Reintroducing Bears and Restoring Shepherding Practices

The Production of a Wild Heritage Landscape in the Central Pyrenees

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> Why is there a problem? This is the question. And I do not have the answer. But I am sure it is not . . . because we [public administration] pay late, underpay, and do not protect [the flocks] well. I am sure it is not about this, because this is not the point . . . there are more things.
> —Catalan's Director of Environment at the Catalan Parliament, 2 February 2019

Introduction

The French and Spanish governments signed an agreement in 1993 to launch a European Union (EU) LIFE project (Chandivert 2010) that aimed to *restore* the presence of brown bears in the Pyrenees once they were considered almost extinct (Camarra et al. 2011). Since then, the bear population has been increasing as a result of four waves of releases of translocated individuals from Slovenia. The reintroduction program also fostered a regrouping policy for sheep flocks to prevent bear attacks. This measure entailed the *return* of shepherds and livestock guardian dogs (LGDs), as well as restructuring previous local farmers' shepherding practices.

This chapter questions the notion of return through which both the reintroduced bears and the new regrouping policy—and more specifically the reappearance of shepherds—have been framed by proponents of the bear program. The program's proposal to restore a certain mountain landscape composed of bears, shepherds, and LGDs is flawed by the very essence of landscapes, which are studied from the past, but necessarily

thought about from a presentism bias (Hirsch and Stewart 2005; Ringel 2016; Pèlachs et al. 2017). Consequently, translocation rewilding strategies (Nogués-Bravo et al. 2016) such as the bear reintroduction program stand on an unsolvable paradox. While they consist of an active environmental engineering endeavor, they also attempt to remake "formerly productive landscapes . . . both materially and semiotically through the practices of 'ecological restoration'" (Castree and Braun 1998: 2). In doing so, they fully engage with the construction and contents of the before-after succession: the temporal politics of the past (Ringel 2016).

Based on our ethnographic fieldworks in the Catalan (Spain) and Ariège (France) Pyrenees and inspired by Tania Li's standpoint of making "improvement strange" (2007: 3), we have tackled the notion of return with estrangement. This distancing view directed us towards, and has been reinforced by, two ethnographic studies on the history (see Hirsch and Stewart 2005) of the shepherding practices on both sides of the Pyrenees to criticize the very idea of return. Local and transhumant farmers have been continuously adapting to varying ecological, social, economic, political, and legal contexts. From this vantage point and inspired by Karl Jacoby's concept of moral ecology to criticize environmental conservation (2019),[1] we contend that the bear program must be read through notions of change and adaptation, rather than those of return and conservation. The accounts gathered through interviews with local farmers highlight a set of historical changes in the shepherding practices in the Central Pyrenees before and after the implementation of the bear reintroduction program. Following Jason Moore (2015: 28), we approach these historical changes "through the dialectical movements of humans making environment, and environment making humans."

In contrast to the above, the notion of return claimed by the bear program's proponents is based on Western historicism (Hirsch and Stewart 2005; Stewart 2016), in which the past is separated from the present, and on the Cartesian Nature/Society dualism (Moore 2015), in which the ontological status of entities is imposed over relationships. In this vein, the environment and the humans, epitomized by the bears and extensive farming, appear as two separate entities *from the past*, while the program's proponents and the farmers emerge as representatives of each one of them confronting amenity vis-à-vis production-based capitalist views of natural resources (Walker 2003). A critical insight into the program's chronology (Ingold 1993) allows us to challenge both Western historicism and Nature/Society dualism as well as to map out the ensuing political hierarchy of environmental conservation policies over extensive livestock farming.

Based on the two ethnographic studies on the history of shepherding practices presented here, we will show to what extent the bear reintro-

duction program was preceded by a set of changing shepherding models, each one of them strikingly different from the one this program claims to restore. As a result, we question the accuracy of framing as a return the reintroduction of brown bears and the reappearance of shepherds as well as LGDs. Rather, should we not consider them as a newly designed landscape, in which only certain features of a past time have been retrieved, whereas many others have been added for the sake of producing a certain wild landscape?

We divide this chapter[2] into three main sections: 1) an outline of the bear program's chronology and its imposing consequences for local farmers, highlighting the Nature/Society divide and the political hierarchy between these two separate realms; 2) two ethnographic historical accounts from the Bonabé and Biros valleys, in the Pallars Sobirà (Spain) and Ariège (France) districts respectively, to illustrate how the notion of return, as used to describe shepherding practices, crumbles in the face of historical changes in flock management on both sides of the range; and 3) a reflection on how the bear program unfurls in a twofold *naturalization* process via the idiom of heritage that leads to the production of a landscape through an imposition/salvation conundrum in which the renewed presence of bears is *naturalized* or taken-for-granted and the bear is presented as though it would make the Pyrenees a *more natural* or wilder place.

