"The Death of a Bear"
Conflicting Ontologies and Overlapping Discourses on Grazing Systems and Large Carnivores Coexistence in Central Italy

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Abstract: Scholarly works have proposed that human-carnivore coexistence is a multi-faceted issue that requires an in-depth understanding of the diverse attitudes and perspectives of the communities living with large carnivores (Glikman, *et al.* 2019), as well of the social, economic and interpersonal dimension of conflicts (Ciucci, Boitani 2005; Linnell, Cretois 2020; Salvatori, *et al.* 2020). However, as of now, the debate over the coexistence of large carnivores (LCs) and extensive grazing systems has become so highly polarized, to the extent of preventing different actors from seeking alternative interpretations and actions. In trying to identify the social context and the circumstances surrounding the killing of a bear, this research assesses the production and reproduction of different discourses by multiple actors, on Human/LCs coexistence and how these have come to permeate an entire society's understanding of people-nature relations (Descola, Pálsson 1996; Igoe, *et al.* 2010). It also argues that the presumed ontological supremacy and universality of *nature*, which underlies the emerging discourse on rewilding is further contributing to reinforcing well-established mechanisms of power and knowledge and a kind of relativism, which neglects local epistemologies and pastoralists' perceptions of landscape. Overall, research findings suggest that any significant advance in facilitating coexistence between extensive grazing systems and LCs requires a comprehensive examination of the ontologies of those who work within, and ultimately shape rangelands. Such a scrutiny, in turn, can empirically inform and promote a genuine power shift towards inclusive LCs management and conservation (Ciucci, Boitani 2009).

Keywords: Coexistence; Large Carnivores (LCs); Extensive Grazing System; Perceptions of Landscape; Rewilding.

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Introduction

Several studies have emphasized the need to explore the linkages between social meanings of wildlife and human-wildlife interactions (Frank, Glikman 2019), especially in consideration of the fact that differing viewpoints – on whether and how humans can share landscapes with large carnivores (LCs) – can influence conservation policies (Lute *et. al.* 2018). Conflicting worldviews and structural barriers constraining the incorporation of diverse knowledge systems into conservation policy may undermine constructive dialogue and local stewardship (Pettersson *et al.* 2023). It follows that a fair representation of stakeholder interests and different knowledge spheres is an essential element for achieving convivial conservation (Büscher, Fletcher 2020). As of now, there is a growing concern that LCs protection and expansion will not be achieved unless specific collaborative approaches are put in place to support and promote coexistence between humans and wildlife. Despite these positive conceptual advances in the scholarly/academic sphere, human-LCs coexistence is proving extremely challenging and economically costly (Bautista *et al.* 2019; Galluzzi *et al.* 2021; Gervasi *et al.* 2021), especially in the context of extensive grazing systems and anthropogenic landscapes, such as those of the Italian Central Apennines regions.
Nowadays, the high-recovery rate of once-depleted species such as wolf (Banti, Bartolozzi, Cavallini 2005; Galaverni *et al.* 2016; Salvatori, Tudin, Ricci, *et al.* 2021), as well the increasing *habituation* of bears towards humans, have affected attitudes (Glikman *et al.* 2011; 2019), experiences (Eriksson *et al.* 2015) and the level of tolerance (Hobson *et al.* 2024) of people (e.g. especially pastoralists and small farmers) towards LCs. As a result, in regions such as the Central Apennine Range, LCs-related conflicts are on the rise, causing significant societal divides (Salvatori, Balian, Blanco *et al.* 2021), especially when iconic species, such as the Marsican brown bear (Ursus arctos marsicanus) become the victims of deliberate acts of violence, as well of unintentional occurrences (e.g. car accidents). One of such acts took place on 1 September 2023, leading to the killing of Amarena (sour cherry), the most popular and prolific bear of the Abruzzi, Lazio and Molise National Park (PNALM).[1] The death of this bear

[1] About five months before the death of Amarena, another fierce debate on human/LCs coexistence had already split into two the Italian public opinion, following the death of Andrea Papi, the 26 years old runner killed by female bear Jj4 in Tentino, on 5 April 2023. On the one hand, there are those who think that bears pose a serious danger to the local population and their reintroduction in Trentino's forests was, indeed, a bad choice. On the other, there are those who believe that cohabitation is still possible and that the killing of Papi is the consequence of twenty years of local government's failure to put in place the necessary measures to prevent bears from becoming confidants towards humans. With respect to the on-going debate, anthropologist Annibale Salsa has rightly argued: "With

has led to the production, re-production and reiteration of multiple overlapping and conflicting discourses, condensing specific views of nature/society relations that are constantly being reworked and negotiated. Some of these discourses are created and maintained by social actors through written and spoken statements and, often, rely on claims and arguments which are based on assumptions and presuppositions that are not necessarily validated by direct empirical evidence, and – yet – are regarded as *true*. These *truths* are now being reproduced and sustained by the public opinion at large and, thus, have deeply permeated an entire society's understanding of people-nature relations (see Igoe *et al.* 2010), while reinstating dichotomous views of nature/society which have long been challenged on both empirical and theoretical grounds (Breda 2001; Descola 1994; 1992; Van Aken 2017).

By and large, these contrasting, and often overlapping discourses, are "systems of thoughts composed of ideas, attitudes, courses of action, beliefs, and practices that systematically construct the subjects and the worlds of which they speak" (Lessa 2006). It is then essential to understand how such discourses articulate in practices and, to what extent ideological and moral constructions of nature influence how large carnivores' conservation is perceived and implemented. On the other hand, the debate over rewilding is providing wider society with a new theoretical framework within which people construct their experiences of the *natural world*, while reinterpreting the coexistence with LCs, in ways that are often being romanticized. The rewilding discourse is now becoming a hegemonic one; since it is "so systematically and extensively promoted that it (has) the appearance of being the only feasible view of how to best pursue and implement conservation goals" (Igoe *et al.* 2010, quoted in Benjaminsen, Svarstad 2010, p. 488). This discourse is also being fostered through practices of discursive power (Adger *et al.* 2001; Benjaminsen, Svarstad 2010; Svarstad 2000; 2003) while being widely circulated and fuelled by powerful global actors. Appealing to specific conceptions of human-nature relationships, the promoters of the large carnivores coexistence paradigm have introduced a kind of relativism that neglects pastoralists' epistemologies and agency. As I will attempt to demonstrate, pastoralists' perceptions of landscape and the metaphysical presuppositions underlying

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regard to mountains-related policies, it is a matter of choosing, with mental honesty, what kind of mountains we (really) want. A wild mountain where human activities are banned and where the inhabitants are (perceived as) an uncomfortable presence or, conversely, a (living) and inhabited mountain; knowing, of course, that a perfect coexistence between man and great predators is an illusion. Both choices are acceptable, but not compatible" (author's parenthetic additions and translation – *Alto Adige*, 25 September 2023) (accessed on 20/09/2024).

their understanding of the role of humans in managing (and caring for) the environment, are all based on culturally specific notions of nature-society relations, whose incorporation into current LC coexistence-related discourses would be difficult, if not problematic.

The study area and the people

The research has been carried out in the different locations belonging to three neighbouring administrative regions within and outside the PNALM. The majority of the Park is located in the Abruzzi region, with smaller parts in Lazio and Molise, covering a total area of 50.000 hectares, with about 80.000 hectares of buffer zones (Fig. 1); 24 municipalities have territories situated within the Park with about 24.000 people living in the area. The Park was legally established in 1923 and it is the second oldest in Italy, thus playing an important role in the preservation of species such as the Italian wolf (Canis lupus italicus), the Abruzzi chamois (Rupicapra pyrenaica ornata) and the Marsican brown bear (Ursus arctos marsicanus). Both Abruzzi and neighbouring regions have a longer period of human-wolf coexistence (Glikman *et al.* 2019) while bear re-colonization, outside of the Park's boundaries, is a more recent phenomenon.

