

It's not Merely a Struggle, the Way We Live, it's Wonderful, too! The Changing Life and Role of Women Herders in the Last 120 Years in Hungary

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ABSTRACT

Women have always played a significant role in herding in Hungary, although their tasks and recognition have changed substantially over time. Nowadays, the vital role of women is becoming increasingly visible and recognised in Hungary. In this paper, members of the Hungarian Women Herders group and three researchers reviewed the scattered ethnographic, autobiographical and other literature, and conducted interviews with five active and retired women herders as well as with the husbands of three of them, and documented the role of women from the beginning of the twentieth century to the present day. Women have long played a fundamental role in holding the family together, providing food, and raising children. As in the past, women herders take part in milk processing and raising the lambs, but several also herd and even shear. After the 1989 revolution, many herders started herding privately again, and some women who had not been born into farming families chose livestock grazing as a profession. More recently, women in herding families have increasingly been responsible for handling the paperwork required for livestock welfare accountability, marketing and other differentiated needs requiring patience and computer skills. In 2021 the “Hungarian Women Herders” group was established, which currently has over 60 members. The group was founded with the aim of self-help and knowledge sharing, but they also participate in festivals, events and international conferences, and they are in contact with the association of Spanish women herders. Pastoral animal husbandry has not become obsolete in the face of industrial food systems. As its knowledge-intensive practices make use of spatially and temporally variable vegetation, it is becoming recognized as a more ecological alternative. It is necessary to recognize women herders’ important contribution to building a more sustainable common future, as their activities and knowledge are integral to this type of livestock production system. Moving forward, women must be included in initiatives to support pastoralism—whether it is the collection of best practices for other farmers and the coming generations to learn from, or the development of locally-based innovations, rooted in tradition while looking to the future.

KEYWORDS

Pastoralism; women and girls; family; livelihoods; shepherds; extensive livestock production.



Introduction: diverse roles of women in pastoralism

Pastoralists and herders turn grass and other plant biomass into high-quality, sustainably produced meat, milk, and other products. They manage pasture-based, extensive livestock production in ways which can benefit biodiversity even in environments with an unpredictable provision of grazable biomass (FAO 2021; Molnár et al. 2020).

Pastoralist literature distinguishes three main types of pastoralism: nomadic, transhumant, and sedentary, with many transitional forms and special adaptations to specific socio-ecological environments (FAO 2021; Manzano et al. 2021). The role of women in these pastoral systems—how women and girls participate in the everyday work and

decision making of the family and the local community—is diverse and often flexible, and may depend on the local culture, ecological environment, and livestock types managed (Bharwad and Shroff 2007; Flintan 2008). Contributions may be diverse, but the role of women was found to be fundamental in most cases (cf. Mera Declaration 2010).

Pastoral women are custodians of valuable knowledge spanning household reproductive tasks and livestock production. Women have multiple roles as livestock keepers, natural resource managers, labour providers, income generators, care-takers, and household managers (Bharwad and Shroff 2007; Flintan 2008). Women are also key in conserving and transmitting traditional knowledge, practices, values, identity, and pride connected to this way of life (Fernández-Giménez, Ravera, and Oteros-Rozas 2022). Families can often

continue livestock herding only if the women are supportive (cf. Köhler-Rollefson 2018).

As most pastoral systems experience serious challenges with increasing globalisation along with land-use and climate change, the role of women is changing. Mainstream society needs to acknowledge and mitigate these challenges to help people overcome or avoid them (de Jones and Flintan 2020; Mera Declaration 2010). Experience shows that in many cases women perform a dual role in facing these challenges: on one hand, they are tradition keepers, while on the other, they are agents of change and innovators of livestock and family management (Oteros-Rozas et al. 2021; Fernández-Giménez, Oteros-Rozas, and Ravera 2021; Fernández-Giménez, Ravera, and Oteros-Rozas 2022). Women implement changes for themselves, become agents of change in their communities, and may even become the principal decision makers. Good education is important for empowering women to better navigate and lead change processes, as shown in an example from the Andes, where it has been shown to provide knowledge and tools to better understand how mainstream institutions work (Valdivia, Gilles, and Turin 2013). Thus, there is an urgent need to re-examine pastoral management practices and women's knowledge and roles in order to foster adaptations and to maintain the resilience of pastoral livelihoods (Yurco 2024).

