



FROM DESIRE TO ENDURANCE: Hanging on in a Spanish Village

HADAS WEISS

Humboldt University of Berlin

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1969-4236>

Fresh out of college in 1963, Jane and George Collier began researching a small village in Western Andalusia. They lived there for nine months, continued studying the village for the duration of their careers at Stanford University's Department of Anthropology, and returned for a year of fieldwork in the 1980s. Both went on to write magnificent monographs about this village, which they named Los Olivos. I read these monographs long ago, never suspecting they would one day set me on a journey of my own.

I study livelihoods and ideologies shaped by contemporary capitalism. Having started exploring this in Madrid, [Jane Collier's \(1997\) *From Duty to Desire: Remaking Families in a Spanish Village*](#) came to my mind as a model for making sense of attitudes in terms of their material contexts. Collier did so by comparing Los Olivos in the 1960s and in the 1980s. In the 1960s, the common way of explaining one's actions and those of others in Los Olivos was of adhering to duty and convention. Back then, it was a farming village of some 600 residents. Spain's Franco dictatorship was pushing self-sufficient farms toward participation in the world market. It hurt the village economy and triggered out-migration. Villagers who persevered did so by protecting their landed estates, whose size determined each family's fortune. To leverage the value of their houses and agricultural lands,

they had to marry well, uphold family reputation, and maintain ties with kin who might die childless or offer help. It made good material sense to attribute their relative fortunes to abiding by the duties that secured them a favorable inheritance. An ideology of duty reflected and reinforced a form of capitalism wherein livelihoods hinged on the transference of family property.

By the 1980s, talk of abiding by duties gave way to a sense that everyone did as they pleased. The population of Los Olivos had dwindled to about 300, and those who had stayed could no longer live off farming. Residents and former residents instead made a living in the national labor market. Their earnings were low but above minimum wage, with an expectation of rising still. Employers justified hiring, promotion, and wage decisions as reflecting the market value of workers' labor. Villagers redirected their efforts from securing an inheritance to paving a career path. Rather than defending family estates, they strove to augment their human capital. They had a stake in affirming self-improvement by highlighting their forward-looking desire and by attributing their fortunes and those of others to its pursuit. An ideology of desire reflected livelihoods that hinged on market competition and wage labor.

Jane Collier's analysis revealed itself as directly pertinent to my research agenda. In a common understanding of contemporary capitalism, jobs grow precarious and wages stagnate, while property regains its earlier importance, as evidenced in the popularity of real-estate investment in Spain and beyond. [Thomas Piketty's \(2014\)](#) account of the growth of property-generated wealth outstripping that of wages has inspired some to relate present-day inequalities to ownership rather than employment, as was previously the norm, and by extension, to family transfers and inheritance ([Adkins, Konings, and Cooper 2020](#)). Attitudes seem to have shifted, too. Young adults I interviewed in Madrid attributed their situations (like living with their parents and working in jobs they disliked) to constraints rather than desires. If livelihoods were now supported by their own ideology, it was plainly not one of desire. Yet I wondered why it also bore no resemblance to the sense of duty of the 1960s, despite a reassertion of property and inheritance.

I also wondered about the politics of interlocutors more attuned to daily challenges than to projecting their desires about the future. My research took place a few years after Spain's mass protests following the 2008 financial crisis, under the banner of slogans like "Youth without a Future" (*Juventud sin Futuro*). The lack of durable security was represented, in these protests, as a future denied to young adults whose hopes for steady employment and a house of their own were frustrated. Seeking possibilities in these mobilizations, anthropologists of contempo-

rary Spain (e.g., [Franquesa 2016, 2018](#); [Narotzky 2016, 2021](#); [Narotzky and Smith 2006](#); [Smith 2014, 2016](#)) analyzed them in terms of political imaginaries and agencies. But Jane Collier's analysis made me wonder about the payoffs of analyzing contemporary attitudes as emerging from existing conditions to reproduce rather than transform them for understanding contemporary finance-led capitalism in which property proves risky and steady employment tenuous and marginal.

My wager was that distilling the ideological contours of the present moment would grant me insight into its material constraints. And it occurred to me that I could do so by revisiting Los Olivos. That was how I came to spend part of spring and all of summer 2019 living in the village. My fieldwork included interviewing some thirty residents, attending religious and social events, and partaking in numerous informal conversations at groceries, bars, playgrounds, church, on daily group exercise walks, and the like. This intense period of participant observation helped me reconstruct some of the material and ideational scaffolding of village life.

Drawing on this fieldwork, I will argue that if the proprietor's sense of duty in the 1960s was replaced by the employee's affirmation of desire in the 1980s, present-day livelihoods in Los Olivos, and arguably beyond, impede both the extraction of significant value from the past and the possibility to carry over value to the future. For villagers, property has become as precarious a springboard for the future as jobs are. Instead, they pin their livelihoods on flexible, ongoing extraction of income from a range of resources here and now. A discourse of endurance redeems their struggle to do so. Endurance becomes a merit when people can no longer distinguish themselves materially. Much like desire, it operates ideologically in shoring up the status quo. But if desire did so by reimagining production-led capitalism as an aggregate of self-made fortunes, endurance does so by claiming virtue within finance-led capitalism. Against the backdrop of mobilizations for livelihood in post-financial crisis Spain, endurance exposes the self-reproduction of capitalism in a way that desire—fueled by a sense of agency vis-à-vis the future—could not, making for a less hopeful historical conjuncture.

In what follows, I will describe the discourse of endurance that has replaced that of desire, as I have encountered it in Los Olivos. Next, I will anchor this discourse in its material underpinnings and show how it affirms villagers' livelihoods. In the final section I will reflect, in conversation with anthropologists who have discussed political imaginaries in Spain and beyond, on the specificity of finance-led capitalism, delineating endurance as an ideology of the contemporary moment.