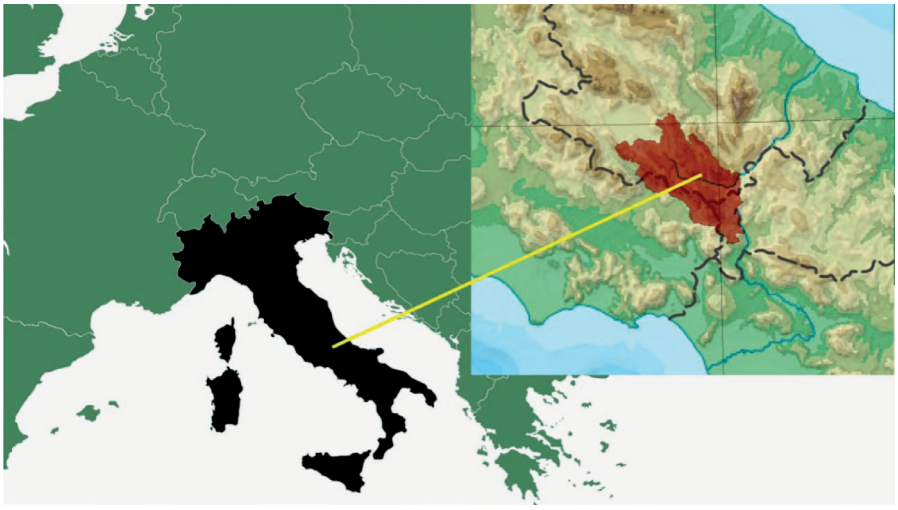

Figure 1. The location of the National Park of Abruzzi, Lazio and Molise (PNALM), within the map of Italy.

The pastoralists of the Apennines range, in Central Italy (Fig. 2), like all other Italian pastoralists, do not live in separate communities and their households are generally found in villages and rural areas – usually in the uplands.[2] They are engaged in extensive animal husbandry and seasonal movements (transhumance); their herds are largely composed of different breeds of sheep, goats, cows and horses. Their system of raising animals is based on the selection of local breeds, strongly adapted to the territory and on the production of high-quality meat and cheese (Novellino 2021). In particular, the eco-systemic services associated with such a system are manifold and include fire control through the reduction of plant biomass, the maintenance of old trails (*tratturi*), the natural fertilization of soils through livestock manure, natural seeds' propagation by herds and the creation of ecological niches, which are essential to the survival of many bird species and other animals. Undoubtedly, pastoralists' native breeds of livestock, do play important ecological functions in grassland and semi-open forest ecosystems. Instead, PNALM management, rather than promoting the presence of free-range caws and horses, inside and around the Park, seems to discourage it, through restrictive regulations and prohibitions. Moreover, it continues to label grazing by domestic cattle and horses as *pascolo pesante* (heavy grazing) to emphasize its allegedly adverse ecological impact, in comparison to the presumably more sustainable *pascolo leggero* (light grazing) by sheep and goats.

Three notably distinct discourses are generally used by civil society to describe the pastoralists/animal herders of the Apennines, as well as those from other Italian regions.[3] For several people, pastoralists are envisaged as a niche of survivors and misfits, uprooted from contemporary reality and living at the margins of mainstream society, while seeking their ancestral rhythms of life. To others, they are imagined as squatters on public land and, at worst, as criminals responsible for environmental degradation. Other people, instead, hold a rather romantic and almost bucolic perception of pastoralists. Specifically, they are imagined as the legacy of a remote past and the last survivors of a *Neolithic lifestyle*. As of now, many have failed to understand that pasto-

[2] The term pastoralist, here, does not indicate animal herding in a context of a substance economy but rather an extensive form of transhumant animal herding, with different kinds of livestock. The words *pastoralist* and *animal herder*, both translations from the Italian *pastore*, are used interchangeably in this study.

[3] These key discourses were identified and assessed through both informal and more structured interviews involving 87 respondents from civil society, belonging to different walks of life. The interviews were carried out between 2009-2011 in the course of the research project *Linking networks on pastoralism and mobile production systems* supported by the Global Biocultural Initiative Program of the Christensen Fund (TCF).

ralists hardly fit in any of these definitions and are rather extraordinary mediators between past and present, between millenary cultural practices and modern economic and productive systems. Such systems, in fact, constantly encourage them to find a synthesis, e.g. to readjust their animal husbandry strategies to cope with market demands, as well as with dramatic environmental transformations and climate change. In short, in contrast to the idea that relegates pastoralists to a *forgotten past*, we are dealing with people who are extremely dynamic and resilient.

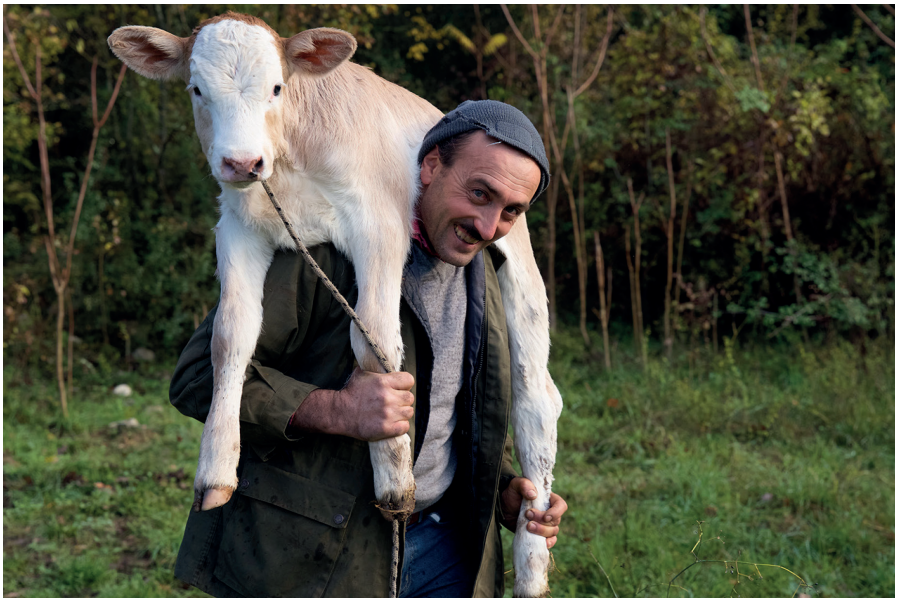

Figure 2. 2021. Emiliano di Girolamo with one of his calves, during a winter transhumance from Abruzzi to Lazio.

Methodology

The author's engagement with animal herders in Central Italy goes back to 2006. Since then, as an advocate for indigenous peoples' and pastoralists' rights, he has supported the claims of local animal herders over the management of their rangelands, as well as their grievances against the increasing damages caused by LCs on their livestock. These efforts have resulted in

new and stronger forms of empowerment for pastoralists and the establishment of a local organization in the Lazio Region. The qualitative research material, on which this article is based, was acquired during many years of engagement with local animal herders and, specifically, in the course of two distinct research projects based on ethnographic methodologies (Le Compte, Schensul 1999; McCurdy, Spradles, Shandy 2004; Rubin, Rubin 2004): 'Linking Networks on Pastoralism and Mobile production systems' (2009-2011), and 'Bringing in Pastoralists' Voices' (2021-ongoing)'. The author solicited views from members of different pastoralists' organizations using both informal and more structured interviews on multiple subjects (e.g. the coexistence with large carnivores, circumstances and numbers of predatory events, people's strategies to cope with the latter, opinions about wildlife management by Park authorities, etc.). To meet appropriate ethical standards, at the beginning of the study, local pastoralists' organizations and committees were widely consulted. For both projects, preparatory discussions with pastoralists' organizations and their representatives were held to ensure a convergence between animal herders' priorities/expectations and research goals. Overall, local animal herders perceived the research as a unique opportunity for bringing up their concerns to an international audience. During face-to-face interviews, respondents from civil society were also included such as young passionate ecologists, nature lovers, hikers, tourists and inhabitants of more urbanized areas. These individuals were also informed about the purpose of the study and asked whether they preferred their opinions to remain anonymous. All surveys were based on both open and closed questions. Occasionally, questionnaires in the Italian language were used and included multiple choice questions, dealing with subjects such as pastoralism and extensive grazing system; coexistence with LCs; wildlife management within the PNALM; socio-economic development within the PNALM; rewilding: approaches and initiatives. Often, such questionnaires were handed over, beforehand, to informants/collaborators for them to familiarize themselves with the questions. Then, their views were elicited in successive meetings. On several occasions, the use of audio-visual recording was essential to obtain precise transcriptions and accurate translations from the local dialects. Video recording was also used to capture key statements from various discussants, especially during workshops, as well as during public demonstrations and sit-ins. Members of different age groups were always chosen with an eye on trying to include both genders. Given the sensitive issues being discussed, some collaborators from the pastoralist group have requested to remain anonymous and their full names will not be disclosed in this article.

