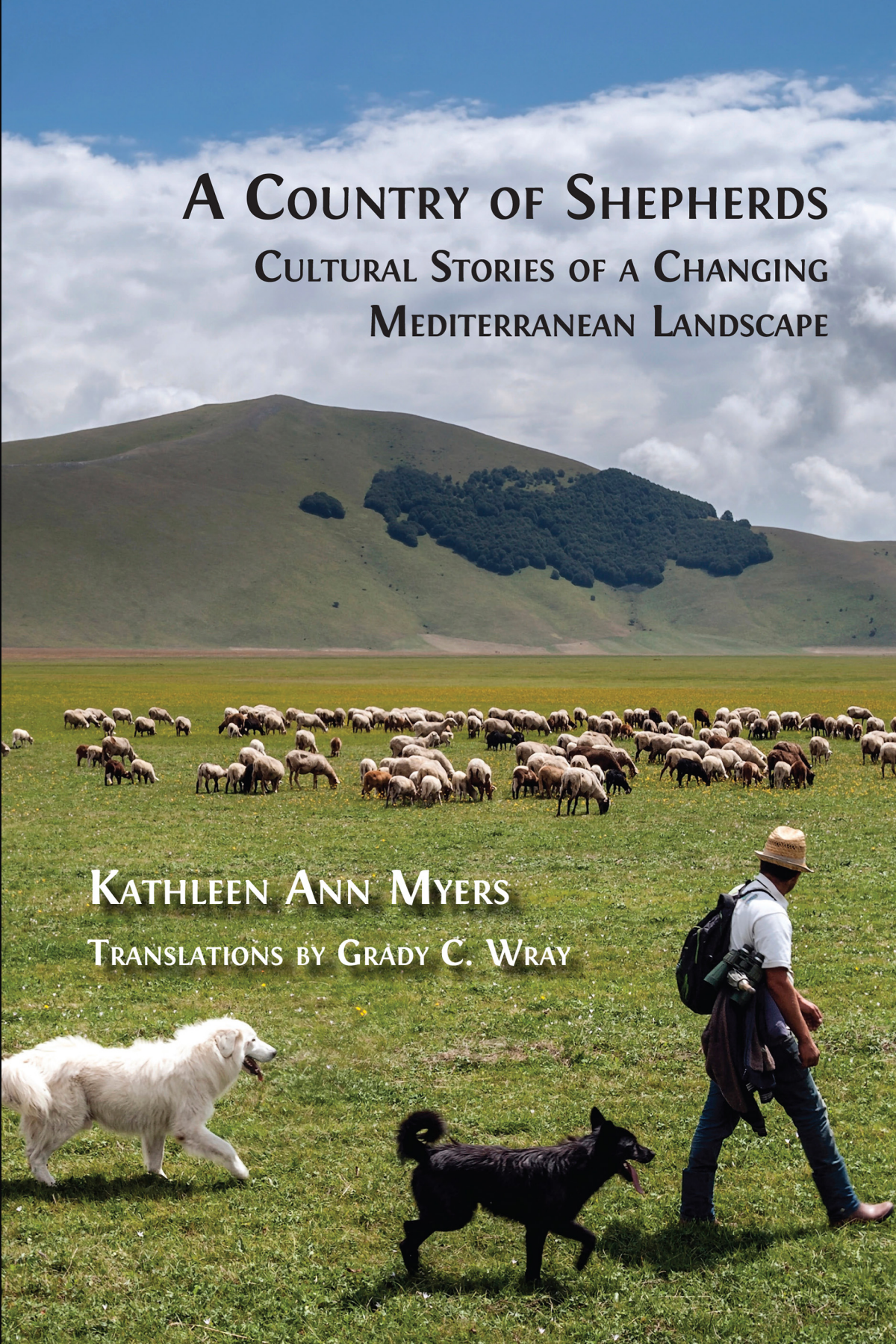
A Country of Shepherds

Cultural Stories of a Changing Mediterranean Landscape



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https://www.openbookpublishers.com

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

Conclusions: Challenges and Opportunities

> Society has changed, and you have to recognize new paradigms in shepherding.
>
> Paqui Ruiz

> We must be practical, we must be strategic, we must choose our priorities.
>
> Ernestine Lüdeke

> I wish there were more people like you; that there was a voice that would speak for us. We're not heard. We need to recognize that the world needs all of us, each and every one.
>
> Fortunato Guerrero Lara

A Country of Shepherds: Stories of a Changing Mediterranean Landscape has taken shape around the case studies of a few shepherds and *ganadero*s based in southern Spain and the regional organizations that offer them support. As we have seen, each of the individuals named here is part of a wider network of family, friends, and collaborators. Our project quickly revealed a snapshot of a larger agricultural system that spreads not only geographically — across Andalusia, Spain, the European Union, and the world — but temporally, across generations of family and cultural inheritance. We have heard a common story among the shepherds of their marginal social and institutional position in the modern world. And yet, the ancient practice of transhumance itself proves to be one of the best examples of the interrelated nature of agricultural systems in a globalized world. We have seen how it has evolved from a practice strictly associated with caring for livestock in the country to a sector that cares for environmental sustainability, animal welfare, and cultural heritage while also maintaining sound ecological land practices.

 https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0387.07

We conclude here with a brief overview of common points raised by the shepherds, resident landowners, and activists whom we have met in *A Country of Shepherds*. Putting these distinct voices in conversation with one another, we gain a wider view of the practices of transhumant shepherding and extensive grazing, as well as the collective efforts keeping them alive. I will summarize obstacles our informants point out and how they relate to larger systemic issues. Then, I will discuss the resilience of this tradition and new paths forward that foster hope for the future of pastoralism in Andalusia.