ENDURANCE

I kept running into fifty-nine-year-old Carmen as she limped (complaining of knee pains) between one or another of the houses she was cleaning, until I finally pinned her down for an interview. Her manner was brisk and matter of fact. As was once common, she told me, she stopped studying after elementary school and went to work, picking chestnuts and working in a confectionary. At twenty-three, she married her village boyfriend and moved into the house he had inherited. While looking after their two daughters, she helped him in the fields. He had sold the fruit they harvested with his brothers but when they could no longer earn enough to support themselves, he switched to masonry. He worked for a construction company until it went bust. Since then, he has been taking on the odd construction job and otherwise farming.

After their daughters entered school, Carmen got a job at a slaughterhouse, but six years of it proved too hard on her body. Instead, she started taking public works jobs like street cleaning and house painting, making extra cash picking olives and chestnuts. She also painted and cleaned the houses of neighbors and vacationers. The better known she became for it, the more such gigs came her way. Now she mostly cleans houses privately, including her brother's. She continues taking on public works jobs on occasion to qualify for unemployment benefits.

Rather than simply rebuild their roof when it started collapsing, Carmen and her husband decided to divide the house in two. For eight years, they spent every spare dime on construction costs, and Carmen's husband did most of the work himself. Now they rent out one half of the house, living in the other half. They also inherited a smaller house, currently occupied by their daughter, and a shed near the main road. They use the shed for the annual slaughter of two pigs they raise, and sometimes rent it out as a garage. And they inherited fields, which provide much of their foodstuff. Carmen showed me her freezer, stacked with pork to last the year, and her kitchen full of fruit and tomatoes she was canning. Eggs and milk they have from their chickens and goats. Carmen makes cheese to sell to neighbors. She also gives produce away as gifts.

When sitting down, Carmen knits (a sweater for her grandson while we were talking). She had sewn her daughters' clothes and made lace tablecloths, too. She needs always to be working. Unlike her husband, she won't have the requisite fifteen years of formal employment to qualify for a pension. It is true that they live well enough now for her not to have to push herself (Carmen nodded knowingly when I repeated what others said about her limping), but that is the point: they are

not getting any younger. Only by remaining active, she explained, can they hope to endure, come what may.

Carmen's story resembled many others I heard and observed in Los Olivos. Most able-bodied villagers spent most of their time making a great effort to obtain a living from a variety of sources. This effort was not for the sake of moneymaking or upward mobility. In an animated conversation at a local bar about the exploits of Spain's millionaires, featured on TV the previous night, I interjected to say that people in Los Olivos also did everything they could to make money. The bar patrons promptly disabused me of this notion. Their efforts were not to get rich, several insisted, but to maintain what they had.

What they had was humble. Following protracted economic decline and out-migration,¹ Los Olivos managed to retain a population of about 300 full-time residents since the 1980s. But its composition changed, reflecting regional trends of declining birthrates and aging (Entrena and Gómez-Mateos 2000; Monteagudo López-Menchero and Márquez Domínguez 1986). Adults recalled the village teeming with children, but this is no longer the case. While I was there, three young families were lured in with subsidized housing so that their children would keep the elementary school from being shut down.

The village also has part-time residents: typically, former residents with inherited houses in which they spend weekends or holidays. Then, there are the tourists. Los Olivos ranks among the most beautiful villages of the Sierra de Aracena, a Natural Park since the 1990s and a magnet for rural tourism. Spanish and European institutions help fund its tourist initiatives (Ruiz-Ballesteros and Cáceres-Feria 2016a, 2016b), including marked hiking paths, an information center, and a botanical garden. Los Olivos also sports vacation rentals, a spa, a high-end restaurant, three bars, two crafts-and-souvenir shops, and local artisanal goods sold at its two groceries. Still, as everyone pointed out, tourists only come seasonally, and only the owners of tourism-oriented businesses gained directly from the money they spend. The year following my stay there, the coronavirus pandemic suspended tourism altogether. Meanwhile, environmentally protective restrictions on construction, farming, and hunting command extra costs that residents bicker about (cf. Mercado-Alonso 2015).

Many in Los Olivos depend for a living on public works and employment subsidies. They are offered at villages across Spain, but primarily in Andalusia and Extremadura under the government's rural employment policies (*plan de empleo rural*). Partly funded by the European Union, these initiatives are designed to halt the massive rural flight. They entail jobs in administration, management,

construction, supervision, organization, and maintenance. Shortages and cost-cutting measures make them typically one-to-two-month gigs, with few as lengthy as eight months. The village administration distributes them, although there are never enough to go around. Public assistance makes for another key source of income. People who have accumulated twelve months of formal employment are eligible for wage-pegged unemployment benefits (*el paro*) for a limited duration. If they have children to support, they can qualify for family aid of just over 400 euros a month, also for a limited duration. Some receive non-contributory disability or retirement pensions of just over 400 euros a month and others, a regular public pension of about 660 euros a month.

Unable to rely on formal employment alone, villagers find other ways to make ends meet while stretching its benefits. In practice, this means a slippage between formal employment such as public works, self-employment, and contracts with public entities and private firms; ad hoc informal work for untaxed cash; and public assistance.² People try to work long enough to get *el paro*, which would grant them the time to work informally and seek additional income. Completing an extra month of work to qualify for it constitutes a common claim for being favored in the distribution of jobs.

In the face of short work contracts and the inability to save and plan, villagers express their struggles in the idiom of endurance. Whereas in the sixties, as Collier had it, they adhered to the conventions of the past, voicing duty to parents whose property they would inherit, and, in the eighties, they highlighted their personal abilities and desires, projected toward the achievement of future progress, the villagers I met in 2019 assessed their lives and actions according to their ability to endure daily challenges. At one point or another, almost everyone I talked to prided themselves on their ability to endure (*aguantar*).