Apennine pastoralists and their perceptions of landscape

It is not the aim of this article to provide an in-depth ethnography of pastoralists' ontologies and oral narratives. My primary objective, here, is to summarize key metaphysical presuppositions underlying their perceptions of how the landscape should be *tended* and *tamed*, also regarding their dealings with LCs.
Pastoralists allude to a time when grasslands were abundant, when their livestock was healthy and when elders gathered in the evenings, to smoke their traditional briar-made pipes or share a *polenta*, around the fireplace. They claim that, during these times, differently from today, their relationship with farmers was smooth: after harvest, livestock were free to move around into maize and wheat fields, filling these with natural manure. Attacks on livestock by LCs were occasional and never at the scale that it is occurring today. For pastoralists, these memories are associated with an imagery of happiness and *good living* that, they say, have now been lost.
Pastoralists' descriptions of the past are always associated with a particular perception of landscape and nature-society relations. As with all forms of cultural landscapes, also the pastoralist landscape is both a product of and a repository for shared experiences and histories (Schama 1995). This further entails that the disappearance of such histories (e.g. no longer transmitted through oral narratives), in addition to the transformations taking place in the landscape, have all led to the dislocation of memories of the past and a sense of loss and grief, amongst people.
Pastoralists do not feel comfortable with it, rather they oppose the idea that *nature protection* should be achieved through forms of *natural regeneration*, which restrict or forbid human presence in biodiversity-rich areas. To pastoralists, a natural landscape is both a *tended* and *tamed* landscape, and – from their perspective – it is almost *unnatural* to leave a landscape unattended. Within this logic, also wild trees might be subject to various forms of management. For instance, pastoralists grafted wild pear trees (Pyrus pyraster) with various species of domestic pear. The practice of grafting wild pears, *in the wild*, was carried out in such a way, as to ensure fruit availability in those inaccessible areas where water sources were hard to find. To secure a ready-available food supply in remote areas, pastoralists also grafted wild apple trees (Malus sylvestris) with at least seven varieties of domestic apples. Wild trees, such as holm oak (Quercus ilex) and wild pear, were pruned up to human height to create shading areas and shelters for both people and their flocks. This practice, aside from providing shelter to animals, also contributed to improving plants' health. This is to say that the landscape was carefully *tended* (Novellino 2007).

Figure 3. Aurunci Mountains (Lazio Region). Michele Minchella crossing a *tamed landscape* with his goat flock, 2009.

A *tended landscape* (Figure 3) is often described by pastoralists through local notions emphasizing cleanliness (*pulizia*), tidiness (*ordinato*) and the action of caring for (*curare*). This notion of cleanliness generally applies to grassland, Mediterranean scrub, cultivated fields, as well as forest, etc. (Zeffiri, Novellino 2024). A pastureland being colonized by thorns is not *clean*, and a tick scrub that does not allow people and animals to walk through it is not clean, nor *beautiful to look at* (*bello a vedersi*). Interestingly, pastoralists' notion of cleanliness condenses both utilitarian and aesthetic parameters. This is to say that a tended landscape, a tamed landscape, is also perceived as a beautiful landscape and, more importantly, it is a *useful* one, capable of satisfying people's everyday needs. According to this view, animals such as wolves and bears should be confined (as much as possible) outside the limits of this tended and tamed landscape, especially away from the immediate surroundings of the house, stables, animal sheds and grazing herds. Of course, incursions of these animals within the tended/ tamed space are, indeed, expected but – as much as possible – should be discouraged (Figure 4).

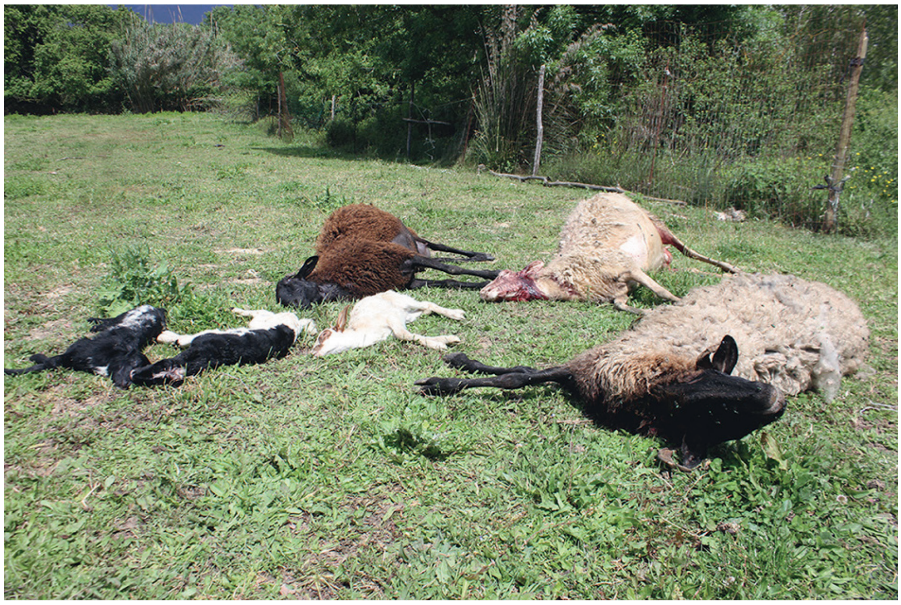

Figure 4. Sollacciano countryside, Minturno (Lazio Region). The aftermath of wolf incursion into a tended/ tamed landscape, 2016.

Statements from several pastoralists, especially elders, suggest that human-bear encounters in the Abruzzi mountains were lived and perceived as a normal possibility and relatively peaceful occurrences (cfr. Toncheva, Fletcher 2021). This cohabitation developed in the absence of protected areas in the region and, thus, of formal rules to regulate the coexistence of human and nonhuman species (see Toncheva, Fletcher, Turnhout, 2022). Statements from residents suggest that coevolution between man and bear was the result of a long process of cohabitation involving the sharing of the same territory or – at least – portions of it. Over centuries, this has allowed both species to shape their respective behaviour and attitudes towards each other based on the experiences and perceptions developed about one another. Ultimately, the sedimentation of such experiences turned into a knowledge that both species used to minimize the potential for conflict. In this way, both humans and bears became “co-constitutive actors” of the spaces they occupied, as well as the knowledge deriving from this co-presence (cfr. Toncheva, Fletcher 2021). There were times, however, when co-habitation strategies showed to be problematic, especially when deterrence measures did not prove effective in stopping a particular bear from

frequently attacking the same herd. The most effective form of bear deterrence was the so-called *fionna*, a very old type of throwing weapon, consisting of two laces and a leather bag containing the bullet (a stone). With the centrifugal force released by the rotary movement of the arm, speed was provided to the projectile, which flew in the air after letting loose one of the laces. Only occasionally, when a bear proved to be particularly aggressive towards humans and livestock, the case was brought to the attention of concerned government agencies, and that particular specimen was ultimately shot.[4] It is likely that, this form of *population control* towards more fearless and confident bears has contributed, over time, to determining some of the behavioural peculiarities of the Marsican bear, that is higher tolerance to human proximity (see Ciucci, Boitani 2008; Glikman *et al.* 2023). According to pastoralists, nowadays, the impossibility of taking direct actions against large predators has made such animals *bold* (*sfacciato*) to the extent that they can attack livestock also in full daylight.

Certain expressions that pastoralists and mountain residents used to talk about bears, embodied elements of respect and close acquaintance. The Marsican bear was often referred to as *tata urz* (father bear) and, on particular occasions, as *a cingillot* (the ragamuffin): a generally playful and affectionate term indicating dishevelment. According to horse-breeder Virgilio Morisi, this word was used to refer to a bear's shaggy appearance, just after waking up from hibernation. "When bears wake up after winter," says Virgilio "they are so thin, hungry and with matted fur, they take small steps and stagger …poor thing! When we encountered them, it was like seeing an old friend…what a thrill! We knew that snow was melting, plants were beginning to bloom and spring was on the way".[5] Meeting *a cingillot*, was not only perceived by the residents as an encounter with an old acquaintance but was also a clear and joyful sign indicating seasonal change and the end of winter.