What Comes after the Bear? Imposing Wilderness and Shepherding Practices

While the *return* of bears as the quintessential environmental hallmark for biodiversity conservation is advocated as a way to *recover* lost Pyrenean natural values from the past, the reappearance of shepherds and LGDs—and the ensuing *restoration* of certain shepherding practices—is claimed to safeguard vanishing sociocultural ones. This narrative of *return* conceals, however, an ontological division and a political hierarchy between the natural and the social in which the bear (Nature) has been first detached and thereafter hierarchically conceived in relation to the shepherding practices (Society). The reintroduction of bears was conceived as a priority, whereas the implementation of a regrouping policy with a set of protective measures—shepherds, LGDs, and electrified enclosures—to mitigate sheep casualties was considered only when conflicts arose among local farmers. Both the ontological division, based on the classic Cartesian dualism, and the political hierarchy, are part of the very essence of the program's hegemonic ideology (Comaroff and Comaroff 2006). This ideology lays the foundations for, and is countered by, local farmers' feelings of imposition.

Taking the program's chronology as a prompt, we argue that Nature—bears—and Society—shepherding practices—have been approached as bounded and detached realms. This Western ontological premise paved the way for the ensuing sequential hierarchy between environmental conservation goals and the challenges that spring from the interplay between livestock and wildlife. Returning to the opening quote, the ontological separation and the political hierarchy between these two realms is key to tackling the question of "why is there a problem" around the bear program. In effect, part of the problem relates to how the idea of return is built upon the politics behind the bear. A brief context of the bear population and its shifting status in the Pyrenees will serve to introduce the state politics or practice of governments (Li 2007) that underpins the bear program.

The native bear population plummeted from a few hundred in the early twentieth century to barely five individuals in the 1990s (Casanova 1997; Marliave 2008). Even though bear hunting was formally forbidden both in Spain and France in the 1960s, poaching and isolated hunting accidents continued to occur. This situation and the spread of the second wave of worldwide environmentalism (Adams 2003; Anderson and Grove 1987; Guha 2000) led to the implementation of EU (e.g., Bern Convention 1979) and state initiatives that provided bears with full legal protection between the 1970s and 1980s (Casanova 1997), when the Pyrenean brown bear population was estimated at around twenty (Marliave 2008). In a short time span, bears shifted status from a hunted species to a protected one, ultimately leading to a cross-border large-scale reintroduction program to recover their plummeting population, which by that time was located only in the Western Pyrenees (Caussimont 2013; Parellada, Alonso, and Toldrà 1995). The political arena and the social tensions among the Institution Patrimoniale du Haut-Béarn (Mermet and Benhammou 2005)—a cluster of local councils, hunters, farmer organizations, and ecological and tourist associations in dialogue with the state in the western region of France—advised against releasing the first translocated individuals in this area, but rather setting the reintroduction in the Central Pyrenees, where bears had been already extinct. An institutional network, composed of a few ecological organizations founded specifically for this task, and four municipalities had been established in the French Haute-Garonne district (Benhammou 2007), where the first reintroduction took place. Since 1996, eight females and three males have been released in the mountain range in four waves (1996/97, 2006, 2016, and 2018), setting the current population over fifty bears (Réseau Ours Brun 2020), most of them currently dwelling in the Central Pyrenees. The success in raising the bear population from a handful of individuals settled in the Western Pyrenees to more than fifty, mostly dwelling in the Central Pyrenees, contrasts with the program's

failure to gain acceptance from the farming sector. The local population's lack of participation in the process—local farmers in particular—due to the top-down approach ingrained in this program coupled with the relocation of the releases from the Western to the Central part of the range, brings us to underline the political character of this conservation program behind its alleged biodiversity conservation rationale. Both the ontological division and the hierarchy of Nature over Society are constitutive to state politics or the practice of governments deployed through the bear program.

In line with this perspective, we contend that the program has resulted in two sorts of impositions for local farmers: imposing wilderness (Neumann 1992) through the reintroduction of bears underpinned by what we call a twofold *naturalization* process; and imposing upon farmers' conducts through a sheep regrouping policy that has changed previous shepherding practices. Both the bear and the shepherding practices have been ideologically—and hence politically—claimed as natural and cultural heritage assets respectively, to be restored from the past and transposed to the present as an opportunity or even a salvation for the dire farming sector. On the one hand, we stress that the program spearheads, paradoxically resorting to the past via heritage narratives, a twofold *naturalization* in the Pyrenees, in which the bear would allow for the production of a wild heritage landscape (Baird 2017). Yet, the naturalized presence of bears and the naturalizing effect of such are both conceived of by farmers as impositions.