The literature on pastoral women living in East Africa and India and pursuing a nomadic, transhumant or recently sedentarised lifestyle is rich, but the literature on pastoralist and herder women living in developed countries is much more scarce, at least in the English language (but see research in Spain: Oteros-Rozas et al. 2021; Fernández-Giménez, Oteros-Rozas, and Ravera 2021; Fernández-Giménez, Ravera, and Oteros-Rozas 2022), as is the literature on those leading a traditionally sedentary lifestyle. There are also knowledge gaps on the historical (ancient and medieval) role of women (see however Grassl 1999) and on the longer-term changes of women's roles through time.

The objectives of the research presented in this paper are to review, reconstruct and document the life and role of women in pastoral work in Hungary from the beginning of the twentieth century to the present, based on ethnographic, autobiographical and other relevant literature and oral history interviews with both women and men who are currently active as herders. Our main aim was to prepare a case study from Hungary and thereby to fill a knowledge gap—more precisely, to start filling a huge, unethical knowledge gap—on the life and role of women in pastoralism in Central Europe. The research was done by and with traditional knowledge holders, mostly women herders, and thus while it cannot be all-encompassing from a scientific point of view, it does represent the voice of women from the grassroots.



Material and methods

The focus area (Hungary) belongs to the forest-steppe and deciduous forest regions. Grazing on grasslands, forests, marshes, fallows, and stubbles has been going on for thousands of years (Molnár et al. 2020). Animal husbandry intensified strongly from the nineteenth century onwards (stables, fodder cultivation), but pastoral grazing has survived till today, both in nature protected areas and outside of them. Even today, hundreds of traditional herders are still active in Hungary, keeping and herding mainly sheep and cattle (pastoral pig grazing has already disappeared).

During the research, we reviewed Hungarian ethnographic literature, which turned out to be surprisingly scarce and incomplete on women herders. We focused primarily on two regions: Eastern Hungary and the Bakony region. The first author, a traditional shepherdess, conducted interviews with five elderly and middle-aged herder women and three herder men (located in Somlójenő, Újiráz, Kunmadaras, Nyírlugas,



Makó, Hajdúsámson, and Csanádpalota). On the one hand, she documented their own personal experiences as women herders and on the other hand, she asked them what they remembered about the lives of their herder mothers and grandmothers. The main questions were: What were/are the tasks of women and girls in a pastoral family? What were/are the specifically female tasks, and what kind of "men's work" did/do they do, if needed? Follow-up questions allowed for elaboration on topics raised by the interviewees. We discussed the summarised results with some key informants and colleagues. Texts in italics are original quotes.



Results

Life during capitalism (the first half of the twentieth century)

We reviewed this period primarily based on the works of Margit Luby (north-eastern Hungary) and Béla Gunda (eastern Hungary) (Luby 1943; Gunda 1972) as well as some interviews. Herders' wives, like their husbands, were described as people who were proud of their expertise and lifestyle (the proud herder boy and proud horseman boy are often mentioned in folk tales). There were both rich and poorer herder families. Herders formed a separate segment of society locally, having only a loose relationship with the peasants settled in the village. Herders rather made friends among themselves, helped each other, went to the market together, and sat next to each other in church. Herders often held their autumn and carnival festivities separately from peasants. The peasantry often looked down on the herders and their wives, but the herders and their wives reciprocated this attitude (*I don't hoe, I don't scythe*).

The main duties of women herders and herders' wives were to take care of the children, feed the family, and keep the house and yard

in order. Compared to peasant women, they performed less hard physical labour, and most of them never worked as servants. They usually did agricultural work only occasionally, mainly helping with the harvest.

Before the Second World War, herder women rarely stayed outside in pasture huts, but lived in the village. Around the turn of the twentieth century, the pastures closest to the settlements were converted into arable land, and from then on it became more typical for women to live in the more distant pastures with their husbands. The women and children were mostly out in the pasture with milking herders from mid-May till September 8 (the celebration of Virgin Mary). The women sometimes went to help with the herd during the first weeks of spring "training" (helping the herds become accustomed to living outdoors). From the beginning of the twentieth century, keeping poultry and pigs, which had previously been prohibited, became more common around barns located in external pastures. Taking care of these was usually the wife's task, and the pigs were fattened on whey. The women did not milk, but it was often the wife's (or daughters') task to drive the sheep to the "milking hole." Before the Second World War, milking sheep in the Bakony region was the job of the shepherd, women were not allowed to milk sheep, and even the cheese was made by men. Herder women cooked twice a day, always fresh food. During this time period, women did not eat together with the chief herders and apprentices. Some dishes were prepared exclusively by men (e.g., *slambuc*, a traditional pasta dish with potato and bacon). In addition to cooking, it was also the wife's responsibility to tend the fire (and collect the sun-dried cattle dung for that purpose) and keep the hut in order. Some women collected herbs, e.g., chamomile on saline pastures. The men took care of the herder dogs and welcomed guests, while the women took part in serving food.