Nowadays, according to pastoralists, an increasing number of bears, as well as wolves, have lost the long-held fear towards humans and, thus, are difficult to control. Even more distressing for pastoralists is to witness the transformation of the *tended/tamed landscape* (or portions of it) into abandoned land, for instance when once rich grasslands regress into bushy-land and when forests are no longer managed through cyclical cuts, and when dry-stone walls and old pathways are obliterated. To pastoralists, the rewilding of the tamed cultural space, signals the collapse of the *old system*, and the beginning of a state

[4] In the thirties, more than 10 years after the establishment of the Parco Nazionale D'Abruzzo, control on wolf population was also carried out by park rangers. In 1934, a male wolf, weighting 45 kg, was shot by chief ranger, Leucio Coccia. Source: Boccazzi, Varotto 1978.

[5] Research-notes, 11/09/2024 (Morisi, V., personal communication).

of uncertainty and insecurity, posing major challenges to extensive grazing. Pastoralists tend to describe *nature* as something that should be controlled, tamed and even improved. According to them, if not periodically grazed, pastures become useless and, when abandoned for a long period, are colonized by bushes and scrubs and, ultimately, will revert into forest. As an example, a forest that is not subject to cyclical cuts is said to be *rapidly ageing* ("*si invecchia*"), to *self-destruct itself* ("*si distrugge*"); conversely, human tending keeps the forest *young* ("*giovane*") and *healthy* ("*in buona salute*").[6] Without tending, the forest becomes *inhospitable* ("*selvaggia*") thus *producing no benefits to anyone* ("*non fa bene a nessuno*"), to the extent that even wild animals (such as deer) are said not to thrive well in such *messy* ("*disordinate*") forests. Untended forests are said to be dangerous because are full of dead branches, which can fall to the ground during windstorms. In some locations, closer to the coast, such dead biomass becomes a dangerous trigger for summer fires. Similarly, tick underbrush is said to represent a threat to livestock, since it provides a hiding place for wolves and bears to strike their attacks. Overall, to the eyes of pastoralists, an unmanaged landscape (untended forest, non-grazed pastures, abandoned agricultural fields, unmanaged stone walls, etc.) is a *dying* landscape where nature wins and takes over human wisdom. This is why, the notion of rewilding is perceived by pastoralists as an aberration, a drastic diversion from the elders' thoughtful, responsible and wise custodianship of landscape. According to Guglielmo Lauro, an animal herder from Molise, the rewilding paradigm "is a way to forget history and the sacrifices made by the grandfathers".[7] From a pastoralist point of view, the objectives of rewilding, such as the opening up of LCs corridors, the establishment of maximum protection zones (e.g. riserve integrali), etc. are all perceived as an attempt to deprive them of their self-perceived role as a *carer* of the *natural world*. This sentiment is explicated by G.R., a pastoralist living on the Latium site of the National Park of Abruzzi, Lazio and Molise. He claims "We are the true environmentalists, we have been protecting these mountains for centuries until the present, we are the ones keeping these trails clean and safe. Without us, nature would become so *wild* that it would be impossible for anyone to enjoy it. Even the tourists wouldn't like to come here, anymore".[8]

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[6] All local terminologies and expressions reported here (e.g. *si invecchia, si distrugge, giovane, pulito, disordinato, selvaggio,* etc.) were identified in the course of interviews and open-ended discussions with local pastoralists. These local categories, linguistically, might be rendered differently and be subject to variations, depending on the dialect being used. Hence, for the sake of simplicity, and to avoid the use of phonetic transcription, it was decided to translate all such terms into the official Italian language.

[7] Research-notes, 25/02/2024 (Lauro, G., personal communication).

[8] Research notes, 7/11/2023 (G.R. personal communication)

From a pastoralist perspective, a landscape that is *beautiful to look at* is also a landscape that is *beautiful to listen to* (*bello a sentirsi*). Pastoralists place great value on the sound of animals' bells. Moving herds during transhumance does not only entail the physical crossing of territory by humans and animals but also represents a form of sound appropriation of a given space being acoustically memorized during previous transhumance (cfr. Ricci 1996). From a pastoralist perspective, portions of the landscape where livestock grazing has been abandoned or curtailed (e.g. in the context of protected areas) have also lost sonority. This is to say that the transition from a tamed to an abandoned landscape also entails a loss of traditional cultural sounds. Those pastoralists who, due to old age, have been forced to abandon their profession, claim to experience a deep sense of nostalgia caused both by the absence of their animals and the related vacuum of sonority. In this respect, the statement by G.M. is revealing: "Before, you could hear women singing while harvesting wheat, and from there [in the background] the sound of bells echoed into the valley. That was harmony".[9] When pastoralists talk about a *lost harmony*, they also tend to emphasize the good relationships, solidarity ties and favour exchanges that once linked together different typologies of people, sharing the same territory (animal herders, lumberjacks, charcoal makers, farmers, etc.). Implicit in this discourse is the idea that tending the landscape (i.e. sustainable management of the locally available resources) was also possible because of the solidarity networks connecting all those who shared the common *tamed landscape*. Pastoralist Giuseppe Ferrari from Sora says:

> Once there was respect among people, the tendency was to help each other in moments of need, and each person fulfilled his duties. Nowadays, people only think about themselves, fences are erected around properties, and park authorities set their own rules on where livestock can or cannot graze. We, pastoralists, are limited in all movements. Instead, wolves and bears can go anywhere they like and eat our livestock whenever they like. This is unfair![10]

Ironically, when wolves or bears kill livestock, park and forest rangers tend to blame pastoralists for their alleged failure to properly guard their herds and for having trespassed into the LCs' territory. Pastoralists, however, reject such interpretations. Says R.C., an elderly shepherd:

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[9] Research notes, 21/08/2023 (M. G. personal communication)

[10] Research notes, 18/09/2023 (Ferrari, G. personal communication)

> I was born here, and I crossed these mountains since I was a child. Now the Park is telling us: you cannot bring your livestock here, you cannot walk there! There are places where we can no longer go, because – they say – these are now the bear territory. There is no such thing as the *bear territory*. Here, people and bears have shared the same land for centuries, we never lived completely set aside from each other![11]

Pastoralists also tend to make a clear connection between the expansion of wild boars (Sus scrofa) and deer (Cervus elaphus) and the spontaneous movement of bears outside the PNALM, towards more urbanized and agricultural-developed locations. According to them, at the roots of this phenomenon lies the competition between bears, deer and wild boars over limited food resources; in fact, all these species use the same ecological niches. This forces bears (especially females with their cubs) to migrate outside the Park's boundaries and elsewhere, to look for food. "Bears don't just eat apples and acorns" (the seeds of Quercus cerrus and Quercus pubescens) – says pastoralist Giuseppe Tatangelo – "they also eat flesh, and our livestock did provide them with valuable proteins".[12] Several other pastoralists I have talked to, have also confirmed this statement. They claim that a thriving grazing system was advantageous to bears. Specifically, the placenta of sheep (Figure 5), as well as cows' and horses' spontaneous miscarriages did provide bears with an extra caloric intake. This food contribution was a valuable one, especially during spring when livestock deliver their offspring. This coincides with the period when bears wake up from hibernation and need to regain the lost weight. Today, according to pastoralists, bears have little to eat and, in addition to this, their cubs also face increasing attacks from wolves. Moreover, they claim that, in the past, because of the manure deposited by hundreds of livestock, pastures and clearings were greener and botanical species (on which also bears feed) were more vigorous.

[11] Research notes, 5/02/2024 (C.R. personal communication)
[12] Research notes, 12/02/2024 (Tatangelo.G. personal communication).

Figure 5. Shepherds in Valle Monna estate, Roccamandolfi (Molise region), 2022. While in Abruzzi sheep population has decreased exponentially; in the neighbouring Molise region (e.g. at the foothills of Mount Matese) some shepherds still own herds of up to 500 animals and more.

Over the years, the near disappearance of sheep and other grazing animals from the mountains of Abruzzi appears to have contributed to making pastures less fertile and, therefore, less appealing also to bears. Pastoralists' narratives should be taken seriously into account, not only because these are based on direct empirical experience, but also because – to various degrees – their accounts have been validated by various experts, such as Paolo Forconi, a zoologist who has carried out research within the PNALM, over a decade.