Duty had once leveraged the value of property from the past while desire was projected toward the value a career holds for the future. The horizons of endurance, in contrast, are restricted to ever-renewed effort, arrested in immediacy. Key to endurance is that continuity and consistency over time—especially through illness, unemployment, and old age—is not secured by inherited wealth, steady employment, or social security. Rather, it results from personal, ongoing struggle. Both duty and desire implied a sense of agency, as villagers had some power to improve their lot and distinguish themselves from each other materially. In contrast, endurance places all villagers, economically speaking, in the same, stationary boat.

Endurance thereby shifts the weight of distinction to strength of character vis-à-vis outsiders, especially those who had left the village. Far from granting outsiders' superiority for having pursued their desires, villagers posit their own moral superiority for having stuck it out. Some remained in Los Olivos because they did not possess sufficient educational or professional qualifications to make it in a city. Others remained because of family circumstances. Others, still, simply because they could. Regardless of their reasons, they saw endurance and strength of character as expressing their ability to hang on: the internalization of hardship as a personal challenge and accomplishment.

Strength of character was demonstrated, among others, by Manu. During my time in the village, he was helping his landlord with construction work in return for rent-free housing, assisting others with gardening in return for produce, waiting tables at the bar whenever they called him, picking wild oregano to sell to restaurants in Huelva, and organizing and pitching cultural events to villages in the region. Every time I walked around with him, he would stop to chat people up, letting those doing agricultural or construction work know he was available. Affecting an outward cheer, he complained to me privately about the inability to plan and build a future for himself. Everything he wanted to do, he said, depended on something else coming through. At the same time, he took pride in his ability to endure.

Big personalities populated the life stories and gossip of villagers; strength of character identified the protagonists. Every person favorably mentioned, alive or dead, was lauded as a fighter, a hard worker, and as funny and outgoing: a people person. Being enterprising in finding income opportunities also garnered praise, as well as conforming to existing jobs and conditions. Not everyone in Los Olivos fit that description, of course, but such was the ideal against which villagers measured themselves. The qualities singled out—self-assertion, resourcefulness, steadfastness, and sociability—were the ones that would help a person endure.

The salience of endurance should not be taken to mean that Los Olivos has transformed entirely. In a village made up of family households, a sense of duty toward relatives continues to have purchase, just as younger villagers pursuing higher education speak of their desires for the future. What is more, endurance, with its Catholic undertones, has a long history in Spain. Nevertheless, in the 1980s, villagers who spoke about having to endure were generally regarded as failures who had to return to the village because they could not find a good job elsewhere.³ But in contemporary Los Olivos, endurance prevails over other values in the same way as duty and desire once had. Having risen from its marginal position,

endurance has superseded desire to become the yardstick against which villagers measure themselves and others.

Endurance is taken as a tenuous achievement. Not merely does it have to be demonstrated repeatedly, it is also haunted by diminishing returns for inherited property, and by the lack of a viable future in which it would become unnecessary. It bespeaks neither the resolve of backward-leveraging duty nor the optimism of future-looking desire. Nor, finally, does it imply a person's ability to improve their lot, if only relative to their neighbors. Instead, enduring in the present has become a virtue in its own right, marking, as [Ghassan Hage \(2015\)](#) describes it, the refusal to perceive oneself as a victim of circumstances, even against a lack of opportunities to escape these circumstances.

Consider, for example, the reflections of a thirty-two-year-old scion of the village's old propertied elite. His parents had long migrated to Seville in search of employment, but he returned to the village, feeling that his life was going nowhere. In Seville, he spent half of his earnings on rent and saved nothing. He could not save in Los Olivos, either, but at least there he had a house to live in rent-free. Then, there were the family fields. They were in shambles, but he was busy restoring them. He brought in a neighbor's goats to clean up the underbrush and started mending the stone fence. He worked in the fields every day, but only as much as his eight-hour shifts at a supermarket the next village over allowed him. He preferred farming, not because he envisioned turning a profit out of it (his early attempts to market organic product failed) but because of how absorbing it proved: placing one stone atop another, he explained, you don't obsess over the future.

If living in the village was tantamount to enduring, actions and attitudes that failed to line up with this ideal had to be accounted for. To preserve the integrity of endurance and the strength of character that reflected it, deviants were associated with one of two groups: the elderly (*mayores*) and the youth (*jovenes*). These designations were only loosely associated with age. Some people in their seventies were so active that no one would dream of calling them *mayores*. Nor were keen and helpful teenagers considered *jovenes*, exactly. Others, though, in their fifties or thirties, could be faulted as being like one or the other. In giving allowance to physical limitations, these designations constituted a gentler form of criticizing what villagers perceived as weakness of character.

Being *mayor* was talked about as being inactive, bored (unable to make good use of time), fearful, and dependent; the opposite of what it took to endure. Men were likened to *mayores* if they spent too much time at the bar instead of earning or seeking an income. Regular church attendance was associated with being an

old woman who had nothing better to do. In contrast, the active elderly broadcast their vigor. One seventy-six-year-old made sure everyone knew about her long hikes, while an eighty-year-old told everyone how, after a health setback, the doctor had threatened to chain him to his bed to stop him from returning to the fields.

Being *joven* was synonymous with restlessness: overspending, not conforming to existing jobs, and openly expressing discontent. Restlessness proved worrisome in that it questioned the intentionality of endurance as a chosen virtue. Though associated with youth, people could be accused of restlessness well into adulthood. This, while children who could be left alone and entrusted with housework received praise for their maturity. Another association with youth was timidity. No trait seemed to cause greater consternation when showing up in one's children or grandchildren. In contrast, the talkative and outgoing were praised as having a good character. One soft-spoken woman told me that she overcame her natural timidity when she could no longer avoid having to assert herself.

Putting their strength of character on display, many proclaimed that they worked in whatever came up (*lo que sale*), referring to public works whose difficulty and scarcity they endured. Professionals avowed endurance, too. Administrators, engineers, and social workers boasted of having also cleaned houses, picked strawberries, or tended to the elderly, all the more noteworthy if they had done so while sick or pregnant. Some prided themselves on making do with less than city folk. Others claimed that pensions, low as they were, went a long way because they were used to not spending much. Those unwilling to endure the hard work and precarious employment were said to have no choice but to study something and leave, as former villagers had, framing these actions as moral failings.