Systemic Challenges

A common observation from many of our informants is the marginalization of pastoralism. As we heard from Pepe Millán (Chapter 2), despite advocacy through documentaries and national television programs, people involved in the care of livestock in extensive grazing systems report a continuing social stigma surrounding the profession. He notes his own efforts at training the very people who interview him to speak respectfully, "you have to treat each other equally, with respect." More widely, Pepe points to an increasing reliance upon supermarkets in even the most remote of urban centers, which has contributed to a general lack of knowledge surrounding food systems, even among young adults. Modern consumer preferences for the standardization, lower costs, and "cleanliness" of supermarkets often ignore the importance of local diversity and do not recognize the environmental value-added of extensive grazing.

This has led to another challenge. The increased separation of the spheres of production and of consumption exacerbates an old trend in Spain and elsewhere: the urban-rural divide. Consumers are more physically alienated than ever from the lands where their food is produced. Traditional transhumant practices had already decreased with the introduction of railroads. Today, ever-increasing regulatory burdens imposed internationally, along with rising fees and falling sales, have forced many shepherds to abandon the transhumant, overland routes in favor of truck transport. With this precipitous drop in foot traffic by shepherds and the brush-clearing activities of the animals, these routes have become so unkempt they are often unusable even as hiking trails. While this loss of public land is difficult to quantify, it certainly makes less visible the work

that goes into raising these animals and, thus, the products that come of them. In a country like Spain, where an urban-rural divide has taken such dramatic hold over the past century, consumers are more physically alienated than ever from the lands where their food is produced.

As more consumers choose mass-produced supermarket meats, farmers turn to cheesemaking and other strategies, hoping to enter a market with longer-lasting and more-profitable products. And yet, the often-stringent government quality regulations on these secondary products at times has driven this promising source of supplemental (or, in some cases, survival) income to a standstill. The journalist Marta Fernández sums up the future situation: "From a holistic point of view, the social and environmental benefits from shepherding are clear. But in terms of sustainability, one pillar is lacking: the economic one. Therefore, if we wonder if there is a future in this activity, the professionals say it is clear: yes, but there must be supplemental income" (Fernández 6).[1] Here, it is important to consider the role of CAP payments in supplementing incomes (so support can come from markets and/or from policy programs). In plain, direct language, Ernestine Lüdeke (see Chapter 5) gives us the bottom line: "Every consumer, everyone who eats, needs to understand the cost to humanity of mass production of food sources at low costs and how they fail to support a viable future. Society has to pay a lot to make up for the harmful effects to the environment."

This leads us to a third systemic challenge, that of the burdensome regulation imposed at all levels, from the regional to the national and pan-European communities. Shepherds, landowners, and activists all emphasize the oppressive nature of successive layers of bureaucratic obligation. Regulations often impose barriers to *ganadero*s and shepherds who must pay additional duties, adhere to quality assurance and hygiene standards, and navigate a mounting culture of bureaucratic red tape. Shepherds Juan Vázquez (Chapter 1), Pepe Millán (Chapter 2), and Fortunato Guerrero Lara (Chapter 3) all note the lack of help in applying for funding when they are in the field all day and complain of new policies

1 She continues to comment that society "is increasingly aware of environmental sustainability and animal welfare. At the same time, society increasingly distances itself from the impact that the biased interpretation of sustainability really has on the rural environment and its inhabitants who amass a valuable demographic, sociological, territorial, economic, and environmental heritage through the care of their animals" (Fernández 9).

that threaten their livelihoods, such as the new definition of pasturelands on which subsidies are based. Even the resident landowners, like Marta Moya (Chapter 4) and Ernestine Lüdeke (Chapter 5), observe about how time-consuming it is to follow the constantly shifting laws and requirements. For example, the European Union calculates pasturelands without an understanding of how the delicate Mediterranean *dehesa* functions. However, there has been growing awareness of this gap in policy, and new eco-schemes and greening strategies are attempting to take into account a broader definition of regional methods of sustainable farm and land management that are aimed at maintaining public goods.[2]

These problems have been exacerbated by the 2020 elections that overturned decades of Socialist rule in the Junta de Andalucía. The new government "cancelled" the department dedicated to the environment where José Ramón Gutiérrez Álvarez (see Chapter 6) worked (*Consejería de Medio Ambiente*); it is now part of the unwieldy department that also oversees the competing interests of intensive agriculture (*Consejería de Agricultura, Ganadería, Pesca y Desarrollo Rural*). The question today is whether the Junta's significant contribution up to now can continue to be effective with no office dedicated specifically to sustainability and the environment.