The Death of Amarena and the unravelling of multiple discourses

On 1 September 2023, I was driving along the state road Sora-Avezzano, returning home after visiting some local pastoralists in Val Comino, Lazio Region (Central Italy), when the radio made a shocking announcement: Amarena, the most popular bear of the PNALM, died from internal bleeding, after enduring a gunshot and a painful agony. The person who shot the bear claims that he did

it out of fear, after meeting the bear face-to-face on his property. The two cubs fled after the mother died and are nowhere to be found.[13] This news was particularly disturbing, considering that the population of Marsican brown bears is now on the verge of extinction, with less than sixty specimens surviving. In a matter of hours, the news became viral and was broadcast widely both nationally and internationally. Later, I learned that the bear had travelled more than 40 kilometres to reach San Benedetto dei Marsi (AQ), a municipality of about 3,700 inhabitants, on the eastern shore of the dried Fucino Lake. This lake was first drained by the Romans in 52 A.D. and completely emptied in the nineteenth century, to be finally converted into a highly developed agricultural area, as it stands – until today. Surely, I am not the only person wondering why Amarena and her cubs had travelled through a landscape crisscrossed by asphalted roads and superhighways, just to reach an agricultural location where there is practically no forest and, by no means, reassembles *the typical bear habitat.* On the next day, I received a phone call from L.V. a pastoralist friend; he said "Have you heard the news? Protesters have gathered outside the house of Andrea Leombruni (the killer of Amarena), and he is now receiving a lot of death threats. That's unfair, it shouldn't be that way, the Park – as well – should be blamed for the bear's death!".[14] In the beginning, I thought that my friend might have known the *shooter* personally and, therefore, behind his statement, there was a masked defence of Leombruni. Soon, I discovered that this was not the case. In the following hours, I felt the need to contact other pastoralists from Abruzzi and neighbouring regions, to get a glimpse of their perceptions and interpretations of what had really happened to Amarena. Surprisingly, I realized that L.V. opinion was not an isolated one; rather it was shared by several of his colleagues. Overall, the widely shared feeling was that Leombruni, while being unequivocally guilty of the bear's killing, had become a convenient scapegoat for the park management to decline responsibilities over its failed wildlife management. I found this perspective particularly interesting and decided to invest more time in understanding the issue, not only from the pastoralists' viewpoint but also from the perspectives of conservation and animal rights movements, park authorities and public opinion in general. While defining the objectives of my new research, I thought that the best and most immediate thing that I had to do was to scrutinize the various statements being circulated on the Web, about Amarena's death.

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[13] The news was circulated nationally and internationally, e.g., see: https://www.ansa.it/sito/notizie/cronaca/2023/09/01/uccisa-a-fucilate-lorsa-amarena-in-abruzzo.-il-direttore-del-parco-nazionale-non_ae1afb20-9374-4bd2-88ee-37581cb358e0.html

[14] Research notes, (02/09/2023 L.V. personal communication).

On 1 September, the news about Amarena's tragic death was posted on the PNALM Facebook page and, in a matter of days, it received over 4,000 comments and reactions! In the following days, preliminary scrutiny of these posts helped me to identify at least two opposing and conflicting discourses.

Nature justice and animal rights first

The discourse about *Nature Justice and Animal Rights First* which, for convenience, I have also named as discourse no.1, appears to be shared by a remarkable number of posts. It calls for exemplary punishment of the person responsible for the killing of Amarena, being defined by many as a *despicable assassin*, a *brutal coward* and a *danger to society as a whole*. Several posts even suggested that he, and his family members, should have been subject to social isolation by fellow villagers (a sort of collective punishment). Generally, some of the authors of these posts wanted to emphasise the *uniqueness* and *sacredness* of Amarena, calling it a *symbol of peaceful coexistence* between bears and humans and describing its death as an *inhuman crime against nature*, causing a *huge void* and an *unbearable loss* within civil society. Amongst the authors of such posts, some suggested that a *requiem* had to be held for Amarena, to honour the bear's death and that the Italian Government had to announce a day of national mourning. Generally, the proponents of these ideas tend to place much emphasis on the fact that humans, through agricultural development and the construction of cities and infrastructures, had already taken over bears' natural habitat and, therefore, it was, now, their responsibility to compensate LCs for this *territorial usurpation*, almost being perceived as a *historical injustice*. In this context, it is not the bear population that has to be managed and controlled, but rather the wrong set of relationships that humans have established with other species. For the proponents of this discourse, coexistence with LCs is not only a desirable goal but the only available option to be pursued, at all costs and by all means, even if this might entail sacrifices to be faced by representatives of *marginal sectors of society* (e.g. animal herders/pastoralists).

Residents' rights first and nature in check

Amongst the hundreds of posts, which I had scrutinized, only a minimal and irrelevant number did raise questions of a different order, such as: what was Amarena and its cubs doing outside the borders and adjacent areas of the National Park? Why couldn't the Park keep the bears safe inside their natural habitats? Why are an increasing number of bears becoming confidants and now visiting villages and urbanized areas? Why are there no fences to block bears' access to dangerous crossings? Why are there no underpasses to fa-

cilitate the crossing of motorways by bears and large fauna? Could efficient municipal waste management help to keep bears away from human settlements? What is the Park doing to protect residents' properties/activities and livestock herders from large predators? Why does the death of wild animals continue to evoke much clamour while, in comparison, the slaughtering of hundreds of calves, foals, sheep and goats by LCs, receives little or no attention at all, by both government institutions and the media?

For a matter of convenience, I have associated this new set of questions to a discourse that I have here named *Residents' Rights First and Nature in Check* (or discourse no.2). This is also to say that several discourses tend to overlap with each other and are not self-contained. By and large, the proponents of this discourse tend to blame the Park for a failed management of wildlife and for not acknowledging and including residents' knowledge and perspectives in nature conservation and landscape management practices. They argue that the blame for the killing of Amarena should also be extended to the park's authorities. This minority group, which appears to be composed mainly of pastoralists, farmers and hunters, tends to perceive nature and wildlife as fundamental components of a collective cultural landscape, where the LCs population should be kept in check and constantly monitored. According to the proponents of this view, the safety, rights, economy and practices of local residents, especially within protected areas, should receive priority over LCs protection. In this perspective, coexistence between the human population and LCs should be allowed only if it does not pose major threats to residents' agricultural improvements, extensive grazing practices and daily economies.

As I would like to clarify, discourses no.1 and no.2 – which I have summarized above – have been defended by their respective advocates, also in non-virtual contexts such as during TV shows and public demonstrations. I did attend two of such demonstrations on 10th September 2023, one was named *A Future for the Bear* and it was jointly organized by environmental and animal rights movements and the other consisted, instead, of a pastoralists' counter sit-in, held at San Benedetto dei Marsi (AQ), on the same day. Both events provided the ideal ground for me to assess the dynamics by which different actors practice their discursive power (Svarstad 2000; 2003; Adger *et al.* 2001) in an attempt to gather consensus and make their views appealing to a public audience.[15]

[15] Pastoralists exercising discursive power during their sit-in at San Benedetto dei Marsi (AQ), see link: https://agenparl.eu/2023/09/12/lazio-apac-allevatori-pacifisti-e-animalisti-intolleranti-a-confronto-lorsa-amarena-diventa-il-simbolo-della-malagestione-del-parco-nazionale-dabruzzo-pnalm/ (accessed on 15/09/2023).

Nature conservation and benefits sharing: a win-win discourse

During a PNALM workshop held in Pescasseroli (AQ), on January 26, 2024, one of the speakers – Antonio Di Santo, President of the PNALM Community (an advisory and proposing body of the Park Authority) – emphasized the need for blending nature conservation and development, hence creating a single template that he defines as the *Park Model*: "a laboratory for sustainable socio-economic development".[16] Referring to the PNALM, he further argued that "a guarded and regulated valley becomes an exclusive valley and exclusivity generates development" and – although some restrictions and limitations are being put in place – these generate new economic opportunities.