Anyone weakened by illness was pitied. In one conversation, two women expressed their admiration of a common acquaintance who kept working hard even after the doctor told her she was dying. Conversely, there was great unease about those who demanded rest. On a hike back from a festival at a nearby village, one woman claimed she was *mayor* and could not walk so fast. Everyone dismissed this emphatically. When she said the walk there had been slower, I volunteered that there was greater inducement to hurry when returning home. "Not for me," she said: "I'm alone and get so bored." Uncomfortable silence ensued.

What made it so striking was that hardly anyone would admit to boredom. There was no greater putdown than saying about someone that they were just waiting around for jobs while doing nothing. Those willing to do anything always had something to do, the logic went. Most took pains to appear busy regardless

of their workloads. When I first met her, one woman made much about how busy she was getting stuff done before August, when a month-long street-cleaning gig would claim her time. In August, she expounded on her fatigue from hours of work under the blistering sun. She couldn't wait for September! But when I asked in September if she was enjoying her holiday, she said she hadn't a moment's rest, given how many errands had piled up in the meantime.

Jane Collier (1997) wrote that Los Olivos residents and former residents in the 1980s knew they were disadvantaged in the national labor market. But having already invested in self-improvement, they had a stake in believing that their earnings nevertheless reflected merit, as encapsulated in the discourse of desire. Similarly, every villager I met had relatives leading easier lives elsewhere, demonstrating that alternatives did exist. If they stayed in Los Olivos, turning its hardships into virtue constituted their form of self-assertion, distinguishing themselves from those who had allegedly given up. Endurance redeemed livelihoods arrested in the present, where all one could do was hang on.

HANGING ON

With her right hand bandaged, fifty-four-year-old Paqui awkwardly maneuvered a glass of juice in her left. She started working after elementary school, she told me: picking chestnuts, cleaning houses, and sewing undergarments for a pittance. When she married, she and her husband moved into her late grandparents' old animal shed, a ruin they spent two years making habitable, and many more expanding to meet the family's growing needs. Paqui spent twenty years caring for her mother's blind cousin, who put her house in Paqui's name and paid her the monthly equivalent of 120 euros today. She drew on public subsidies to convert the woman's house into a vacation rental, but the extra work proved too much: she was caring for another elderly relative and her own parents at the time. It felt like running an old-age home, what with two small children to boot! As these relatives died off, she took on house painting and cleaning jobs.

Paqui's husband works in a recycling plant in Huelva but heads straight for the fields when back from work. They have goats, and Paqui makes cheese to sell; she also conserves fruit and vegetables to last the year. It is strenuous, unprofitable work, and her husband suffers from tendinitis, as she does. But the fields need to be watered, the animals fed. They could not manage if not for the help of their son, who has no stable employment. He would much prefer playing video games, but he rallies. He told Paqui just the other day: "Mom, I love the fields, but not as

much as dad does.” Paqui laughed relaying this, adding that her son simply didn’t want to work so hard, the poor thing.

Paqui’s struggles hark back to Los Olivos in the 1960s, when property served as a bulwark against dispossession. Yet the houses and fields she inherited have proved as much a liability as an asset. She projected her doubts about having to struggle for them onto her son, who would gain little from helping his family as she had hers. Unsurprisingly, then, she never asserted the importance of duty, which used to support the transmission of property down the generations. Instead, Paqui echoed the values of endurance and strength of character, just as she communicated the deficiencies of work and property.

These deficiencies have to do with broader transformations in the structure of capital accumulation in Spain and beyond. Since the 1970s, confronting a slow-down in global economic growth, Spain has reorganized industry and imposed austerity measures. Since the 1990s, it has also extended private debt in construction and real estate. Rising real-estate prices would encourage homeowners to compensate with property for declines in real wages, underfunded pensions, and insufficient public assistance. But if Spain’s financialization since the 1990s precipitated a housing boom, ensuing busts forced income-constrained adults back into their parents’ homes. At the same time, temporary contracts, and high participation in seasonal sectors like tourism, condemn its population to insecure employment. More recent austerity measures further intensify the burden on households. It now falls on family members to protect their members from calamity. Especially in society’s lower echelons, resource pooling makes for their chief material recourse (Charnock, Purcell, and Ribera-Fumaz 2014; López and Rodríguez 2011; Rey-Araújo 2021).

We should understand the reassertion of property in this light. If hanging on to property in Los Olivos had already constituted an effort in the 1960s, livelihoods back then were nevertheless leveraged by the value of homes and agricultural land. They helped villagers carve out a living in which, as the elderly reminisce, most daily necessities were locally produced and consumed. And they differentiated villagers’ fortunes from each other. Despite seeking all manner of work and income even then, property was their main path toward distinction and self-betterment. In present-day Los Olivos, property is grossly insufficient for securing livelihoods. Its maintenance often demands more work and money than the value it delivers. Villagers’ fortunes, moreover, are barely distinguishable no matter how much property they own. To get by, family members must nevertheless pool their property, along with what value they can extract from work and public assistance.

Multigenerational households are common in Los Olivos, where dependency runs both ways: relatives care for the elderly, but grandparents also look after the children of working parents, and old-age pensions are just as important as wages for everyone's upkeep. Dependencies are also horizontal: if one spouse works formally, the other takes over house, field, or care work.⁴ And if one spouse's income is drawn on for daily expenses, the other tries to put something aside for a rainy day.

The conventional distinction between gift-giving and monetary exchange is subordinate to daily exigencies. Family members help each other for free, but when someone can pay for farming, construction, or maintenance work, they hire relatives or friends. People with an active garden grow more than they can consume and gift produce to each other, social networks being vital for support and income opportunity. But they also sell their produce when the benefits of hard cash weigh higher. Similarly, rides are offered free of charge to nearby towns where people run errands, but older people who do not hitchhike also pay for these rides.