When I interview José Ramón about the changes in government, he observes: "We're not very agile. We can't move things along very quickly," and other interest groups, including animal-rights activists, bring "new contradictions that put into question extensive-grazing practices. Now there are barriers to everything we used to do naturally." Others, like Ernestine, argue that not only are there barriers, but that there is a lack of sufficient economic support on the part of the government at the regional, national, and European level for the environmental and territorial services that shepherding provides — services that benefit everyone. Increasing administrative costs and extensive paperwork draw attention, time, and resources away from the primary work of shepherding, which has itself had to struggle in a world characterized by constant technological innovation. Overwhelmed and worn out, Fortunato exclaims, "it's impossible. There's no time. New things are always coming out, and more paperwork. It's all a huge mistake forced on us by the politicians."

2 https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:Eco-schemes

At the European Union level, the CAP legislation often has not been responsive to local and regional needs in member countries, such as in the case of Andalusia. The draft of the proposed new laws, slated to go into effect in 2023, has shaken every individual I checked back with in 2022. As Yolanda Mena mentions in our last chapter, the proposal is for a "green CAP", (now in force 2023–2027) but, in the way it is being configured currently, "the *ganadero*s doing extensive grazing have very little weight. It's becoming more and more complicated." As activist Paco Casero told us earlier (see Chapter 6), many people lay the blame at the feet of the Spanish government, saying officials have long ignored the value of extensive grazing for its role in maintaining rural environments; providing high-quality, sustainable food sources; and even preserving the natural and cultural patrimony. Most advocates are proposing structural changes that would redefine the unique, multivalent contribution of the extensive-grazing system. Key to this restructuring would be establishing more equitable distribution of the European Union's CAP subsidies, which the new 2023–2027 version has attempted to address.

A fourth systemic hurdle, and one with deep historical roots, is what many see as the stubborn resistance of many traditional landowners to adopt techniques of sustainable pastoralism. In contrast to trends of modernization over the last half-century, it can be difficult to re-adopt traditional, sustainable practice. In our interviews, we heard from landowners who decided to become more permanent or semi-permanent residents on their farms and to work directly with their managers. Marta Moya (see Chapter 4) even calculated how much she lost before she began living at least part-time on her land and got to know how to run a sheep farm and shore up its traditional sustainable practices. Looking back in 2022, she observes that "I lost part of the money I earned working at the club in Seville when I wasn't on the *finca*. I still hadn't learned how to properly run the *finca*." Another resident farm owner, Ernestine points out that the lack of understanding and respect follows the lines of rural-urban divide that we have been tracing. Much like Fortunato, she expresses a frustration with those landowners who refuse to listen to the expertise and long-term vision of those who live in closest connection with the land, and who are often interested only in the increasing rent they can charge for land use. As we heard earlier (see Chapter 5), she sums it up, saying "it's very difficult to feel identified with the needs of

an agroecosystem if it's not yours, you're being badly paid, badly treated, exploited. Conversely, if you have a nice income from your farm, you don't have to really be aware of the negative aspects of it, or even live them."

To change this lack of mutual respect and the urban-rural divide, as Fortunato notes, requires both landowners and consumers to better understand the interlocking nature of production, exchange, and consumption that supports all local, national, and global food systems — not just transhumant shepherding. Fortunato describes for us the compatible nature of sustainable farming and maintaining olive groves. But the first step must be for "people to be more aware of what's going on" — by "people", he refers to everyone from consumers to landowners and government officials.

A fifth challenge, surely the most well-discussed in the news, is the impact of global-market forces, over which local producers have no control. Markets are governed as much by real shifts in climate and political upheaval (one of the hottest summers on record and the war in Ukraine are the most recent examples in 2023) as they are by speculative investments. Looking at the last couple years alone, we see how a global pandemic spread fear of disease and affected shepherds as much as anyone. Shepherds rely on a functioning economy and the ability to move their flocks between spaces.[3] If their animals become ill, they lose business. And, while on the move, their access to veterinarians is limited. Yet, because people who work with livestock are considered essential workers, they were exempted from the harshest restrictions of the lockdown in spring 2020.

In this same period, climate-related catastrophes hit hard. For example, a wildfire broke out in the area where the family farms of the *Escuela de Pastores* student Francisco Bueno Mesa (see Chapter 6) are located, near Sierra Bermeja, Málaga. In just the first five days, more