Di Santo's statement brings to light a well-known *win-win* discourse, which merges both biodiversity conservation and community benefits (cfr. Benjaminsen, Svarstad 2010). Within such discourse, sustainable tourism is generally seen as an economic boost, bringing significant advantages to the Park's residents. Clearly, this discourse has been largely influenced by a neoliberal way of thinking, which views *nature* as an exclusive commodity, a luxury item reserved for the needs of tourists and urban people, for recreation and *spiritual refreshment*. Implicit in this win-win discourse is also the idea that a minority of citizens might bear the costs of conservation (e.g. due to LCs expansion) for the sake of wider benefits being enjoyed by the majority of civil society. Evidence shows that the so-called park model, except for those engaging in the tourism and hospitality industry, has generated little or no economic benefits for other categories of residents, such as pastoralists. This win-win discourse – which I have here named *Nature Conservation and Benefits Sharing* – "rarely involves real devolution of authority but, on the contrary, it leads to the political and economic marginalization" (Benjaminsen, Svarstad 2010, p. 9) of *traditional* stakeholders, such as pastoralists. In this fashion, power is re-centralized within park authorities (*Ibid.*).

Notoriously, PNALM authorities discriminate against pastoralists, blaming them for their alleged incapacity to properly deal with LCs. For instance, in an article published by the ANSA press agency on 15 September 2023, PNALM Director Luciano Sammarone, with reference to Amarena's death, argued: "There is, obviously, no justification for this (tragic) episode, because Amarena, although she has caused damages to agricultural and livestock activities… she was never a threat to humans". He also added: "Let's ask ourselves how many

[16] See Radio Parco audio-visual recording of the event: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h9y-iDYer-48 (accessed on 27/01/2024).

unauthorized poultries, more similar to shacks, are being found within our territory".[17] In other words, through his own statement, Sammarone transfers part of the blame on local owners of farmyard animals for keeping their animals within inadequate structures, more similar to barracks and, indeed, not bear-resistant. One is left to wonder why, in the first place, rural households should build bear-resistant poultries in areas like San Benedetto dei Marsi (AQ) that, historically, are not inhabited by bears. Bears have reached these locations only very recently and unexpectedly. In a similar vein, on 1 September 2023, during an Amarena-related sit-in, held by conservationists in San Sebastiano dei Marsi (AQ), PNALM president, Giovanni Cannata,[18] also blamed local people and, specifically, the pastoralists. He gave the following statement: "The culture of prevention requires livestock breeders who do not think that these mountains are the Far-West, where you target a mother [bear] and run it over [with a car]". During the same interview, he also labelled pastoralists as "breeders of European CAP Funds" (i.e. people taking advantage of EU funds, set aside for agriculture). Such derogatory statements, rather than smoothening up an already polarized debate, have created the premises for further conflicts and the radicalization of contrasting positions over Human/LCs coexistence. It must be pointed out that pastoralists' perceptions of, and approaches to, landscape, as well as their tendency to perceive State land as a source of opportunity for *good living* are being interpreted by Park authorities as an attempt to impose a *de facto* self-government on biodiversity-rich areas. As a result, the Park's authorities tend to force animal herders/pastoralists into a framework of rules and regulations and, in so doing, the Park appears to have bypassed participatory methodologies and fair consultation procedures. This also entails a blatant violation of those civic and collective rights being guaranteed to residents by the Italian Constitution and national laws. Overall, the Park discourse is wrapped in the language of benefit sharing and opportunities for local communities while through the expansion of its boundaries and the incorporation of grazing land, it competes with pastoralists (cfr. Benjaminsen, Svarstad 2010). Through the offering of higher bids, local municipal mayors are leasing collective lands to the Park. As a result, pastoralists are deprived of parcels of

[17] See: https://www.ansa.it/sito/notizie/cronaca/2023/09/01/uccisa-a-fucilate-lorsa-amarena-in-abruzzo.-il-direttore-del-parco-nazionale-non_ae1afb20-9374-4bd2-88ee-37581cb358e0.html#:~:text=Chiediamoci%20quanti%20pollai%20abusivi%20ci,dinamica%20dei%20fatti%20%2D%20aggiunge%20%2D (accessed on 20/09/2023)

[18] Source: "Apac-Lazio: L'orsa Amarena, una morte annunciata? Le responsabilità del singolo e quelle del 'sistema parco", Agenparl 7 Settembre, 2023. https://agenparl.eu/2023/09/07/lazio-apac-lorsa-amarena-una-morte-annunciata-le-responsabilita-del-singolo-e-quelle-del-sistema-parco/ (accessed on 10/9/2023). Also see: https://www.facebook.com/share/v/sLLDJWwSdgkLB1Vn/

grazing lands which would be essential – not only for ensuring the rotation of pastures – but also for acquiring the necessary titles to have access to CAP (EU Common Agricultural Policy) payments. More importantly, the areas being leased by local municipalities to the Park include collective domains/properties. In Italy, collective properties (see also Graziani 2011; Grossi 1998; Nervi 2002) comprise, in the strict sense "corporately managed territories by a local community clearly identifiable by statute, as well as lands for civic use, a term that defines both territories assigned to specific local communities based on the legislation on civic uses, and lands belonging to third parties, whether public or private entities, on which the local community can still exercise secondary rights of civic use" (Bassi 2022, p. 114). Such civic rights include, amongst others, the collective management of pasturelands (see Bigaran, Villa 2018) are enshrined into Law no.168 of 20/11/2017, and are regarded as inalienable and non-transferable.[19] It is perhaps not surprising that also the Framework Law on Protected Areas (394/91), in art. 11 (Sec. 5.) states very clearly that, in the context of park regulations: "the real rights and civic uses of local communities shall remain unaffected". Unfortunately, this is not happening within the PNALM. Now as in the past, *collective domains* continue to be subject to strong social conflicts (see Ostrom 1990) and "are at the very centre of the attention of local governance and movements aiming at a sustainable, ethical and responsible use of soils (biodiversity) and natural resources, in line with the Sustainable Development Goals"[20] (see also Bindi 2022, p. 114).

The rewilding ideology: an all-embracing discourse

"Rewilding is a type of large-scale biological and ecological restoration, emphasising recovery of native wide-ranging species and top carnivores and other keystone animals in natural patterns of abundance, to regain functional and resilient ecosystems" (Noss, Cooperrider 1994, quoted in Johns 2019, p. 12). This term appears to have been used for the first time in Jennifer Foote's book (1990) Radical Environmentalism (see Johns 2019). The understanding of wil-

[19] The Law 168 of 2017 recites: "The legal regime of the goods referred to in paragraph 1 (i.e. land of collective enjoyment) remains that of inalienability, indivisibility, non-susceptibility to usucaption right, and of perpetual agro- forestry-pastoral designation" (Art.3, co.3) (words in parenthesis and translation are mine).

[20] Bassi (2016) has argued that although biodiversity does not appear as an explicit concern of local communities managing collective properties, it is – nevertheless – preserved by the indirect effect of their intimate interrelationship with their territory. In this sense, "collective property is not formally protected area" but "is substantially protected area" (Graziani 2011, p. 102, quoted in Bassi 2016, p. 2).

derness, as an area governed by natural processes, lies at the root of the rewilding paradigm. However, one should not look at rewilding as a fixed notion; there are, in fact, differences in rewilding perspectives and these lie, for instance, in the extent to which "restoration of ecosystem structure and function is aimed and pursued and, ultimately, in those interventions that are necessary, feasible, or acceptable" (Carver *et al.* 2021).
By and large, rewilding advocates perceive wilderness as an area having its own intrinsic biological value, where the *Earth* and its community of life are untamed and uncurbed by man. In this wild landscape, man is no longer an agent of change, but simply a visitor in search of solitude and of an intimate connection with *nature*. Centuries, if not millennia of human wisdom, adaptation, innovation and experiences in dealing with the environment are not regarded by rewilders as essential in solving the current ecological crisis; rather *nature* – and its intrinsic forces – are believed to represent the answer. This is mainly because rewilders tend to recast humans as biological intruders rather than cultural agents, while promoting the "de-socialisation of environmental actors" (see Van Aken, 2017). Implicit in their narrative, is the idea that *homo sapiens* is "a universally harmful, species-scale, actor" (Ahuja 2015) and he should now put himself aside, and give a chance to *nature* to restore itself (cfr. Johns 2019). Of course, I am not disagreeing with the noble objective of restoring or rehabilitating environments being degraded by human activities. Rather, I am questioning the epistemological status of notions such as *ecosystem restoration*, *trusting the forces of nature* and, overall, moral tenets such as *respect* and *responsibility for* the environment regarded by rewilders as universal and applicable to all cultural contexts. Obviously, as it appears, rewilders' ideas and practices for restoring natural processes are completely at odds with pastoralists' own perceptions of the *tended* and *tamed* landscape, which I have described at the beginning of this paper. In fact, from a rewilding perspective, the expansion of LCs and large fauna, in general, is viewed as an opportunity for people to reconnect with *wilder nature* and to experience it; on the contrary, to pastoralists, such expansion is perceived as a curse, a serious threat to both their livestock and livelihood.