On the other hand, the notions of environmentality, as a public governance of natural resources that aims to conduct local farmers' conduct in myriad forms (Agrawal 2005; Fletcher 2010), and territoriality, as "the unfolding of a society into a territory" (Vaccaro, Dawson, and Zanotti 2014: 3), are key to understanding the feeling of imposition experienced by local farmers in the wake of the state-driven sheep regrouping policy. Farmers' forms of dwelling (Ingold 2000) have varied over time, but more recent ones, prior to the reintroduction of bears in the Pyrenees, have been questioned by the program's proponents for paradoxically resorting to, and aiming to recover, age-old shepherding practices. The renewed presence of bears has been followed by a state-driven regrouping policy for sheep flocks. This new shepherding system consists of gathering several sheep groups in a single flock with the abovementioned set of protective measures. This policy was fostered and funded by public administrations in order to protect flocks from bear attacks. The resulting collective flocks, and more specifically the renewed presence of professional shepherds and LGDs, are deemed as restoring the social and cultural heritage values of the Pyrenees by allegedly returning to an old shepherding model—the village flock—in which a local shepherd surveils private flocks owned by

different farmers from the village. Schools of Shepherds, created in the 2000s, have become a way to preserve this heritage. New shepherds have gained social status through a professionalized career while their salaries have been paid by the state and their work conditions have improved in recent years. Inasmuch as the presence of shepherds is claimed as a way to restore waning shepherding knowledge and practices, institutional narratives have fostered the use of a specific breed as an LGD due to its contribution to the preservation of the Pyrenean heritage: the Great Pyrenees. This breed was historically prevalent in the Pyrenees as the flocks' protection dog until the early twentieth century when the decline of large carnivores along the range meant that these dogs were no longer used in the Central Pyrenees (Ferrer i Sirvent 2004).

Back to What? Tracking the Historical Changes among Shepherding Practices in the Bonabé and Biros Valleys: Parallel Paths for a Common Present?

I had never seen a bear before. It was completely extinct. After this reintroduction, everything changed. Before, our sheep benefitted from the mountains. Now, they are not free and so they do not benefit from these pastures as they used to and do not become as round and fine as before. You know, we used to breed and graze the *broutard*, the young sheep, in the mountain pastures but we no longer can do this. It is too dangerous [due to bear attacks]. We had to change our method, we can no longer work as usual. (Farmer, Biros Valley)

Local farmers have been pressed to change their shepherding practices due to the renewed presence of bears. Indeed, bears have brought shepherds, LGDs, and electrified enclosures, but also a sense of constraint and discontent that has permeated into the core of the farming sector. The protective measures implemented in the Central Pyrenees after the bear program were seen by conservation advocates and political institutions as ways to restore a previous shepherding management system, presumably shared since time immemorial across the entire mountain range. However, the ethnographic data gathered on the multiple transformations among shepherding practices throughout the twentieth century in the Bonabé and Biros valleys, in the Pallars Sobirà (Spain) and Ariège (France) districts respectively, challenges these notions of restoration, continuity, and uniformity, by providing an insightful overview of the shepherding practices through the lens of historical changes.

In 2019, on the southern slope of the range, the "core bear area" of the Catalan Pyrenees, northeastern Spain—covering the Val d'Aran district

and the northern regions of the Pallars Sobirà district (around 1,300 square kilometers in total), including the Bonabé valley—held six collective flocks comprising of around seven thousand sheep. Since 2012, and as a result of the consolidation of the bear population in the region, the village of Isil at the entrance of the Bonabé valley has hosted the only museum on the southern slope of the Pyrenees devoted to the brown bear: The House of the Bear. In 2019, on the northern slope, the mountain pastures of Ariège (southwestern France) held around fifty-nine thousand sheep, extending their territory over around 1,400 square kilometers. The *return* of bears in this area has also entailed a recent process of labeling, redefining this area as Pays de l'Ours (Bear Country) by several Pyrenean ecologist organizations to garner attention within the purview of local green tourism. The Bonabé and Biros[3] valleys and their respective mountain pastures become especially pertinent to assessing shepherding changes and adaptations due to their long-standing and current pastoral life alongside the large number of bears present in these two areas.

The Collective and Individualized Management of Flocks (Catalan Pyrenees)

"Along this road here [the main entrance to the Bonabé valley], which then was not a road but a track, 'el Tort' [the most popular and powerful farmer from that epoch settled in Alós d'Isil] brought six thousand sheep. And Pubill [another *strong house* from this village] had around three thousand. Look, the mountains were not leased then!" Pau,[4] born in 1933 in Alós d'Isil, vaguely remembers seeing from the balcony of his house the Tort's flock passing by from the plains to the mountains in transhumance. He also recalls his parents' time, when sheep were so abundant in their village that most of the collective pastures along the Bonabé valley, whose use rights were shared with the adjacent village of Isil, were not leased to foreign transhumant farmers. "There were enough livestock here!" Pau cries out, recalling the presence of three private flocks—two from Alós d'Isil and one from Isil—as well as the village flocks from the two villages, for a total of nearly fifteen thousand local sheep. The village flocks used to be tended by the main shepherd (*majoral*) and some assistants (*rabadans*) at a time when almost every household in the village kept livestock. The Bonabé's main pastures were not leased, but each flock, whether private or collective—the two village flocks—had a specific parcel (*partida*) assigned for grazing.