3 While some transhumance was altered and both the Festival of Transhumance and the *Escuela de Pastores* were suspended in 2020, they resumed in 2021. P. O., 'El coronavirus deja este año a Madrid sin ovejas', *Telemadrid*, 16 October 2020, (in Spanish:) https://www.telemadrid.es/coronavirus-covid-19/Madrid-ovejas-trashumancia-coronavirus-0-2277972206--20201016070152.html; Javier López, 'Plan B de la trashumancia para evitar al coronavirus', *ABC de Andalucía*, 22 June 2020, (in Spanish:) https://sevilla.abc.es/andalucia/sevi-plan-trashumancia-para-evitar-coronavirus-202006220740_noticia.html?ref=https:%2F%2Fwww.google.com%2F; Sara Batres, 'Trashumancia en tiempos de coronavirus', *RTVE*, 18 November 2020, (in Spanish:) https://www.rtve.es/noticias/20201118/trashumancia-coronavirus/2057446.shtml

than 19,000 acres burned, and 2,500 people had to evacuate as 650 firefighters and hundreds of emergency military personnel fought the flames (Aritz Parra, AP 9/15/21). Marta Moya also recalled for us the fire that spread through her *dehesa* and rendered it useless for several years. A decrease in extensive-grazing practices means that large areas of highly flammable undergrowth are no longer cleared. Just days before the fire outside of Málaga erupted, the World Bank predicted massive population migrations due to climate change by 2050.[4] The most vulnerable region will be Sub-Saharan Africa because of its "desertification, fragile coastline, and dependence on agriculture", but the environment in southern Spain is also at high risk. Ernestine, once again, puts it plainly:

> The fragile, biodiverse *dehesa* is one of the last defenses Andalusia has in the face of the encroaching Sub-Saharan desert system, which is slowly but surely creeping north. It is up to us to be sure the younger generation understands and accepts this challenge.

She and Paco Casero believe there is still time (though as Ernestine states, "not very much") to ensure regions of Andalusia do not become just another extension of the Sahara.

In addition to climate change and a pandemic, we have also heard how politics can radically shift market trends in a short time. As Fortunato explained in fall of 2021, the reduction in lamb export products from the UK to the European Union due to Brexit actually increased demand and prices for Spanish lamb production for the first time in decades. However, speculative markets can also inject uncertainty for producers: the stock trading on commodities necessary for the raising of livestock, such as animal feed, adds even more variables to an already volatile market for the high-quality, labor-intensive meats raised by Fortunato and shepherds like him. He reminds us again that developing widespread awareness is the key:

> The whole market thing is very complicated.... 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

4 It is estimated that between 44 and 250 million people will have to migrate (published the Groundswell report (13 September 2021) and Renato Brito AP 9/14/21).

> grain seller, I sell it just a certain way…." People need to be more aware of what's going on.

Even with the large gain in lamb prices from Brexit, however, speculative markets reacting to the extreme drought in spring 2022 and forecasts for the months ahead fueled a crisis. According to Yolanda Mena, it is the worst disaster she has witnessed in more than thirty years working in sustainable pastoralism. She is alarmed at what is happening:

> In 2021–22 there was a brutal increase in the cost of production — up to seventy to eighty percent in feed costs for livestock. Between the drought and speculation, no grains have been produced and costs have gone up. For example, in November, forage fodder — essential fiber for grazing animals — was planted, but instead of cutting it for hay, driven by speculation caused by the drought, it was harvested for grain, and now there's not enough hay. The crisis that the people who do extensive grazing are facing is the worst I've seen in my lifetime, worse than the recession of 2008.

Perhaps the most critical challenge to the whole system of sustainable pastoralism, however, is the problem of the generational renewal: the number of shepherds retiring without replacements. Many shepherds recognize this as a problem of inheritance. The struggle to pass onto subsequent generations a practice that often offers fewer and fewer gains — not to mention more and more roadblocks — characterizes the lives of many shepherds today. In the absence of these future stewards of the lands, transhumance will evaporate in obsolescence. Fortunato observes:

> 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 *ganadero*s 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.

Many working conditions would need to change to help keep and attract new shepherds and *ganadero*s to the profession. The city dweller Daniel (see Chapter 5) who left to work as a shepherd-manager at Ernestine's farm summarizes:

> There are a lot of situations where working conditions for contracted shepherds are not the best for a job that's so demanding of self-sacrifice. They have to work too many hours and are probably poorly compensated as to living facilities and days off. In many cases, their monetary compensation is way below what it should be.

Even the efforts of many *ganadero*s (such as Fortunato and Pepe) and some landowners (such as Ernestine) to organize collectively as part of a growing mass of advocacy platforms — not to mention those of regional governments (such as the Junta de Andalucía) to help fund pastoralism and to teach classes on the practice — are not enough to guarantee its permanence. The shortage of workers has worsened, at least temporarily, due to new labor shifts since the pandemic, says Marta Moya. When the lockdown took place in Andalusia, many farm owners who lived in the cities moved to their farms, sharing lodging and routines with resident laborers and shepherds. She says: "This mixing of people did not go well. Often the people who work the farms are there because they not only like nature, but they like the solitude and independence of working primarily on their own without the landowner and their families there 24/7." In the aftermath of those four or six months of the lockdown, "there was a lot of movement all around." Many shepherds quit their positions. In Marta's case, she has had to manage the farm and animals on her own with sporadic help from family for nearly a year as a range of workers have come and gone — most of whom have little experience. Now, because of her own experience with the challenges of shepherding, like having to rescue her flock from a country road at midnight, Marta has a personal understanding of the demands of the work. As we heard earlier, she emphasizes: "If you weren't invested in the welfare of the sheep, would you go out in the freezing cold?"