Bear corridors and food shortage

As far as concerning the managing of the Marsican bear population, both rewilders and park authorities believe that the establishment of corridors and of so-called *riserve integrali* (wildlife integral reserves), might be beneficial to this species. Therefore, within the PNALM's perimeter and surrounding areas, Rewilding Apennines – a branch of the larger Rewilding Europe Network –

in collaboration with the local non-profit, volunteers-led association *Salviamo l'Orso* (Let's Save the Bear) is planning to implement so-called bear-smart corridors, aiming at linking different protected areas, with the ultimate objective of allowing bears to expand their territorial range, so to increase their survival rate. As we shall see, pastoralists' explanations of bears' movements should be seriously considered, not only because such explanations are based on direct empirical evidence, but also because, to various degrees, the latter bear strong analogies with those of experts, such as researchers of the Italian Society for the History of Fauna "Giuseppe Altobello", as well with the field findings of zoologist Paolo Forconi.[21]

PNALM authorities claim that trophic productivity levels are optimal within the Park and that bears have sufficient resources on which to feed (AA.VV. 2011. p. 9).[22] On the other hand, evidence shows that there is a progressive movement of Marsican bears from remote locations towards human settlements and agricultural areas (Forconi 2020). Not surprisingly, instances of confident bears attacking farmyard animals, feeding from garbage bins, breaking into restaurants and private houses are occurring more frequently now than in the past (see Sulli, Latini, D'Amico, Sammarone 2014). In this respect, local zoologist Paolo Forconi has raised some fundamental questions: why was the 80% of mature female bear with cubs found outside the park's boundaries, between 2020 and 2023? And why only 20% of the existing bear population breed inside the PNALM, during the same period? Why are 50% of bear cubs dying within the first year, unlike other bear populations around the world? (Forconi 2019). The zoologist's answers to these questions match, in many respects, pastoralists' empirical evidence. The main reasons justifying bears' abandonment of remote locations would appear to be related to the dwindling availability of wild-food sources, to the ban on grazing within integral reserves and to the positioning of anti-bear electric fences around private fruit orchards (Forconi 2020). According to Forconi, this reduced food availability becomes critical during specific years, when due to various reasons (late spring frost, droughts, natural fluctuations, etc.) dominant bears drive out their conspecifics in order to secure the little food available (*Ibid.* 2020). Hence, food shortage would ap-

[21] During the two-days *Wildebate* workshop *Between Wild and Domestic: a Dialogue between Local Actors* held in Capracotta (IS) on 27-28 Sept. 2024, Corradino Guacci, President of the Italian Society for the History of Fauna 'Giuseppe Altobello', has stated: "there is a precise correlation between the presence of bears in populated areas and the scarcity of trophic resources in nature" (author's translation and video-documentation of the event).

[22] AA.VV., (2011). Piano d'azione nazionale per la tutela dell'orso bruno marsicano – PATOM. *Quad.Cons. natura*, 37 pp. 1-49, Min. Ambiente – ISPRA.

pear to be the main reason why – over the past four years – no mother bears and their cubs, have been spotted in the most secluded and highly protected *wild sanctuaries* of the PNALM, such as, for instance, inside the wildlife integral reserves (*riserve integrali*) and National Park's core zones, found between Mt. Marsicano and Mt. Meta. It is an irony, says Forconi, that in order to protect bears, certain areas within the park have already been curtailed to pastoralists and no bears are presently living there. This further suggests that, while regional-scale connectivity can allow bears to exploit a larger number of ecological niches, it might not represent the ultimate solution to halt bears' movements towards more urbanized areas. Such movements are also the main cause of bears' fatalities, due to car accidents, as well as to close interactions with humans. "The years 2019 and 2023" says Forconi "have one thing in common: a shortage of food for bears, their movement out of the Park and the increase in bears' casualties".[23] Such accidents are not rare, and according to WWF-Italy every year on average two Marsican brown bears die due to human induced, accidental or illegal causes.[24] Moreover, Forconi points out that, on 23 January 2023, before the dead of Amarena, the bear named Juan Carrito was hit by a car on State Road SS 17. A female bear also lost her life on the same road, in 2019. Another bear was shot death in 2014, after attacking chickens in the village of Pettorano sul Gizio (AQ). Over the years, several other named bears have disappeared from the park's list and are nowhere to be found; amongst them, Peppina in 2022 and Mario in 2019 (Forconi 2020). Overall, says Forconi "Marsican bears continue to die, and the Park continues to make the wrong management choices, without understanding what is wrong. From 2011 until now, eight Marsican bears have died due to car accidents, of which two were habituated bears and six were not-confident bears".[25] Very recently, another bear has died due to the injuries sustained during a car accident occurred on the highway Sora-Avezzano, last 13 August 2024. However, according to pastoralist Giuseppe Tatangelo, this gloomy checklist would be incomplete without adding another two bears drowned in 2010, inside a water tank found on Mt. Breccioso, as well an additional three other bears which died in 2018, in the same way and in the same location. According to Tatangelo, after the first incident, the Park should have worked with the local municipality to make the tank

[23] P. Forconi, 18 April 2024, personal communication

[24] Source: https://www.wwf.it/area-stampa/la-morte-dellorso-juan-carrito-e-una-tragedia-annunciata/ (accessed on 28/09/2023)

[25] Research notes, 18/04/2024 (Forconi, P. personal communication). A habituated bear is a bear that shows little to no overt reaction to people, as a result of being repeatedly exposed to anthropogenic stimuli without substantial consequence.

safe so to prevent new deaths, but it did nothing. Ultimately, the tank has been sealed while, according to Tatangelo, the Park should have created a bear-safe access to this precious water source. Because water can no longer be found on Mt. Breccioso, bears have now encroached in the nearby village of Balsorano (AQ) and in other neighbouring lower areas, thus facing the risk of man retaliation. This represents a tangible instance of PNALM's failed LCs management. Rather than placing undue emphasis on the creation of bear corridors and on the establishment of new *riserve integrali* (wildlife integral reserves), one is left to wonder if anything different could have been tried to enhance food availability for bears, in order to stop or at least reduce, their movements towards villages and agricultural areas. Also in this case, Paolo Forconi's proposed solutions, and pastoralists' suggestions, share some commonalities. Amongst them, is the idea that the Park should have planted thousands of fruit trees (in Spain, the Fundación Oso Pardo has already planted more than 380,000 of them, exactly for the same purpose). Moreover, the Park should have also created specific foraging sites, especially during food-shortage seasons, which would have allowed access only to bears, but not to wild boars and deer. Such measures are already taking place in other countries where bears are given extra food supplements, especially during the period preceding hibernation (see Ziegltrum 2008). Overall, both pastoralists and the zoologist, agree that the Park should establish apple orchards only for bears. Both foraging sites and apple orchards should be located away from villages to reduce damages to local communities, as well as a close interaction with humans. Unfortunately, these proposed suggestions continue to be largely undermined by the Park; other goals, perceived as more urgent and appropriate (e.g. conforming to rewilding targets and the establishment of maximum protection zones) are being pursued.

Discussion: making sense of multiple discourses

The two discourses outlined at the beginning of this paper: *Nature Justice and Animal Rights First* (discourse no.1) and *Residents' Rights First and Nature in Check* (discourse no.2) do include several intermediate positions that I am unable to outline in the context of this paper. However, I must specify that the Park win-win discourse overlaps, in many respects, with discourse no.1, but has a stronger overtone on *benefit sharing*, being deriving from nature conservation. What needs to be highlighted, here, is that all such discourses are associated with specific cultural conceptions of nature-society relations, which often contrast with each other. On the other hand, the rewilding ideology represents a strong point of convergence for a number

of overlapping discourses being advocated by various actors, such as conservation biologists, environmental NGOs, protected areas managers and animal rights movements. The rewilding tenets: *Nature knows best/Nature should take the lead* are now becoming the unifying proposition embracing a multitude of stakeholders and the mainstream society. As a result, the debate over coexistence between large carnivores and extensive grazing systems is being trapped in eco-centric categories, with detrimental implications for the lives and economies of certain sectors of society (pastoralists first). Indeed, this discourse can be challenged through an ontological argument, which takes the form of asserting that there is no universal human ethic about the use, management and the restoration of the environment, as the *guru* of the rewilding paradigm would like to propose. Clearly, the presumed ontological supremacy and universality of nature, being entwined into the rewilding ideology, is completely at odds with pastoralists' own views. Here, the key point is that metaphysical presuppositions underlying pastoralists' understanding of the role of humans in tending the landscape, are based on culturally specific notions of the interaction between nature and society, whose incorporation in current *coexistence* and rewilding discourses would be problematic. In fact, pastoralists do not regard *natural regeneration* through self-healing as an object of managerial solutions *per se*. Instead, they place emphasis on the abandonment of customary practices that, according to them, have led to environmental damage. The latter is not attributed to presumably destructive practices, such as overgrazing or the clearing of vegetation through fire, but rather on the progressive depopulation of the countryside and the consequent fragmentation of the traditional farming society, following *modernization*, *globalization* and peoples' migration to industrial towns and abroad.