Local businesses operate on small margins and their owners are among the hardest workers in the village. Nor are other forms of property the foundation of family fortune; sometimes, they even mean a liability. Houses, for example, are old, with things always falling apart. Homes' lime-plastering quickly soils, necessitating annual repainting. Repair and maintenance costs are prohibitive. Houses in the worst state are put up for sale or even abandoned if their owners can live elsewhere. Those who cannot, find ways to make them habitable on the cheap. The houses are quite big by city standards and up to three stories high (animals used to be kept on the lower levels, while the upper served to store farming equipment). They can therefore be subdivided for grown children or tenants, or one can live in the part of the house originally partitioned into rooms, sealing off upper and lower stories.

The houses are inherited, and inheritances in Andalusia are heavily taxed. They are also something for which heirs are expected to work, and whose modest gains are to be justified by the display of such work. In an aging village like Los Olivos, almost every family cares for at least one elderly relative from whom they will one day inherit. When an elderly person has more than one child living nearby, the children divide the responsibilities between them, or one child does more than another who has grandchildren or other relatives to care for. Women care for their husbands' relatives if the husband is employed full-time. And the childless elderly conscript younger relatives.

Ernesto is a childless widower who had reached such a caretaking agreement. In return for care, his late wife's two nephews would inherit her estate, while his younger brother would inherit his. Not long after the agreement was signed, both nephews and the brother died. The nephews' widows and the brother's son took over, caring for Ernesto for almost twenty years on monthly rotation. Ernesto's nephew told me that being at his beck and call means not being able to do other things. When his own mother was sick, he compared it to a chain pulling him in both directions. The house he inherited for his work had its bottom and top stories sealed off. Still, it proved a godsend for a forty-eight-year-old whose sole income was a meagre disability pension, demonstrating that he, too, could endure.

One of the widows in charge of Ernesto partook in the morning exercise walks I joined. She was able to come only every other day because she had to prepare him for dialysis on alternate days. During the walk, she would relay his moods and nightmares, which kept her up half the night. But when her son wanted to live alone with his girlfriend, she could offer them her inherited house. She told me that whenever Ernesto complains, she chides him: "You have three people taking care of you. There will be no one taking care of us."

Indeed, none of the caretakers I spoke with imagined that their children would do the same for them. The very people who took pride in their collective endurance foresaw a future in which each person would fend for themselves. Endurance did not purport to carry to the future what villagers had, as duty and desire once had. Time and again I heard that this was the last generation of in-home eldercare. Middle-aged people said they would seek institutional care when their time came. Some explained that their children had jobs and mortgages. Others, that they would never encumber their children in such a way. My neighbor went so far as to insist she would be cremated, to spare her children the trouble of keeping her tombstone clean.

Investment in children was, in this sense, a net loss. It took a lot to raise them, and parents were always comparing the prices of school equipment, clothing, and gadgets. Parents of children who went on to higher education took out bank loans, using village property as collateral, to finance their city lives. In considering whether to have children, younger people openly weighed their costs and the work they would require.⁵ When one mother told me she could not wait for her children to grow up, I asked if this was because she would then be free to do more. "No," she replied: "I could finally do less!"

Land also constituted a diminishing resource. One could no longer make a living off farming, leaving fields neglected. Those whose lands contained chestnut

trees or cork oak sold off the rights to harvest them. Others cultivated their fields out of obligation (some said they felt bad for the trees) and love, claiming that the work was too strenuous to qualify as a hobby. Produce consumed or sold helped balance family budgets, but it was never clear whether this justified the work. Indeed, most villagers were loath to admit its economic benefits. If, in the 1980s, material compensation for one's physical investments confirmed the power of desire, the virtue of endurance was confirmed by its material insignificance. Only moral distinction would justify agricultural work that was more of an encumbrance than a path to progress. One woman told me, for example, that she hated fruit and vegetables but, as they grew in her garden, they had to be eaten.

The houses and fields of Los Olivos were talked about as patrimony, but owners believed the village would someday be lost or transformed into a tourist resort. Some ruminated over what they could have done with all the money they had spent on their houses. They dismissed my suggestion that it might prove a good investment. Most doubted whether their children would stay on, or whether anyone would want to buy the houses ("for sale" signs hung on some for years). Their professed aim was rather to preserve their patrimony now, or at least keep up appearances. The community disproved of letting one's home fall into disrepair, as it bore witness to weakness of character and an inability to endure.

Since patrimony brought scant economic gain, its main value was precisely as a tangible sign of endurance. This was the case for Marisa, who had divided her family house in two after her father's death, in compliance with his will. Her older brother, who lived in Madrid, turned his half into a vacation home for his daughter. Marisa resented the partition and fought it in court for three years. Leaving the house intact would have offered her no material benefit. Indeed, the section of the house she now lived in alone felt too big already, making her nervous at night. Rather, it was a matter of principle and appearance. Her brother had left the village as soon as he finished high school, whereas she had stayed on, caring for their father in his old age and enduring into the present on a small, intermittent income. It felt jarring to Marisa that their divided childhood home seemed to place her on the same moral footing as her brother, who was never around, and her niece, who came and left as she pleased, even though Marisa alone had endured.

I discussed patrimony with Eva, who had a lot of it. Her truck-driver brother spent every moment he was not on the road working the family fields. She was forever telling him to get some rest or, better yet, as a bachelor in his forties, go out and find himself a girlfriend. But he just could not let the fields go. Their father was the same, always out there. The family also owned several houses. Eva and her

husband fixed them up over the years, whenever they were on *el paro*, though she could not say what for. Her brother was childless, and she only had one daughter. Fourteen-year-old Julia would be the sole heir to the family property, then. But she was a smart one, doing well at school, and would surely go on to university and leave. Eva told me she teases her daughter, saying “one day this will all be yours,” leaving Julia to roll her eyes. “She’ll just sell it all and that will be the end of it,” Eva added with a shrug.