If the wife did not live out in the pasture, she would bring cooked food, bread, and dry pasta to her husband and to the other herders every day, or weekly in more distant pastures.



It was more usual, however, for the youngest apprentice herder to come into the village to fetch food and other necessities. The herder collected lapwing and duck eggs from the pasture in the spring and presented them to his wife, who kneaded delicious pasta from them “in return.”

In most regions, women helped with the milk processing and cheese making; at home in the village and in huts, women did these jobs themselves. The wives also took the share of the dairy products to the owners in the village, and the herders' wages were also collected by the women. At the market, the hard *gomolya* made by the herder wives, a fresh white type of cheese and fine curds (salty, ground *gomolya* cheese), was considered a delicacy.

The herder women also made pasta for the villagers, went to their houses to make soap, and made cheese rennet for them. Some women herders also sheared; and they were even preferred by some livestock owners for the more delicate shearing (such as that of the herd leaders) due to their finer manual dexterity (Figure 1).

The years of the two world wars were exceptional periods. In those times, many herder families were left without a male head of the family, and all the work around the livestock had to be done by the wife, children, and older family members.

Then as now, an important element of the herders' character was the “purity” of their family life. Being away from their families for a long time, herders were more sensitive to the fidelity of their wives (and vice versa). Of course, there have always been husbands and wives with looser morals. It was typical for herders to choose a partner from a herder family, and among shepherds the preference was for someone from a shepherd family. One of the reasons for this was that a peasant girl could not easily become accustomed to the pastoral world, as her knowledge was insufficient; for example, she could not understand why *it was necessary to sacrifice [so much money] for that kongo* (bell)—a real woman herder considered bells to be an ornament on the livestock,

and she knew and valued the sound of her husband's herd (Luby 1943). Herder families were more inclined to keep traditions, and the patriarchal family model also survived here longer compared to peasants. Herders often did not leave their pastoral life even if it would have been to their financial advantage: “only a very ‘bad’ herder lets his craft down” (Luby 1943, 62).

Changing life and roles under communism (1950–1980s)

The communist period was reviewed through a combination of literature, film and interview data. We included autobiographical books written by the shepherdesses Piroska Béresné Márki (2006) and Vilma Tamás Károlyné Kiss-Tóth (2009), a documentary film about the latter shepherdess (Petényi and Kabay, 2013), and the book by Márta Sófalviné Tamás (2012). This period was also still clearly remembered by the interviewees, who discussed their own personal experiences as well as those of other generations of women in their families.

In the decades following the Second World War, the communist elite tried to abolish the self-identity and self-sufficiency of the peasantry and herders and to weaken their traditions. This was done with the goal of creating a uniform proletariat in both urban and rural areas. Many of the herders who persisted with their practices were taken away by force, beaten, and imprisoned. Eventually they were all forced to become labourers in agricultural cooperatives that followed industrial models of animal keeping. The assimilation of herders into village society accelerated, and ever more herders' wives stopped working as herders. At the same time, there were instances of herder girls marrying non-herders and introducing their husbands to pastoral life.

Women herders and herders' wives still had the primary task of keeping together and feeding the family. In the pastures, it was mainly the wives of shepherds who lived with their husbands. Several informants mentioned that *a wife provided a secure family background,*

the herder was complete only when he had a family, and had a wife to help him.

Cooking and baking bread remained important tasks for women. In herder families, freshly cooked food was typically served daily. In many cases, the wife continued to take her husband's lunch to the pasture every day. The food was traditional herder food, but urban recipes also appeared, especially cakes and cookies. At family celebrations, they almost always ate traditional herder's dishes, but these were often prepared by the men.

There is an impression among the Bakony herder community that during this time period more respect was shown to herder's wives and daughters by their husbands/fathers than among families of dairy herders and swineherds. This was perhaps because in shepherd families, the women had more responsibilities linked to the livestock production system, including milking, lambing, shearing (the latter was done in this area exclusively by teams of women), but also herding (i.e., grazing watched over by both women and girls) when needed. They were also skilled in treating animals and trimming sheep's hooves. Dairy herders and swineherds usually had many children, so their wives stayed at home more doing the housework. The daily food was packed by the wives. If the man was looking after animals that were not coming home daily (on external pastures), his wife (or an older child) would usually go out to the pasture to bring him food and clean clothes for the week. Sometimes women were also in charge of smaller pig herds on the pastures; here preventing encounters with wild boar was a priority.

