees a future with fewer shepherds, more rules, and poorer cost margins. As I listen, my own hopes dim for a brighter future for *ganaderos*, even though we heard good news from Juan (see Chapter 1) and Pepe about a new generation taking up the profession.

I see the future as very bad. There are no new generations coming up, no compensation, despite the high unemployment rate. You’ve got to be out in the country with the livestock. When you go to a rented *finca*, the farmhouse is in bad condition. There’s no running water; no electricity to charge your cellphone; no internet. The house doesn’t have anything in it. It takes a small investment: a water tank, a solar panel for your basic needs, and an antenna for cell coverage. It costs a lot, and it’s not profitable. It’s not worth it! I see the future as very, very, very bleak. I’ve been at this for thirty years, but it’s still the same. More new things to do, paperwork, requirements, land problems.... Young people have it really hard. We’re fighting with our lives.

Fortunato also points out a more general, societal loss of a sense of interdependence: “We all need one another. We’re losing certain values in life: communication, closeness, family, contact with other people. We must meet our obligations, not just be free to do as we please. Traditions and customs are disappearing.” He does realize he is “fortunate” to have his son join the family tradition. The situation this month is dire for him



with the recent loss of so many sheep, but some of his hope remains as he states: “We’re waiting for the calm after the storm.” May it be soon.



Fig. 4.1 View of Marta Moya Espinosa's *dehesa* and sheep near Castillo de las Guardas, Seville (2018).