A Path Forward

Despite these and other systemic challenges, the individuals we have heard from all recognize a path forward based on the environmental benefits these traditional practices offer, and they express hope that a cultural renewal in the public sphere will create stronger markets and policies to sustain pastoralism. First, many agree that the tide is turning as the public and governments become increasingly aware of the critical role for pastoralism in environmental and rural sustainability. In the five

years between my first and final interviews, the conversation changed. During the first months of the pandemic, because people who work with livestock were considered essential workers, they were exempted from the harshest restrictions of the lockdown in spring 2020. By 2022, shepherds, resident landowners, and advocates all commented on a shift in public awareness about pastoralism as sustainable-ranching practices and transhumance. *Ganadero*s are as important to ecosystems as bees, according to student-*ganadero* Francisco Bueno:

> They say that if there weren't any bees the world would cease to exist because bees give us pollen. It's not the same relatively speaking, but it is true: if there weren't sheep, goats, and this type of livestock, we would probably not have the diversity that we have right now. They no longer say that the shepherd or the *ganadero* is the lowest of the low. People are finally realizing that a lot of people live and a lot of natural diversity thrives because of *ganadero*s and what we do. We have to realize this; we have to make sure that others realize this.

Despite the persistence of urban-rural and production-consumption divides, more people understand the benefits of buying local, sustainably produced food and products if they can afford them. People working within the *plataforma* system note progress in marketing high-quality woolen and food products to select markets that have expanded due to public awareness.[5] The government official José Ramón Gutiérrez smiles, saying, "After ten to fifteen years of public campaigning, society is recognizing that we're at a crucial moment for extensive grazing. As the saying goes, 'better late than never'." Yolanda Mena at the University of Seville also sees a corresponding shift:

> What I've perceived in the last few years is a greater sensitivity for the extensive grazing type of pastoralism and *plataformas* that support communication between all actors — *ganadero*s as well as researchers. They're all coming together.

Secondly, as more consumers and government officials understand the contribution made to the environment and society by the production of local artisanal goods, there are more opportunities for direct marketing. Small producers like Juan (Chapter 1), as well as Pepe's daughter Rita,

5 See, for example, the group Govinnova (www.goovinnova.org), in which Ernestine Lüdeke is an active member.

have been able to capture a part of this market. In fact, Juan turned the catastrophe of the pandemic to his advantage: when he contracted COVID-19 and his buyer halted all purchases from him for six months, he was forced to seek other solutions. Motivated by the Junta de Andalucía's loosening of restrictions, Juan and his wife Manoli are able to sell their cheeses directly to established customers. When I last saw Juan, he could not linger to talk long because he was busy delivering their hand-crafted cheeses. As Rita Millán (see Chapter 2) explains:

> It's up to all of us to change how we do things; to get rid of the middlemen and make direct sales to the consumer. So yes, then you can make a profit. If not, it's very, very, very hard. It depends on feed prices if you have a good year. It depends on many, many things, and then, on what they want to pay you.

Part of the project to help with direct sales is better marketing, which includes creating easily identifiable brands and, as Rita notes, using the internet to reach a broader clientele. As the president of the collective "Asociación Pastores por el Monte Mediterráneo" noted, "responsible consumerism needs to continue developing and grow deeper roots in society, and *ganadero*s need to know this loyal consumer market will demand high quality products." Indeed, Yolanda Mena's working group at the University of Seville has launched "a collective brand, a brand-name quality seal" to help consumers easily identify high-quality local products.

Thirdly, as current labor opportunities continue to be inadequate to meet the needs of many people, pastoralism offers an alternative to the modern urban lifestyles in which some people feel cut off or alienated from nature, community, and tradition. When I first began this project in 2015, the impact of the 2008 global recession was still being felt in Andalusia, especially by young people who were often unemployed or underemployed. Teaching English at the University of Seville at that time, I was shocked to find that 80% of the students taking my course saw only two options to make a living: either to work in the tourist industry or emigrate to another part of the European Union. English was the passport to both. Since then, unemployment has decreased, but many young people still have not found much stability. Since the advent of the global pandemic in 2020, which hit urban Spain particularly hard, COVID-19 became a catalyst for people to escape congested urban areas — at least for now. A man in his early thirties at the *Escuela de Pastores*, who wants to become a shepherd, says: "I don't

like working in the city, but I do like working with animals. Besides, there's an urgent need for more shepherds." People like him express interest in living more closely to nature, having a personal connection to their work, making a contribution to the environment, and finding a livelihood that can sustain them. As we heard from the shepherd-manager Daniel:

> When I would run into people that had found shepherding, I was always attracted to the work they were doing, the way they lived, the way they acted. It was something that just drew me in. In these last few years, after doing a round of training in forest management, I came to the conclusion that I needed to experience the essence of shepherding. I felt the need to get out of the city, the fast-paced rhythm of today's society and everything that has to do with urban life.

Fortunato's son, Javier, also noted for us that, in 2016, the conditions of economic crisis over the previous five years had pushed some young university-educated Spaniards back to their hometowns and to the countryside more generally, where many of them ultimately would find work in professions, such as shepherding, for which they were not originally trained. Around this migration has sprung up a neo-ruralist movement, in which both people from small towns and from large cities have come to find new meaning in their lives through their adoption of those traditions that they had previously disavowed or never known. As we heard, Javier believes there is a role for everyone and every profession, but that food production is key: "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."