In the 1950s, when communist suppression was at its strongest, women herders also had to face new challenges. According to recollections during the interviews, they played a vital role in ensuring that the family had enough food even after the quota (a large proportion of the harvest/livestock herd) was forcibly seized by the communist state.

In cooperatives and state farms, herders became salaried workers, and the division of

labour and responsibilities within households also changed. In many cases, the herders were respected even by the cooperative and state farm management, but the women herders, even though they remained active in pastoral work, became more and more "invisible." Many wives worked full-time in other sectors of the cooperative, e.g., in the poultry sector.

In herder families, women continued to play an important role in milk processing, whether in the production of cheese, cleaning the cheese preparation and milking equipment, or preparing rennet. Going to the market also remained mostly a female task. Only a few women did milking, albeit not regularly, but both women and girls took part in driving sheep to the "milking hole" (Figure 1). The milking of sheep, however, gradually declined during the 1970s and 1980s.

Although grazing remained mostly men's work, sometimes women also took part in it, for example, grazing the lambs and the weaker individuals around the barn. It was also not unusual for the woman to walk in front of the herd, with the man guiding the cattle from behind. In the Bakony region, the wife of the swineherd and the female helpers of the owner farmers were responsible for escorting the pigs first out of and then in the village, so that they could find their way home in the evening. Wives would also go with their husbands to help herd the pigs in spring until they got used to the routine.

Daughters of herder families also learned the tricks of herding. Herding women and girls usually had their own dogs, and occasionally would share dogs with other household members. When watering livestock from the well, the girls helped raise the bucket by holding on to the rope tied to the far end of the boom. Shearing was typically a man's job, but even during the communist period there were women shearers and even women's shearing brigades. Up to 30–45 sheep were sheared a day by one person, using hand shears. Women often took part in picking wool as well.

Handling the lambs and feeding them was often a woman's task. Especially in the case





of the few remaining private herders, women also helped with lambing and calving. Children were often given baby lambs, which they “tamed.” Caring for poultry and pigs was also mostly a female task. Ducks, geese and pigeons were kept in addition to chickens. If there was a vegetable and flower garden (uncommon among herders in the past or now), tending this fell to the women in the household. In the Transdanubian region (Western part of Hungary), the female role first became dominant in buffalo keeping, perhaps partly because of the animals’ stubbornness. They would often only allow women to milk them. Where this could not be arranged, a man would put on a skirt and a headcollar to fool the animal. In Zala County, as a result of this, the milking of smaller livestock also became a woman’s task relatively early on. Women already performed a lot of work raising the animals around the 1950s to 1970s. Because of the nature of the buffalo, the children regularly played among them, and because the women were there to look after the children, they did both their own tasks and helped out since they were “available.”

Herding skills and herder traditions were mostly passed down and preserved in multigenerational herder families. Parents would say:

Even in the pram, our children were among the animals on an emotional level, they were already learning. At the age of four-five, they got a lamb to look after, children loved to take care of it. They learned to walk among the sheep so as not to disturb them. By the time they were six-eight, they already knew the basics, beauty, and tricks of herding. By the age of eight-nine, they could make cheese. The parents showed them the beauty of this work, and later these girls could more easily tolerate the challenges of life. You can still benefit even if you won’t become a herderess!

Herders are usually more traditional than peasants, so some peasant traditions that have not been continued in rural farming

communities have survived among herders (e.g., wearing a hat, pocket watch, leather bag, not moving the family celebrations to Sundays). However, school increasingly tore children away from their families, especially those living on farms further from villages. There were times when the children lived in the family’s village house, even without adult supervision, and went to school from there, with the mother only visiting them on market days.

During the decades of communism, the respect for the traditional herder’s attire declined among women more than men, who still often wore herder’s hats, vests with silver buttons, herder’s belts, and knife holders. It was characteristic of herder husbands not to buy gifts for their wives and daughters from stores, instead to give them horn or leather items made by themselves or by their herder friends. At the same time, in this period it was not yet a practice for herders to take their wives with them to herders’ feasts and festivals.