If rehearsing duty made little sense now that the past afforded negligible economic value, asserting desire—as villagers and former villagers had done in the 1980s—made even less sense. In [Jane Collier’s \(1997\)](#) analysis, villagers suffered even greater exposure to workplace exploitation than did workers in Spain’s urban centers, operating under a system that disadvantaged and discriminated against them. Yet their jobs and earnings nevertheless distinguished them from one another materially, giving credence to the notion that they reflected merit, or the investments they made in their skill sets. It encouraged them to continue pursuing skill-formation and professions. These pursuits, while forward-looking and aspirational for each worker, also fueled the production of surplus value in Spain’s economy.

Desire has lost its persuasiveness in today’s Los Olivos. Although some of its residents boast that their urban children work professionally in fields that they studied or in jobs they liked, few can say the same about themselves. Local jobs are treated as interchangeable. Wages are standard, reflecting neither skill nor effort. The only factor to favor one job over another is the length of contract. These jobs attest not to workers’ skill or ambition but to their willingness to perform any work available, and to having been favored for a gig that others coveted. The only ability that villagers’ working lives manifests, then, is their strength of character. Since its fruits are nondurable, the effort must always be renewed; a perennial exertion encapsulated in the idiom of endurance. But just as desire once did, endurance also shores up the status quo: rendering the maintenance of livelihoods under such conditions a personal accomplishment and point of pride.

Since even stable jobs in Los Olivos did not allow those who had them to rise significantly above the fold, the people who held them downplayed these jobs to overplay their own endurance. The local mailman insisted that his life had not changed since getting the job: he sees the same people and does the same things as before. Only when I pressed did he admit that he now worked in the fields only when he felt like it, not because he had to. A tenured administrator told me that he

would much rather be restoring old furniture—his true vocation—than pushing papers, but, well, he had a family to feed.

Where precarious employment and stagnant wages force the depreciation of human capital, it becomes, in the words of [Michel Feher \(2009\)](#), a speculative venture rather than an asset of growing value. Investment in education and skills is not calculated to augment future earnings but constitutes a simple reach for self-esteem. This description rings truer to a reality in which work no longer conveys forward-looking desire while nevertheless manifesting endurance. Such employment, along with property, allows villagers to hang on but not to do better. Unable to leverage them toward a better future, their human and material resources anchor villagers in the here and now.⁶

Such was the situation for thirty-year-old Veronica. Unable to find stable employment after graduating from university in Seville, she was offered a short-term gig in Los Olivos setting up cultural events. Then, her grandmother's health took a turn for the worse. She stuck around to help care for her. Since then, she has kept scoring local gigs, if only intermittently. Helping her grandmother allowed Veronica's mother to retain her own, steadier job as a nursing home aide. Veronica would prefer living in Seville, or at least alone: her parents drive her insane! Her family did own another house in Los Olivos, but she did not see the point of paying double the utilities when she had to be by her grandmother's side all day anyway. She regretted not having lived it up in her twenties when she still had the chance, she told me wearily.

Residents who had left Los Olivos reinforced the value of endurance, in that villagers considered leaving an alternative, if seldom a practicable one. Staying in the village when one could in principle leave was tantamount, to them, to choosing a life of endurance. It endowed their struggles with a moral high ground vis-à-vis outsiders, whom they also faulted for consumerism and for living beyond their means. This did not go over well with everyone, though. A mother of three, whose children had moved to cities, told me it annoyed her that people thought they had it easy, discounting how hard it was to get by anywhere. At the same time, those who left fought back by distinguished themselves from full-time residents, whose conforming to circumstances they interpreted, for my benefit, as a paucity of ambition.

The possibility of leaving Los Olivos made those on the fence ponder the stakes of endurance more explicitly than others. Fifty-two-year-old Arturo offers an example. At sixteen, after his father suffered a heart attack, Arturo took over the bar he owned in the main plaza. He enjoyed the work at first but, as the nov-

elty wore off, he continued out of obligation alone. He finally left the village in his twenties, moving to the United Kingdom. He spent the next two decades holding a string of jobs from cleaning storefronts through polishing lenses to selling snacks on trains. Every few years he would move back to Spain and do maintenance work at the Seville airport.

Moving and changing jobs represented taking charge of his life, he explained, rather than endure conditions he disliked. But a few years ago, his mother fell ill, and he returned to help. When I met Arturo, he was living with his mother and coordinating community activities in the village. The gig would soon be over, and he would have to find something new. Living in the village felt to him like living in the past, or worse, because it was an older, emptier, and sadder place than the Los Olivos of his childhood. He hoped it would not be where it all ended for him.

Before I left the village, I told Arturo I might visit again in the winter and asked if he would still be around. He replied that he would: much as he would like to leave, he felt it would be hard for him to start afresh someplace new. I countered that getting by in Los Olivos was also hard. Yes, Arturo concurred, but there, at least, the hardships were familiar. I can no longer conjure up Los Olivos without imagining him there: a wandering spirit that, having once sought his fortune elsewhere, has again become arrested in the present. For all his ambivalence about endurance, it was his only moral recourse to affirm this choice.

A NEW CAPITALIST IDEOLOGY

In Spain as elsewhere, financialization has shifted the motor of accumulation from production to rent-extraction through monopolies, asset-price inflation, and consumer payment streams. Finance decenters exploitation through relatively steady, full-time employment, making jobs precarious and wages erratic. The risk-laden path of finance-led accumulation also means that property, once a pathway to upward mobility, assumes unstable value, commanding the debt-servicing of tenants with insecure incomes. Shackled to the investments and debts of the past, common experience resembles being dragged down by negative net worth. As [Lisa Adkins, Martijn Konings, and Melinda Cooper \(2020\)](#) describe it, this experience is accompanied by a sense of having no better future toward which to plan. In the absence of progressive forward movement through time, life becomes a series of moments of bare survival (cf. [Guyer 2008](#)).