Fortunato comments that "the best inheritance I can leave him [Javier] is his career," and other shepherds speak in similar terms of inheritance. Even Juan — who asked us rhetorically, "Who wants to do this on a Saturday night?" — finds himself taken aback by the eagerness of some members of the younger generation, including his own nephew, to take up shepherding. Even then, as the perspective of Javier already suggests, this is not the same specialized career for which the youth have been university trained, reminding us: "You have to live it. And besides, you have to pass it on from generation to generation. You can't learn it from a book." Pepe Millán also told us how he learned without a father or schooling but through his keen sense of observation: "You have to watch nature.... You can study all you want, but you have to watch and learn."

A fourth aspect of this shift in pastoralism, then, is the shift in education and training for labor opportunities in the profession. While "the book" that Javier and Pepe refer to above may be a stand-in for contemporary educational and labor models, study is becoming more common in order to sustain pastoralism. The newer generation, like Pepe's daughter Rita, studied the administrative hoops to handle multiple sets of regulations and paperwork. Besides the traditional walking stick to herd their flocks, they need internet access and knowledge of how to work with government policies and funding. This is why the Junta de Andalucía now guarantees graduates of the *Escuela de Pastores* help in attaining licenses for land and flocks. They also learn more about the environmental and cultural benefits their work provides. While many long-time shepherds are amused at the thought of shepherd school, there are growing numbers of graduates from these shepherd-training institutions. Recent graduates of the *Escuela de Pastores*, as well as a fourth-generation shepherd like Francisco Bueno, increasingly understand the larger environmental, economic, and cultural value of the work they do: "Thanks to us, a lot of people live from livestock, but it also benefits the environment." *Neo-rurales* that we heard from, like Daniel who trained at Ernestine's educational center, see their role and the skill it requires:

> Shepherding is very special because it has gone from being a rather common profession in earlier times to the way it is today, with fewer people wanting to dedicate themselves to it and its tradition of preserving a part of our history and customs. Also, it demands you understand the animals, in this case the sheep, and the great psychological commitment it takes to spend hours alone, exposed to the weather.

As we saw in Chapters 5 and 6, these shepherd-training programs provide students with a vast range of information and practical skills; once completed, they now also increasingly come with a near-guarantee of work. In addition to addressing the need for a higher standard of living, the schools are now training their students on how to market their products. The director of the *Escuela de Pastores*, Paco Ruiz, for example, teaches a course on how to establish cheese shops.

Ownership and fair pay are a critical fifth area for nurturing a path forward. Every informant, whether shepherd, landowner, or university researcher mentions the importance of improving these aspects. Since generational inheritance poses a daily concern for shepherds today,

the recent ability of shepherds to apply for funding to own their own *explotación* (large flock) and to assist with costly access to land, as well as the *plataformas* that help them access these funds, are critical to being able to set up their own practice. In *A Country of Shepherds*, we have heard from three families of shepherds that have developed their own businesses, as well as shepherd-managers who are finally being given better working conditions. Both are relatively new situations and give workers more of a stake in the outcomes of their labor. Owning their own businesses, however, has come at a steep cost in terms of time, money, and stress. While these *ganadero*s see it as the only way forward to live better and, perhaps, to have interested family members take over, they also note that the responsibilities of ownership, too, are not sustainable in their current form. Fortunato's family, for example, now owns all of their flocks, but they cannot continue to work at the current level; the need to move beyond subsistence living cannot be at the cost of no time off. As Fortunato ironically jokes: "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." For her part, *Escuela de Pastores* graduate Paqui Ruiz argues that new collectives of shepherds are the key to moving forward. "There aren't a lot of farming families who can do it on their own." They need better working hours and vacations for a better quality of life. All three of the landowners we interviewed also recognized this need for both ownership and better working conditions for their shepherd-managers. As Marta stated, "The days of near-slavery are long gone." "We need to be practical," argues Ernestine, "and first fight to attract young people to shepherding … we need a new management system. In twenty years, it will be too late!"

To reach this goal, there needs to be more focus on a sixth area, changes in government policies. We have seen some concrete beneficial changes in local, regional, and European Union regulations to support pastoralism. The subsidies offered for an *explotación* have been the catalyst for several of the families we interviewed to expand their work. They have also been a catalyst for the family of Vanesa Pablo Fernández (see Chapter 1) to work toward having their own business while the local town supported them by offering temporary grazing land. As Vanesa explained earlier, in three years they have gone from three goats to nearly two hundred and can now apply for government subsidies. She jokes about how she has gotten into great shape, but she also gets to the heart of what needs to

happen in the profession: "It has to be your project," your own business. Fortunato suggests there needs to be much more support:

> Everything can always get better in life.... For the government's part... if they could compensate public *finca*s 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.

But, as Paco Casero and others note, the Spanish government often has not fought hard enough for pastoralism within the European Union CAP system, nor has it fairly distributed funds from it. Both Vanesa and Rita Millán conclude that the only way to help close this gap without more subsidies is to "sell directly to the consumer" to avoid middlemen taking a big cut of any profits made.