*Adapting to rapid and unexpected changes
(from the 1990s to the present day)*

The political and economic regime shift in 1989 once again initiated major changes in pastoralism in Hungary. Most of the livestock of the cooperatives went to medium- and large-scale farmers and agricultural enterprises, who worked with hired herders. The esteem of these herders was generally low; moreover, the people employed to work with the livestock were often not herders at all, but untrained people “*carrying plastic bags*” (i.e., not the traditional herder’s equipment) and needing little more than “*a litre of wine.*” Respect for and recognition of herders and the culture of herding diminished even more than during the decades of communism. The respect shown to women herders and herders’ wives also continued to decline. At the same time, some herders kept their own private herds, while others started up again as family farms, mainly sheep farms.

The main tasks of herder women and herders’ wives were still the typically female

responsibilities of running the household, raising children, cooking, and keeping the home in order. In parallel with the social changes, herder families themselves have transformed, and today children usually help less with the work around the livestock. There are however some exceptions, with some girls regularly herding and helping in the barn before going to school in the morning. Herders' wives now often have a full-time job outside of animal husbandry. Bearing this double and triple burden of work, cooking is still a woman's task, and even today, freshly cooked food is put on the herder family's table every day. Even nowadays, the wives of self-employed herders sometimes take lunch out to their husbands, although many hired herders work in shifts of one or two days with their colleagues, so they can pick up the food prepared at home themselves. Although backyard poultry and pigs have almost disappeared from Hungarian villages, most herder families still keep various animals around the house, and taking care of them is still largely a woman's task. Several families keep more exotic animals, such as peacocks or ornamental pigeons.

In addition to the traditionally female tasks, new tasks have also appeared in the last 30 years, above all the increasingly complex paperwork, monitoring compliance with regulations, preparing applications and reports, and corresponding with officials and decision makers who often have little or no understanding of herding. Even today, therefore, we can hear phrases like: *it wouldn't work without a woman; you cannot pull the cart alone; I couldn't do it without my wife because of the paperwork*. We note that significant patience and computer skills are required to properly follow the often impractical and even absurd rules and procedures, which are often alien to their culture. At the same time, without this patience, the herder family would lose their income, leaving them financially unviable.

Herders' wives often mention that they can—or used to—do almost every job as well as their husbands, apart from the most physically demanding work. Most of them also

herd when needed. Today milk processing as a typical female job survives in only a few families (Figure 1). Where cheese is still made, the animals are mostly kept in a barn and milked by a machine. Women's tasks have not changed significantly, although cheese-making technology has been modernised. Today women still help with the shearing, mainly by collecting the wool and providing food for the workers. Some families also sell the meat they produce directly to restaurants and other consumers, which is also often done by women.

Many women herders are now retired, and are often unable to continue livestock keeping. They say that if they are not careful, the way of life, knowledge and experience that they were born into, which receives less and less attention from society during their lifetime, will disappear. Today's herder women (and men) do not even have an official certificate stating that they are herders. There is no school in Hungary that offers such a qualification. In Spain and France such schools exist, with many women graduates, although the title is not officially recognised in the education system.

Herder women are often still proud women today, and female members of multi-generational herder families fondly talk about their herder parents and grandparents, their livestock, and pastures. At the same time, nowadays even children born into herder families do not necessarily become herders, the main reason being not a lack of love for livestock, but the low level of recognition and economic profitability of the sector. This breaks the multi-generational process of knowledge transfer. Fortunately, there are still 8–12-year-olds (even girls) who wish to become animal herders.

The social changes in Western Europe that led to the transformation of pastoral society are taking place in Hungary, albeit with a delay of a few decades. Just as in Spain, Italy and France, Hungary has also experienced the emergence of women who were not born into herder families, but who later chose animal husbandry or even grazing animal husbandry as their profession. They partly



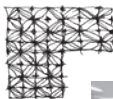
follow the practices of Hungarian herders, and partly practise modern eco-farming based on domestic or foreign experience (cf. regenerative agriculture). There are both self-employed and hired herder women. On many farms, if the number of livestock is quite low, they are mostly tended to by the women, while men focus on crop production. As with traditional herder families, even the youngest children grow up among the livestock, carried in a shawl by their mother while herding the animals. Modern machines that take the effort out of physical labour also help women working in animal husbandry.

While recognition of the work of herders has declined, maintaining and reviving herder traditions is becoming increasingly widespread and even almost fashionable in Hungary. Gradually, there are more herder festivals than herders, although herders are often there only as guests of honour, props on the stage. It is rare for a festival to discuss recognition of

their work and knowledge, or even to allow the voices of female herders to be heard. One such case, however, is the National Organic Cooking Competition and Herders' Meeting organized by Péter Rózsa, where the living and deceased so-called Örökös Herders of Hortobágy are presented as "Perpetual or Forever Herders," and among those honoured and celebrated every year are two shepherdesses, Mária Szopkóné Márki and Piroska Béresné Márki. One of the side impacts of the festivals is that herder women and girls are choosing to wear traditional costumes more frequently.