Such was life in Los Olivos as I observed it: a patching together of property, wages, public assistance, and a range of family resources, none of which sufficed on its own to provide security, and the combination of which allowed most villag-

ers merely to stay afloat. It also served as the material backdrop for the ideology that accompanied such efforts. Encumbered by the past and deprived of a future, villagers exalted endurance as a virtue that emerged from their daily struggles. It provided them a moral high ground over those who left, and it served to redeem the conditions in which they found themselves.

Yet this also constituted the context in which mass protests broke out all over Spain following the 2008 financial crisis. Anthropologists have reflected on the country's mobilizations as examples of political imaginaries and thwarted agencies. [Susana Narotzky and Gavin Smith \(2006\)](#) had originally diagnosed "immediate struggles" as struggles with direct influence against a nearby enemy, rather than a more distant culprit one hopes to overturn; stuck in the present rather than building toward a better future. They fleshed them out for Spain's Vega Baja region, where the Franco regime's repression and invasive regulation could only be partly bypassed through personal connections. Politics collapsed into a currying of favors and appealing to powerful patrons while shifting through short-term employment. In their analysis, this led, finally, to an individualist, ad hoc agency, which preempted collective action.

[Jaume Franquesa \(2018\)](#) focused on collective struggles in southern Catalonia against the energy corporations exploiting the region. The erosion of the old agrarian order precluded villagers from becoming either autonomous farmers or permanent wage laborers. Facing depopulation and agricultural decline, they decried their degradation in the name of dignity. Linking this to protests in Spain that echoed a discourse of indignation, [Franquesa \(2016, 2018\)](#) found in both an appeal for control over livelihoods. To him, the indignation of villagers trapped between an incomplete past and an impeded future gestured toward something better.

Los Olivos residents are hardly typical of the Spanish population at large. [Jane Collier \(1997\)](#) found the village relatively small and homogenous, even with respect to rural Spain—a difference that holds to this day. Yet the ways in which its residents respond to broader pressures discloses the uniqueness of contemporary capitalism and demonstrates the more general workings of ideology. Hanging on in Los Olivos chimes with the seeking of protection through personal connections that Narotzky and Smith have described, and with the reach for dignity that Franquesa has. It results from the same historical circumstances, namely, the degradation of agriculture, the marginalization of the countryside, the informalization of work, and the activation of personal connections. Yet it scarcely affords the projection beyond immediate circumstances that political agency connotes.

Franquesa (2016) strove to meet Gavin Smith's (2014) gambit of reimagining a politics that the present makes possible. Smith argued that marginalized populations unable to envision their goals being met within existing institutions have the potential to exert a disruptive power over them. Smith (2016) envisaged a resistant subject, for whom the struggle for livelihood could be leveraged against dispossession. Susana Narotzky (2016) found recent mobilizations in Spain's Galicia region lacking in this respect. Their indignation was directed at the corruption and privilege of elites, not the economic forces that reproduced inequality and domination. Narotzky (2021) further notes that Spaniards have been mobilized by a media- and policy-supported notion of intergenerational conflict over scarce resources, while in truth, household resources are pooled, grounding intergenerational solidarity rather than conflict.

Analyses of politics and its failure among anthropologists of Spain evaluate public discourses on their own terms, mining them for emancipatory possibilities. A critique of ideology, in contrast, views discourses with suspicion. But there is more than one way to take interlocutors' concerns seriously. One payoff to viewing what they say as reflecting dominant ideology, emerging from existing conditions to orient action in ways that reproduce rather than potentially transform them, lies in resisting unreasonable expectations of subjects that operate under genuine constraints. In the case of Spanish politics, discourses about a hopeful or foreclosed future seem contrived, even from the perspective of the people rehearsing them. They fail to communicate the prevalent temporal orientation under finance-led capitalism.

Here, I follow Lisa Adkins (2018), who argues that a vision of the future for which one plans has been superseded by submergence in the present. No longer led by production, capitalist accumulation ceases to require the population's exceptional value-producing work and value-realizing consumption. Under the dominance of finance, it instead requires of households a capacity to use precarious wages and other resources to meet contractual payments. The money from these payments and debt servicing flows to financial institutions and service providers, where it is bundled and sold on to finance markets, creating profit. To fuel finance-led accumulation, households must simply stay afloat and sustain the money flow, instead of striving to improve their fortunes through work and consumption, as in previous decades. Such a reality is not conducive to a future denied to long-term planners, whose frustration sparks resistance.

Such a reality is, however, reflected in endurance. Endurance is thoroughly nonpolitical in that it eschews an orientation toward the future, placing moral

weight on ongoing efforts to get by. It is, moreover, ideological, aligning people with their material circumstances—in terms of which their attitudes make sense—rather than representing an active stance against the conditions in which they find themselves. This holds true despite the undeniably heroic aspects of enduring in the face of overwhelming degradation (Ringel 2018). To remain the same, to be durative, to suffer and yet persist vis-à-vis the excesses of capital may even be read as emancipatory, as Elizabeth Povinelli (2011) does. But this personal heroism issues from a resolve to live with things as they are.

The ideological aspects of this attitude can be sharpened by comparison with those that Sarah Muir (2021) found among Argentines in the post 2001–2002 crisis, which sent the country into turmoil. Muir's interlocutors had lingering intuitions about progress, but they felt trapped in a world that offered them no stable grounds from which to project a different future. Their critiques and professed disillusionment therefore did not create a springboard to action, but a performative ritual, a distinction that signaled belonging to the collapsed middle class. Such distinction conjures up the appeal of ideology in providing personal satisfaction in the very act of acquiescing with unfavorable circumstances.