The regional government's loosening of restrictions on the sales of locally produced cheeses saved Juan's family during COVID-19, and now every graduate of the *Escuela de Pastores* receives a license for their own flock. Positive change in government practices around pastoralism does make a difference. When I catch up with José Ramón Gutiérrez in 2022, he proudly notes that the *Escuela de Pastores* is thriving. It had sixty applicants for twenty-five places this year, and completion of the program now "fulfills requirements that make you eligible for government subsidies". José Ramón is preparing his notes for the closing session, a round table that includes collectives and shepherds as they discuss: "What does extensive grazing need to learn in the twenty-first century?" His basic philosophy motivates his work:

> Shepherds need the ability to communicate — to communicate what they do; what they need. They are no longer those solitary figures who have very little to do with the town they come down to visit every once and a while. Today they share the same rural environment and the perception of the world — just like any young person.

The researcher working with Ana Belén Robles's group at CSIC, María Eugenia Ramos Font (see Chapter 6), is part of this emerging generation living in a highly digital, connected world. She believes that "young people have to step up; young people have the power" to make positive change and make these demands. She smiles, saying she knows they are out there already making connections, sharing knowledge: "I follow a WhatsApp group that has 143 members. They're always sharing things, tricks, what

they like, how many births they've had." These connections could be harnessed and become powerful forces for change. According to journalist Marta Fernández, "social networking can be the megaphone for them to be the 'influencers' for this sector" (8). This new movement, however, must be accompanied by political support, as shepherd-manager Daniel notes:

> As far as the *ganadero*s are concerned, especially small-time *ganadero*s, certain governmental policies must change to allow for profitability from these *explotaciones* without affecting the quality of the *explotación* or the labor conditions of the workers.

Other administrative decisions made by the Junta de Andalucía, such as the selection of directors of public lands, can also ensure long-term sustainability. Directors need to understand how the viability of public land often depends on integrating pastoral practices with land-management plans. The photographer-vet-activist we interviewed in Chapter 6, Maricarmen García, for example, was named Director of the Parque Natural del Castoril in 2020. Her vision of the close relationship between land management and extensive grazing will help ensure biodiversity and combat the negative effects of intensive agriculture in southern Spain. The key, as we heard from Maricarmen above, is that "we need society and people living in cities to understand what shepherds do today. They manage environmentally high-value lands. They care for these high-value biodiverse spaces."

Finally, shepherds and others working in programs related to land use and pastoralism also continue to strengthen the scaffolding on a wide range of issues to make it more profitable. Besides help with transhumance and knowledge sharing, one of the biggest focal points among shepherds has been advocacy for reform in agricultural and livestock policies. We saw in Chapter 6 how many *plataformas* have joined efforts to change proposed new CAP guidelines that undermine the strides made in sustainable pastoralism. Yolanda Mena describes how the European Union proposal restructures CAP subsidies into a two-part subsidy system, with one part directed to practitioners but with a new set of requirements that would make it "increasingly more complicated for the *ganadero*s who practice extensive grazing and have very little weight to make changes to the strategic plan". She also lists a whole series of activists, organizations, and conferences working to change the proposal before it's too late. Many of the *plataformas* we mentioned above — such as "Asociación Pastores por el Monte Mediterráneo", "Asociación

Trashumancia y Naturaleza", "Fundación Savia", and la "Plataforma por la Ganadería Extensiva y el Pastoralismo" — were developing collective campaigns when I last interviewed them. They were hoping to help focus policy on transhumance and extensive grazing that was going to be included in the CAP "eco-scheme" that was rolled out in 2023. They set out to demonstrate these systems' ecological benefit.[6] These organizations amplify the voices of shepherds and *ganadero*s, who are faced with bureaucratic changes that threaten the viability of their work.

This extensive government activity and programming, however, is overwhelming for most *ganadero*s and shepherds who must dedicate full-time to the care of the flocks, as Pepe noted. In response to this dilemma, Ana Belén Robles's group is developing a concrete solution, a central office dedicated to assisting *ganadero*s with bureaucratic red tape, helping smaller-scale agriculture workers navigate the increasing regulation of pastoralism. She explains that bureaucratic changes like the ones proposed in the new CAP wreak havoc on people who work with livestock: "They need to dedicate time to their animals. They don't have time to do paperwork or do the work to rent pasturelands. They need someone else to do it, and many times it's left up to their wives who are the administrators for the family." If we expect a new generation of young people to take up the profession, she maintains, we must acknowledge that they will demand a certain lifestyle like their peers that includes free time, having an internet connection, and a decent income. We need offices to help them secure funding, access to pasturelands, and support for a good quality of life. Echoing Fortunato Guerrero Lara's observation, Ana sees how otherwise young people "look for other ways out. Or they look for extra work or an alternative so they can still be close to the land."