   The dismantling of the Tort's flock with the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in 1936 gave way to the *first historical change* of the twentieth cen-

tury in the Bonabé valley. This transformation mainly relates to the origins and ownership of the flocks that were grazing over those pastures. By that time, Alós d'Isil and Isil held fewer than one thousand sheep each, which were grouped into the respective village flocks. Most sheep belonged to transhumant farmers, who came from the plains and leased the same pastures that three local farmers had almost monopolized throughout the previous decades. According to Roigé (1995), in the entire Pallars Sobirà district transhumant sheep flocks amounted to fifty thousand animals in the 1950s. Given the geological characteristics of the Bonabé valley, with its calcareous soil that allows for better grazing lands, in contrast with the predominance of granitic soils over the rest of the northern parts of the district, it is plausible to infer that a relatively high number of those fifty thousand sheep would come to this valley in transhumance. Two shepherds were responsible for tending and grazing each village flock, whereas each one of the numerous transhumant flocks of up to five thousand sheep were tended by five or six shepherds apiece. The money collected from each municipality, once the collective pastures were leased, partially served to pay the shepherds and *rabadans* of the village flock. The rest of their salaries derived from the *taxa*, a tax collected from every household that had stakes in the village flock in accordance with the number of sheep held by each.

"Peasantry was three months of hell and nine of winter." Family memories from the mid-twentieth century, such as these ones shared by Jesús, born in 1965 in Alós d'Isil, tend to recall a harsh period in which time was mostly devoted to working the land to make a living. This was a period during which machinery was not used, and every plot of land was valued for its potential contribution to the yearly harvest. Pau illustrated this mindset through the following sentence: "Where there wasn't even room for a car, you would sow some wheat." Although Alós d'Isil's sheep stock plummeted to fewer than one thousand animals with the dismantling of the Tort's flock, two shepherds were hired year-round to make sure that the village flock did not ruin the privately-owned cultivated fields surrounding the village. These daily concerns about the land materially produced a certain landscape. A mosaic of yellow, brown, and green composed of fields to harvest (*terres*) and meadows to mow (*prats*) kept the forest's advance at bay. The lack of trees and the geographical scope of the fields that stand out from this period conjured for Jordi, a local farmer from Isil born in 1992, a sense of dwelling and pride that strikingly contrasts with the notion of abandonment and resignation that emerges from today's landscape. By that time, regardless of the substantial differences in class and power among villagers, the village flock and the ensuing collective management of all flocks, provided households with a sense

of community. It "was like opening the boundaries . . . a way of making community," according to Antoni, who did not live in those times, since he was born in 1984, but who has absorbed them through the stories told by his uncle, born in 1949. The village flocks were mainly tended by shepherds, but local farmers would organize themselves in turns to do *jadilla* with the sheep, that is to move them across private fields during the night in order to fertilize those fields in the fall before the first snowfalls. Shepherding practices were organized in a fragile equilibrium to enhance the productivity of the fields, pastures, and sheep. Within this balance, the bears stopped playing a significant role since their numbers were already much reduced and local farmers eradicated them from the scene. According to Casanova (1997), the last bear killed through legal hunting in the Pallars Sobirà district dates back to 1948, and Pau confirmed that the *last* bears settled in the Bonabé valley—although he also recognized that "there have always been bears here"—were poisoned by the local population when he was a child (early 1940s) after two horses were allegedly killed by them.

According to Jesús, the village flock remained until the beginning of the 1970s. By that time, although he was then a child, he remembers in detail the livestock count in his village: "Here, there were about eight hundred sheep . . . and one hundred and fifty goats . . . one [household] had sixty the other thirty, the other twelve." Some years before, a "migratory epidemic," as it was described by Pau, spread over the region. The 1960s were characterized by both an urban industrial boom in Catalonia that demanded a lot of labor power from the peripheral rural areas, and the mechanization of agriculture. The arrival of tractors displaced one of the main sources of income for local inhabitants. Traction horses became worthless overnight. Outmigration flows following new economic opportunities were recalled vividly by Pau, who was afraid that "nobody [was] going to remain in these lands . . . And almost no one was left here!" According to Jesús, the dismantling of the village flock was closely related to these demographic shifts: "Through the 1970s people had already gone and the [village] flock was completely dismantled . . . because, you know, many people moved to Barcelona [and other cities] . . . and then it went to hell! It was only our house [sheep farm] left [in Alós d'Isil]." The *second historical change* in the Bonabé valley then took place, since the dismantling of the village flocks brought about crucial consequences for both the management of the few remaining private flocks, and the use of collective pastures. Even though the total number of sheep in Alós d'Isil stayed progressively close to previous years, as long as the two remaining sheep farmers—Pau and Jesús—began to raise their numbers, livestock concentration in so few hands led to the disappearance of a social figure that had,