Hage's (2015) reflections on endurance, drawing on his fieldwork in Lebanon, likewise noted the workings of distinction. For Hage, endurance is a celebration of one's capacity to stick it out despite the absence of alternatives, and an inability to grab such alternatives even if they presented themselves. The heroism of endurance lies in self-assertion in the midst of a situation wherein one has no agency: a refusal to become a mere victim of circumstances. It is, moreover, self-perpetuating: just as people stuck in an unmoving queue keep queuing, so, the more one waits, the more reluctant one becomes to stop waiting.

Hage (2015) does not call this *ideology* but rather *governmentality*, and the shrinkage of political imagination. Hage's frame of reference is the excess and failure of the state, as in the Foucauldian and Althusserian traditions, where mechanisms of power appear inscribed into the body directly. Slavoj Žižek (2012) distinguishes this from an understanding of ideology, whereby discourses or attitudes function to support the social domination entailed in a capitalist logic of accumulation in a non-transparent way (cf. Weiss 2019). Traces of ideology in this sense are nevertheless present in Hage's (2015) description of endurance: inviting and valorizing self-control, it implies that acting in a restrained fashion elevates the one enduring above the seeming vulgarity and impatience of disruptive action, thus allowing desperate conditions to persist unaltered.

The non-transparency of ideology, on which Žižek (2012) insists, also positions endurance at its borderline. We can best see this by contrasting it to desire. The discourse of desire, as Jane Collier (1997) described it, conveyed a sense of agency. It reflected the promise that through effort and skill-building, one could improve one's lot. It further reimagined capitalism as the aggregate outcome of individual desires and agencies; hence the ideological reinforcement of its domination. Collier exposed the personal and family costs of desire for Los Olivos residents and former residents. Exploited and disadvantaged in the national labor market, they were nevertheless motivated to produce more value than that which they received, fueling production-led accumulation.

Exposing desire as undermining villagers' own aspirations in this way would have seemed counterintuitive to those caught up in the sense of their own agency. Indeed, Collier often noted the differences between her analysis and the self-perceptions of her interlocutors. The ideology of endurance proves immune to such illusion. It rather bespeaks the very non-agency that afflicts subjects of finance-led accumulation. Whenever villagers speak of their efforts and livelihoods, circumstances are simply given, and no one imagines overcoming them. Endurance is therefore more patently a reinforcement of the status quo than desire ever was.

Nor has duty resurfaced in Los Olivos as an ideology explaining life's circumstances, despite property's returned foregrounding. This is so because property is no longer a fulcrum whose retainment and maintenance would mark the difference in villagers' fortunes. Now a risky resource or even a drain, it is one more thing to deal with in the struggle merely to hang on, as well as something whose paltry gains one must justify by working and by demonstrating strength of character.

Endurance makes the reality of hanging on appear dynamic and virtuous. Without a claim on either past or future value one could leverage, endurance must be realized daily and can only be asserted to the extent that it succeeds. In Los Olivos, aging villagers assume this success to be short-lived, that subsequent generations will disperse, and that the community as its members know it will come to an end. Yet this recognition does not breed collective political agency, any more than the ideology of individual desire did. Instead, endurance renders hardships a challenge that requires and elevates strength of character, construing it as accomplishment rather than affliction.

ABSTRACT

Comparing a Spanish village in the 1960s and 1980s, Jane Collier analyzed how the different ways of making a living in those decades generated distinct dispositions: from abiding by duty to pursuing desire. I revisited this village to explore the ideological contours of finance-led capitalism and the livelihoods it enables in rural Andalusia. I found that villagers' struggles to hang on, arrested in a present in which property carries over insufficient value from the past, and work offers no path to progress in the future, are redeemed by a discourse of endurance. I trace its material underpinnings to constraints imposed on work and property and demonstrate how it renders villagers' struggles as an accomplishment rather than an affliction. I also use this ethnography to make a case for studying contemporary attitudes as reflections of ideology, rather than as expressions of political agency. [household; ideology; property; restudy; work; Spain]

RESUMEN

Jane Collier, en sus estudios de un pueblo español en los años sesenta y ochenta, analizó cómo las diferentes formas de ganarse la vida en esa época generaban actitudes muy claras: desde cumplir deberes hasta perseguir deseos. Volví a visitar este pueblo en concreto para explorar los rasgos ideológicos del capitalismo financiero y los modos y medios de vida que genera en la Andalucía rural. Encontré que la lucha de los vecinos por mantenerse a flote, paralizados en un presente en el que la tierra y la vivienda no conservan suficientemente su valor del pasado y el trabajo no ofrece ninguna garantía de avanzar, se ve compensada con un discurso de "aguantar". Trazo las bases materiales de esta situación en las limitaciones impuestas a través del trabajo y la propiedad y demuestro cómo interpretar estas luchas de los aldeanos como un logro y no como una aflicción. También sirve esta etnografía para defender el análisis de actitudes contemporáneas como reflejo de la ideología, más que como expresión de una capacidad política. [domicilio; ideología; propiedad; re-estudio; trabajo; España]

NOTES

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1. Reconstructing the events of the Spanish Civil War and its aftermath in Los Olivos, George Collier (1987) described how some village socialists were killed, while others fled. As the region's agriculture became marginalized under Franco, poor workers and smallholders joined the urban working class, while agrarian proprietors were saddled with agricultural work that no longer won them power and prestige. Agriculture was gradually abandoned, precipitating emigration.

2. Small businesses in Andalusia are indirectly subsidized by public works and assistance as well, in that petty entrepreneurs informally employ agricultural workers on the dole (Djurfeldt 1993).
3. Jane Collier, personal communication, 10.20.2020.
4. It is mostly husbands who have the more formal employment, and wives doing the lion's share of house and care work.
5. Few children used to be necessary to avoid excessive claims on limited inheritances, and long courtships in Los Olivos accomplished birth control (Price and Price 1966).
6. In this sense, endurance resembles a pre-desire era that Stanley Brandes (1975), describing a different Spanish village, identified as fatalistic: believing one had no control over one's financial future.

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