Pastoralists' perceptions of the tended/tamed landscape challenge the rewilding *naturalist* perspective, which presupposes that nature/society interface is *natural*. In fact, the rewilding discourse assumes that human societies are modelled after an idealised notion of *nature*. Within this context, the notion of Human/LCs coexistence becomes imbued with moral values such as *tolerance*, *respect* and *compassion*. Everything that contradicts the rewilders' idea, according to which *nature knows best* is, then, automatically branded as intolerance, supremacy, aggressiveness and arrogance towards *mother nature*. Conversely, as we have seen, pastoralists' landscape is one where humans are caught in webs of interdependence and mutualism with nonhumans and the environment. Such a landscape is modelled after an idea of a functioning society, fulfilling the needs of its members, where notions such as *order* and *cleanliness* are synonymous of harmony and stability.

While challenging the rewilding paradigm, I am not disagreeing with the notion that nature is highly resilient and can *heal itself*, rather I'm disputing the idea that man-induced environmental imbalances (e.g. the uncontrolled and exponential proliferation of wild pigs – which has caused incalculable damage to agriculture, natural biodiversity and citizens' safety – can be simply amended by allowing nature to take its own course. Similarly, the increase of wolves (Italy has the largest population for square km in Europe) and the alarming encroachment of confident Marsican brown bears into villages and rural areas are all urgent issues requiring prompt and well-planned scientific *human solutions*, rather than a total reliance on the idea that *nature*, after all, will automatically heal itself. The major danger of the rewilding narrative lies in its failure to take into account plural interpretations of nature-society relations, as well as in its incapacity to engage in a radical socio-political critique of present development models.

It is undeniable that conservation measures, based on rewilding prescriptions, are generally followed by a more decisive push for the implementation of protected areas categories, such as *riserve integrali* (integral wildlife reserves), *special conservation zones* (ZSC), *special protection zones* (ZPS), etc. These restricted zones, being actively promoted in the context of National Parks such as the PNALM, tend to disintegrate the unity of the pastoralists' landscape and become meaningless to pastoralists. In fact, people do not perceive their landscape as a tabula rasa which can be inscribed, measured and dotted with specific land categories, but rather as a continuum of indivisible features (Ingold 1986) which are the repository of previous experiences, past events, social relationships and wilful actions (Rosaldo 1986). Without doubts, an ideology based on the notion that *nature* knows best is far from being neutral and innocent. It is rather, a *political* act to *ontologise* cultures, i.e. to assign a different existence to local communities and pastoralists. This has the effect of removing the people from the space they occupy (Fabian 1983) thus depriving them of agency and history. It does not come as a surprise that rewilders are not particularly interested in local histories and customary practices and often disregard the fact that the so-called *truly Mediterranean wilderness* is an anthropogenic *tamed* and *tended* landscape. Curiously enough, to pursue their agenda, rewilders have to set their clock backwards, towards an imagined landscape, which have existed, long before human occupation. This idyllic landscape occurs "outside of human presence and outside of human history" (Brosius, Russell 2003, p. 52). It is exactly this failure to establish a single timeframe when nature was really *wild* that deprives the rewilding discourse of scientific substance and credibility. This is because any attempt of dividing the history of the Earth into a time in which nature was

wild, and a time during which it became altered by humans flows strongly against contemporary understandings of human-environment coevolution. Unavoidably, this ill-conceived way of thinking ends up having important and detrimental wide-ranging implications on the way in which Human/LCs coexistence is imagined, promoted and implemented.

Conclusions

The death of a bear has had the final effect of strengthening the alliance between park authorities, nature conservationists, animal rights movements, rewilding advocates and civil society, in general. Amarena has been portrayed as an icon, a tangible symbol of coexistence between man and nature. The last video taken of Amarena, before its death, portrays the bear during a village's crossing, while various individuals, armed with cell phones, try to catch a picture of the mother-bear with its cubs (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Three years before its death: Amarena with her four cubs, in Villalago (AQ), (image use authorized by P. Forconi 2020 copyrights)

As my argument is coming full circle, some nagging questions remain: Is this, the type of coexistence that we should aim to? Shouldn't LCs maintain a healthy distrust of man, to better protect themselves and their offspring? Shouldn't this be one of the key objectives of park authorities, i.e. making sure that wild animals remain truly wild? In the context of the PNALM, we have witnessed, instead, to the *Disneyfication* of wild nature and to visitors dealing with the rare Marsican bear as it was a *naughty teddy bear*, engaged in a whole range of *funny things* (e.g. stealing food from shops, ravaging apiaries, breaking into pizzerias, grabbing a sheep, etc.).[26] Despite the undeniable negative consequences on local residents, tourists and external observers tend to portray such events as *hilarious*; this divergence of perspectives remains painfully incommensurate. And yet, we cannot be content simply with the assertion that discourses on human-large carnivores coexistence are not clear-cut and should hence be carefully identified, deeply understood and put into perspective. Perhaps, more importantly, an urgent call should be made for rewilding advocates, park managers, conservation organizations, animal rights movements, etc., to put aside both their models of the world and *regime of truth* (Foucault, in Rabinow 1991) so to finally allow pastoralists and local communities to voice out their own distinctive views. What indeed continues to widen up the gap between animal herders/pastoralists and other stakeholders is the prolonged lack of "participation from below" (Goulet 1989),[27] in addition to a blatant disregard of pastoralists' unique perspectives. Concurrently, the rewilding ideology is gaining much appeal amongst mainstream society and is almost shaping itself as a form of an environmentally-based populism and – as all forms of populism – "it… does not invite a transformation of the existing socio-ecological order but calls on the elites to undertake action such that nothing really has to change" (Swyngedouw 2010, p. 223). The rewilding paradigm is also a convenient one: not only it depoliticises discourses over environmental sustainability, but it also provides a politically neutral answer to current ecological crises. After all, to allow nature to heal itself is economically appealing, and financially less costly, if compared to sophisticated interventions for ecosystem restoration and other forms of environmental engineering.

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[26] In the field of sociology, the term Disneyfication is used to explain the process of the transformation of things into something simplified, controlled and more pleasant. This has the effect of *sugar-coating* the reality of unsafe environments/places (or things), by stripping them of their original character (see Zunin, S. 1996. *The Cultures of Cities*, Blackwell Publishing).

[27] According to Goulet: "participation starts from three distinct sources: it can be induced from above by some authority or experts; generated from below by non-expert populace itself; or catalytically promoted by some external third agent" (Goulet 1989, p. 166). "When participation is spontaneously generated from below it must be regarded as a fundamental source of social capital" (Novellino 1997, p. 47).

While much ink continues to be spilled over the coexistence between LCs and extensive grazing systems, the time is ripe to seriously think on whether overlapping and often contrasting discourses could be reconciled by acknowledging the multifaceted dimension of people and nature relationships. This further calls for the need of understanding *natural landscapes* (e.g. rangelands), not only as opportunities for environmental conservation but, more importantly, as human constructed landscapes beings interpreted by man on both practical and symbolic levels (cf. Breda, 2001).
Decades of weak participation procedures, the lack of concerted and inclusive solutions, the neglect of pastoralists demands, the implementation of ineffective top-down conservation measures have all brought extensive grazing system to the dire situation in which it finds itself in, today. To reverse this ongoing trend will be extremely difficult, but not impossible.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflicts of interest

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