up until that point, been of paramount importance: the shepherds of the village flock. "When the village flock was over [disbanded], we released them [sheep] to graze freely. There was no shepherd anymore," as pointed out by Jesús. The 1970s thus gave way to a new era in which a handful of local farmers began to let their flocks graze freely over the collective pastures. The previous collective management of the flocks, based on farming governance over pastures that were strictly bounded in both spatial and temporal terms, turned into a completely new shepherding model. Local farmers began to practice an individualized loose management of their private flocks under what Antoni called "shepherding without boundaries." This overarching transformation translated into the blurring of the previously strict territorial grid from the times of the village flocks, in which "the limits were the limits" and "everything was well set," in Jesús' words.

In the meantime, although the livestock numbers of the remaining local farmers rose steadily while the number of farms waned, the total of transhumant flocks also dwindled, and the overall number of sheep grazing over those pastures shrank strikingly. Jesús, for instance, began to run his own farm with one hundred sheep in 1985 and reached a maximum of four hundred in 2004. According to official data from the Catalan government, while in 1979 there were twenty-five households with agrarian activity among Isil and Alós d'Isil, in 2006 the number plummeted to thirteen, and in 2019 there were only six, three of them devoted to sheep breeding and amounting to one thousand animals (Manel Torres, personal communication, email sent on 1 April 2019). In the Pallars Sobirà district, transhumance drastically dropped from fifty thousand sheep in the 1950s to sixteen thousand in 1993 (Roigé 1995). Disparities in sanitary regulations among different counties in Spain made transhumant farmers refrain from coming to these mountain pastures in the early 2000s (Espinós 2014).

Sheep numbers during the summer season had been fluctuating in the Bonabé valley over the span of a century, but they had always been in thousands. The collapse of sheep transhumance in the Catalan Pyrenees at the beginning of the twenty-first century (Còts 2002; Estrada, Nadal, and Iglesias 2010) resulted in the *third historical change* to pastoralism, since it represented the first time in one hundred years that the sheep grazing in the Bonabé valley totaled no more than several hundred. Since then, expansion of vegetation has been followed by a rapid growth of forest-related fauna, either human-induced or natural, especially cervids—deer, fallow deer, and roe deer—but also bears.

In this context, the year 2011 marked a turning point in the management of flocks. Local farmers from Isil and Alós d'Isil and the public administration reached an agreement to group three private flocks into a

single collective one of one thousand sheep tended by one shepherd and guarded by three LGDs following the triad of protective measures. After this pioneer program was tested, the reduction in sheep casualties caused by bear attacks motivated the Catalan government to extend the new regrouping policy over the rest of the "core bear area."

From *Escabot* to Shepherds as Sentinels (Ariège Pyrenees)

Anselme was born in 1925 in Sentein, the main village in the Biros valley (Ariège district, southwestern France). He evokes his grandparents' lifetime—the age of border-crossing transhumance—when flocks were so abundant in the village that farmers had most of their animals grazing over the Val d'Aran pastures (the district adjacent to Pallars Sobirà, in the Catalan Pyrenees) during the summer season.[5] Farmers constituted collective pastoral groups named *pariés* for each of the three mountain pastures that they leased on the Catalan side (Cabannes 1889). As Anselme recalls, "my grandfather used to go to the Varradòs mountain to graze his sheep flock from the 23rd of June to the 20th of September." Each chief of the pastoral group (*majouraou*) was a farmer from the Biros valley. These *majouraous* used to make agreements to lease these mountains and were responsible for conducting and guarding the animals belonging to the collective group. According to Anselme, while the largest sheep flocks crossed the border in transhumance to the Catalan Pyrenees, the smallest ones—between fifty and eighty sheep each—remained in the mountain pastures (*estives*) of the Biros valley. In turn, similar collective pastoral groups named *pariaus* (Chevalier 1951) were established among the remaining owners, who took turns surveilling the sheep flocks in the summer pastures. These flocks grazed in *escabot*—the usual shepherding system in the valley—in which farmers themselves acted as shepherds. The main role of these farmers-shepherds, however, was not to herd these flocks but to give them a direction (*largade)* and let them move in conditions of semi-freedom: instead of a single large flock each group grazed freely at different corners of the mountain. These turns were already agreed upon in the assembly held in spring and depended on the number of animals per owner. As Anselme explains, "twenty sheep were equivalent to a mountain turn. They called it *faire le tour* and it meant surveilling these flocks for one day." Two or three farmers would go up to the mountains until their turn was over, and then other local farmers from the village came up to relieve them. Customary rights inherited from the Ancien Régime ensured access to the mountain pastures associated with each village.