While each of these initiatives will strengthen the future of pastoralism, people like Ernestine Lüdeke caution that these partial models are often not enough to sustain transhumant shepherding. Larger structures are needed, she insists. People with any investment in it at all must "get to a point where it can be part of a more global system" that prioritizes a very practical strategy, matching the interests of everyone involved:

> We need people who breed dogs, people who have sheep, people who produce certain products that we need for the dogs. We need architects

6 See, for example, Por otra PAC, 2019, (in Spanish:) https://porotrapac.org/

> who can construct simple housing in the north where people can stay. And we need modern people to tell us how, with solar panels, we can make warm water and have cell phones work.

As a transhumant shepherd himself, Fortunato points out, "Transhumance has always happened, but now it could easily fail because there isn't a population who gets their products from transhumant livestock." Employing some of the very infrastructures she outlines, last year (2022), Ernestine's collective of transhumant sheep reached nearly 14,000, and Jesús Garzón's nearly 20,000. There is reason for hope, but there is also a clear call to action on all our parts.

Evidence of this increased awareness of the need for a unified approach at the level of the national government is the recent publication, *Propuesta de bases técnicas para una estrategia estatal de la ganadería extensiva* (October 2022), which, as we saw in Chapter 6, is the result of a collaborative process with some of the most influential collectives in Spain. The document outlines a whole range of concrete actions for the Ministry of Agriculture to approve. To name just a few of those actions that dovetail with what we have heard: creating a centralized bureaucracy for paperwork; establishing educational banks of information; restructuring CAP subsidies; legislating fiscal incentives for extensive grazing over intensive agriculture; requiring purchase of extensive grazing products for state functions; assuring access to pasturelands; helping generate public-private initiatives; incorporating more women; connecting young shepherds with those who are retiring; and initiating public campaigns on the nutritional and climate benefits of extensive grazing (*Propuesta* 101–24). The action list is impressive, and the hope, given the current crisis in pastoralism, is that it will move forward in a timely manner. If the action plan can be implemented soon — and if we as consumers can make sustainable choices — then positive change is on the horizon.

In our case studies of transhumant shepherding and extensive grazing in Andalusia, we have heard about many factors that are not under the control of individuals. From changes in local and regional government, market demands, and access to pasturelands and droving roads, to climate change and the global economy, the speed of change has accelerated and manifested itself in both changing consumption habits and the destruction of traditional habitats. In our chapter on the plataformas, we discussed scaffolding as the structures and support that surround extensive

grazing, yet as we have seen in *A Country of Shepherds*, this infrastructure relies on multiple layers and interconnecting roles in society to ensure resiliency and sustain the practice. Moving forward, we can visualize it as interlocking system of public policy, professional organizations, and community networks, as well as of individuals like us who can change our patterns of consumption to support more local products for a larger net benefit: sustainable ecosystems, cultural traditions, and rural development. Landowner Rafael Enríquez del Río (see Chapter 3) noted, in his efforts to bring on a number of family businesses to help manage his farm, the problem of rural depopulation: "A fundamental building block are the people who live in the country. When people leave the rural areas, what happens? You lose your culture." More importantly, this sustainable, multifunctional farming, he argued, is our only path forward, "especially if we want to live in a world that's not so cruel".

Recent changes to this way of life are partly balanced by new opportunities: modern innovations in communication have allowed the traditionally marginalized shepherds to stay connected to family, collaborators, and markets more than any time in history. A new cultural interest and respect for time-honored traditions has resulted in an explosion of cultural production and renewed public interest, especially among young people who represent the future of these practices. Consumer preferences are changing worldwide. The scaffolding support offered by the *plataformas* has continued to mature. Finally, the reality of global climate change has galvanized public and government attention to environmental issues.

All these developments offer hope to the people we interviewed, and courage to keep going. We have to admire a businessman who would endure the loss of 60% of his stock and still plan to rebuild, a shepherd nearing retirement who retools his family business to meet the emerging demands of a new economy, and a landowner who works alongside her manager doing the hard work of farming and to see first-hand the changes that need to be made. Now it is up to the larger community of consumers, leaders, and politicians to show the resiliency these traditional practitioners already possess. As Ernestine points out so clearly: "There isn't much time left; this way of life, this natural world is disappearing fast. I want to believe … step by step, people will change." The practitioners of transhumance, like those of all subsistence livelihoods, have always been grounded in true resilience. Shepherds like Pepe Millán possess a keen

power of scientific observation that have helped them adapt over millennia — from seasonal changes to climate challenges, drought, pestilence, crop failures, livestock disease, and countless other challenges — by constantly changing their practices. For them, resiliency isn't an academic term: it has always been a way of life, a matter of survival, not of choice.

We have heard a common story among shepherds, landowners, and their advocates. Each group points to the ancient practice of pastoralism as a way forward, as the practice proves to be one of the best examples of the interrelated nature of agricultural systems in the globalized world. The long-standing cultural narrative of Spanish shepherds as symbols of humble Christian virtue, integral to Spanish identity, or more recently, as eco-heroes, is not enough to keep this tradition alive and protect the valuable cultural landscapes and eco-systems threatened by extinction. We all have a part in how this story will unfold globally over the next couple decades. As citizens — and consumers — we will have powerful input into its outcome.

Fig. 7.1 *Zapatos tradicionales del pastoreo* [traditional shepherds' shoes] (2017).