World War I (1914–18) brought an end to this dual shepherding system. Local flocks no longer ascended in transhumance to Val d'Aran, whereas the scenario in the Biros valley remained the same in terms of shepherding practices. The reduction of flocks due to the impact of the war and certain inner bureaucratic issues within the Catalan district (Chevalier 1956) led to the *first historical change* of the shepherding practices in the valley through the disappearance of transhumance and the two pillars of the pastoral system: the *pariés* and the figure of *majouraous*. Pastoral groups continued to organize the summer season collectively in the valley and flocks were surveilled in *escabot* by local farmers-shepherds following the same rule as *le tour de montagne*. However, Guillaume, born in 1933, recalls how his great uncle used to be hired as a shepherd in the mountain pasture of Bentaillou (Sentein). "He had a partner and the two of them surveilled sheep flocks in *escabot* until 1938. They got paid almost nothing." On the contrary, as Anselme explains, sheep used to graze freely with sporadic controls by local farmers or another member of the household in the mountain pasture of the Artigou, in the village of Bonac. Taking care of the animals was Anselme's job, since his father worked in the mines of Bentaillou extracting zinc and silver-bearing lead. His family had eight cows and around fifty sheep. During the summer, he would ascend to the Artigou every Sunday morning to check on sheep and treat their hooves. Although the figure of the farmer-shepherd as well as the collective management remained present until the 1950s, the managerial formats of the Artigou and Bentaillou mountain pastures show the heterogeneity of shepherding practices that existed in the valley during this period.

After World War II, the mining industry collapsed in the valley. This led to overarching transformations such as depopulation and the progressive abandonment of farming through the late 1950s and 1960s. Higher sheep flock concentration between fewer local farmers coupled with the end of bear predation led to a new managerial format. On the one hand, flocks began to graze freely over the *estives* with sporadic controls by farmers; on the other, the collective management was dismantled and replaced by an individualized model. Jean-François, a farmer born in 1939, remembers the last bear killed in the valley in 1951, hunted by his father and other farmers. He also recalls how the sheep used to ascend with no guidance to the *estives* nor permanent surveillance around 15 May and came back around 1 November. Hence, this period entailed the disappearance of the collective pastoral groups, the farmer-shepherd figure, and the *tour de montagne*. Given this management of the flocks, it became common to breed and have a flock while holding a position of public employment at the EDF—the French state-run hydroelectric company still operating in the valley today—or as a postman. However, the valley became progres-

sively depopulated over the years and only a few local flocks grazed in the mountain pastures at the end of the 1960s. Pastoral lands became manifestly under-used to a critical point. Vegetation expansion and natural reforestation rapidly and radically modified the landscape of both mountain pastures and formerly cultivated private fields near the villages, resulting in what might be deemed as the *second historical change*.

Groupements Pastoraux (GPs) or Pastoral Groups came to be the response to that given scenario—pastoral land abandonment and vegetation expansion. These pastoral groups revitalized and restructured the Ariège mountains and pastoralism in the late 1970s and early 1980s, after the approval of the 1972 Pastoral Law, resulting in the *third historical change* of pastoralism. Through an institutional arrangement between local farmers and the state, GPs turned out to be a fundamental tool for shepherding and land management as long as they ensured and regulated the access to the *estives* as well as fostering the arrival of transhumant flocks from the foothills and the plains. Most of the GPs were created during the 1980s and early 1990s, driven by state subsidies that aimed to recover grazing pastures in public lands. Bear predation was extremely rare in the valley after the 1970s and local flocks still grazed in *escabot* with sporadic controls by local farmers. Thus, although GPs represented a new form of collective action in which the state started to play a major role, the shepherding model remained mainly individualized.

Since 1996, the presence of bears has progressively transformed shepherding practices in the valley once again. As a result of bear predation, flocks are no longer sporadically controlled by farmers nor do they graze in *escabot*. This old shepherding practice has disappeared in the valley, where sheep are now guarded by professional shepherds within single large flocks. The new system has also shortened the grazing season. When Thomas, a local farmer born in 1961, compares the current situation with the one in the late 1990s he displays a clear discontent coupled with the sense of having lost something precious. "We had the benefit of letting our sheep go free in the mountains from mid-May to November 1st. They used to graze the lower parts of the mountain in the spring and the fall. And all this is over. We have lost two months of the grazing season."

The transformations of the shepherding practices among the six GPs managing the current seven *estives* of the Biros valley has resulted in the surveillance of around 8,700 sheep by ten shepherds and twenty-two LGDs, and the use of electrified night camps in two *estives* during the summer season of 2019. Several local farmers from the Biros valley remember the attacks of *Hvala*, one of the Slovenian females released in the second wave. As Batiste pointed out, "I remember her well. I had several attacks in one week. And she has taught several generations of cubs how

to hunt, so they will have the same attitude." Some transhumant farmers no longer ascend to these mountains, as a result of bear predation. In this regard, two out of the three *estives* of a GP were abandoned in the summer of 2019. The abandonment of these parts of the mountain would lead to reforestation, bush expansion, and probably an increase in ungulate populations. But more importantly, if this abandonment becomes a general tendency, a state-led conservation endeavor such as the bear program will have countered the main purpose of a previous state-subsidized plan that created GPs to revitalize mountain pastures.

Protection measures funded by the government have been gradually set out in the *estives* to prevent bear attacks. However, this implementation has been asymmetrical with some level of heterogeneity, since some GPs have been reluctant to use them. Farmers are hesitant about the effectiveness of the set of measures against bear attacks. Fabian, a young farmer recently installed in the valley, claims that bears adapt their behavior both to the presence of LGDs and the installment of electrified night camps, based on his own experience using these measures, and the attempts of his colleagues in the French Alps to prevent wolf attacks. "There is an evolution, bear attacks are occurring during the day now because we keep

Figure 4.1. A single large flock guarded by a professional shepherd grazing in a mountain pasture, Sentein, 2019. © Lluís Ferrer

the sheep inside fences at night in our *estive*. In the Alps, all the studies are showing this: half of the wolf attacks occur during the day because the animals are inside the fences at night." In a nutshell, these measures serve only, as Batiste contends, to train bears to become more skilled: "We are afraid of being pushed to an arms race where more and stronger LGDs will be required to adapt to new bear predatory strategies."

The ethnographic data reflects an ongoing set of parallel, though not simultaneous, historical changes in shepherding practices on both sides of the range. Each one of these changes brought about not only an important shift from the preceding period, but so great were these shifts that none of the aforementioned changes resemble the current scenario in the least. These transformations and the dynamism of these shifts challenge the idea of conceiving both a single past detached from the present and the new shepherding practices as a return to the old ones. Besides the dissonances between past(s) and present, the depiction of the recent wildlife expansion by local farmers as "the new squatters of the rural world" portrays the power struggles between farming and conservationist sectors today.

Conclusion: Looking Back, Thinking Forward

In this chapter, we have identified a set of local farmers' narratives that challenge the way in which a landscape composed of bears, shepherds, and LGDs, and the ensuing transformation of previous shepherding practices in the Central Pyrenees, have been framed by the bear program's politics. The program's claim to *restore* these human and nonhuman elements to the Pyrenean mountain landscapes based on notions of return and conservation is countered by the ethnographic historical accounts from the Bonabé and Biros valleys, which reveal two stories of pastoral change and adaptation. The so-called *return* of bears, shepherds, and LGDs are also presented as an opportunity for the farming sector. In this concluding section, we aim to expand our critique of the notion of return by linking it to the twofold *naturalization* processes engendered by the renewed presence of bears.

This critique has revolved around two premises: the separation of the past from the present following the precepts of historicism; and the detachment and ideological hierarchy between Nature and Society following the Cartesian dualism. How do these two Western ontological separations intersect, and how are they channeled through the bear program? We contend that heritage as a hegemonic idiom (Franquesa 2013) and the concept of time-tricking (Ringel 2016) help to provide a generative answer to these enquiries.

Heritage has been defined as a hegemonic idiom since it not only articulates "hegemonic and counterhegemonic projects," but also frames "conflicts in terms that, by concealing their connection with broader issues of political economy, are advantageous to dominant groups" (Franquesa 2013: 347). Keeping in mind this definition, while the use of heritage might recognize the value of old-age local farmers' knowledge and practices, it also appears as an idiom of the hegemony that is not recognized by some farmers. Recognition, approached from a radical justice perspective that questions "who is given respect (or not) and whose interests, values and views are recognized" (Svarstad and Benjaminsen 2020: 1), turns out to be a key word to tackle the conflicts between the bear program's proponents and the farming sector by critically engaging with heritage as both an idiom of the hegemony and a hegemonic idiom (Franquesa 2013).

Besides this preliminary note, deeming the bear reintroduction program as a heritage-making process allows us to reveal how it consists of isolating parts of the past and transposing them to the present following one of the main tenets of Western historicism, that is, the separation of the past from the present (Hirsch and Stewart 2005). Through the bear program, "the pastness of the past is crystallized in efforts to present [the bear and shepherding practices] as objects separated from the present" (Gordillo 2014: 8). Heritage thus highlights the "pastness" of the past vis-à-vis the "presentness" of the present through resignification and revaluation processes (Kirschenblatt-Gimblett 1998). These processes are not devoid of power, but rather fraught with politics. In concrete terms, the temporal politics of the past as a form of time-tricking through which the before-after succession on the interplay between wildlife and livestock is reshaped. Heritage also connects with the second ontological premise of the bear program, since the canonical classification between natural and cultural heritage values allows for the establishment of a hierarchical order between Nature and Society. Natural heritage values—epitomized by the renewed presence of bears—have taken a much more prevalent political stance over cultural ones—represented by the regrouping policy and the shepherding practices it claims to restore.

Despite the two aforementioned main problematic aspects of framing the bear program through the idiom of heritage, the program's proponents claim that the return of bears and the consequent restoration of former shepherding practices should be conceived as an opportunity or even a salvation for the farming sector. This discourse undermines farmers' complaints and feelings of imposition in the wake of this rewilding strategy and the ensuing transformations of shepherding practices by asserting that what the program asks farmers to do is nothing more than what their ancestors had done since time immemorial. Critically engaging with

the politics of time devised by the bear program, we argue that, instead of representing a link to the past, the bear itself spearheads a twofold *naturalization* process in the Pyrenees. On the one hand, the program considers that its presence, as the ultimate symbol of wilderness, produces a more natural or wilder—and hence better—landscape. On the other it claims that the renewed presence of bears must be considered as a naturalized, unavoidable, and incontestable asset of current landscapes that will make local farmers thrive under an environmental conservation paradigm.

Both *naturalizations* de-politicize the bear program and may well explain the recurrent rejections of such by most local farmers, as they perceived two sorts of impositions: the top-down, outright imposition of wilderness; and the more subtle and insidious imposition of shepherding practices. The contradiction spurred by the bear program between imposition and opportunity is better understood in light of the idiom of heritage and the ensuing political hierarchy of natural over sociocultural heritage values. Indeed, the bear has been framed by the program's proponents as something of superior value within the public interest to be preserved, and, under the idiom of heritage, a pathway to salvation for the dire condition of the farming sector. This cross-border conservation project has forced sheep farmers to adapt to a novel scenario, in which a sequence of changes has been implemented by multiscalar political institutions. These changes aimed to safeguard natural, first, and cultural, thereafter, heritage values that had been vanishing throughout the twentieth century. Therefore, Nature and Society have been first devised as separate realms and then politically animated within a hierarchical order. In other words, bears were released and, only after testing and proving the negative impacts of the reintroduction of these large carnivores on sheep farmers, the reappearance of shepherds and LGDs within a sheep regrouping policy was fostered. Therefore, this political hierarchy constitutes the foundation of these two impositions—bears and shepherding practices—that local farmers resent, which ultimately results in a growing discontent and the increase in social conflicts.

The restoration of the bear population, shepherds, and LGDs in the Central Pyrenees should be framed through notions of change and design rather than those of return and conservation. This replacement emphasizes the transformative nature of shepherding practices through different historical stages in which farmers have been progressively losing control over their own flocks when they graze over the high mountain pastures in the summer season. The implementation of the sheep regrouping policy through the bear program was claimed to have reestablished the abandoned collective management of the flocks. However, this state-driven policy led, in fact, to a new high-modernist territoriality (Scott 1998;

Vaccaro et al. 2014) based on a public environmentality (Agrawal 2005; Fletcher 2010) over farmers, sheep, bears, and pastures. It led to the production of a wild heritage landscape in the Central Pyrenees.

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Notes

1. Karl Jacoby stressed that he had coined the term "moral ecology" in order "to unsettle the earlier neologisms of conservationists—including, of course, the very term conservation, coined by Gifford Pinchot in 1910 in a brilliant turn of phrase that cast the movement as a conservative, common-sense measure to protect a self-evident nature rather than a new form of control over the environment that often brought radical ecological and social change in its wake" (2019: 291).
2. This chapter is the product of two years of fieldwork in the Catalan and Ariège Pyrenees. The results presented here have been elaborated on through: in-depth interviews and informal conversations with local farmers, shepherds, environmental conservation experts, and local politicians; participant observations on the shepherding practices, and the management and implementation of the regrouping policy; attendance to symposiums and conferences on the bear program in the Pyrenees; and the analysis of press news and the main politicians' interventions in the media.
3. In the Bonabé valley there are two villages (Isil and Alós d'Isil) that belong to the same municipality (Alt Àneu) that extend over 131 square kilometres, while the Biros valley has five municipalities (Antras, Balacet, Bonac-Irazein, Bordes-Uchentein, and Sentein) with a territory of 173 square kilometers total.

4. Names have been changed for the sake of anonymity.
5. This pastoral agreement was part of a larger historic treaty between these two territories (Roigé, Ros, and Còts 2002).

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