A long-awaited development of recent years was the founding of the Hungarian Women Herders group, established following the Spanish model (see Box 1). Their main goals are to share knowledge and experience with each other and to draw the attention of mainstream society to women herders, in order to gain recognition and respect for those who, as women, work around and for the livestock.

Box 1



Group photo of the Hungarian Women Herders group meeting at Hajdúsámson on March 2, 2024 (László Katona / Képmás)

The group was formed in October 2021 by women herders from Hortobágy and the surrounding area, with support from Zsolt Molnár, following the example of the Spanish Women's Herding group *Ganaderas en Red*. The group is self-organised, and membership is open exclusively to women who are or have been active in pastoralism and animal husbandry. The main purpose of the group is to enable Hungarian women herders to get to know each other better, to exchange information and knowledge, to make new contacts and friendships, to discuss their achievements and challenges, and to help each other in many ways by fostering a sense of shared community. They also aim to show the importance of women's contributions to the pastoral world, as well as the beauty of the life they live through photos, presentations, and media coverage.

The women herders are proud of the life they have chosen and want to continue this livelihood and life-style and pass it along to the next generation. At the international meeting of herders and researchers held in Olaszfalu, Hungary (May 2023), their husbands also expressed their appreciation and recognition of the work of women herders and their support for the group's activities, urging them: *Do it, we will help!* (see the film by Nikolett Csányi 2023).

The following are selected quotes from journal articles that reported on the women herders' meeting (Szász 2024; Fodor 2024):

"We rarely have the opportunity to talk to people who understand what we are saying. It's good to share your joys, sorrows and difficulties with people who you know understand what you're talking about."

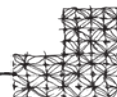
"No matter what happens in the world, our profession will always be needed." "There is nothing more precious than being able to put your own, home-grown, healthy food on your family's table."

"The beauty of it is the same as the difficulty. You are there for every moment: at birth and at death."

"I have a university degree in agriculture, but for this profession, you have to see it in practice, you have to grasp it, you have to live it. I believe that farming children have both feet on the ground, in every sense, they find their happiness out on the farm, not at night, with the wrong crowd."

"We also try to help other farmers [by posting] on the internet, sharing little tips and practices with them. It's not easy to farm these days, to combine tradition with the modern world, but we've dedicated our lives to making it work and passing it on to others." "We also present our farm on social media to show young people that there is a future in rural life and agriculture. And that in this future women will also have an important role to play."

"Often it is us [farmers, herders] who spoil the image of farming by constantly complaining: there is a drought, we have to work hard, or the purchase prices are low. But it's not merely a struggle, the way we live, it's wonderful, too!"



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Discussion

Women herders perform important productive and reproductive work. Although their contributions have long been invisible, the documentation that we present in this paper is meant to shift the narrative towards greater inclusivity. Particularly as the first author and some of the other co-authors are not academics, but are actively working as women herders, they were able to discern different things of importance from the literature and build a more intimate rapport during the interviews and oral histories.

For the time being, there continues to be very little available data on Hungarian pastoral women who lived in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries or earlier. More information is available from the first half of the twentieth century, although this too is limited. The most complete overview is Béla Gunda's study on the roles of shepherdesses, but his article clearly shows that it was written by a male researcher (e.g., the striking absence of authentic women's voices). Furthermore, he may have interviewed only men, and he presents women herders from the point of view of peasant women. Margit Luby's account is more balanced, although she probably also interviewed mostly male herders. Both authors worked only in the eastern part of Hungary, Hortobágy and Szatmár-Bereg, so little is known about women in other regions. The authors of the present paper who are herders and the interviewees clearly remembered the period from the 1950s to 1970s, and provided some detailed data on this period. However, the best documented period remains the last 40 years. At the same time, from a geographical point of view, our collection is also incomplete, as we have hardly any data from Transdanubia (except for the Bakony region) or from the Northern Mountain Range. English-language literature on herder women in Central Europe is scarce. Thoroughly reviewing literature in different local languages would offer more comparative material for the regional

level, see e.g., Vuia 1980, Kelly 2000, *Baci și Băcițe* 2020, and the Hungarian publications cited in the reference list, and also for global contextualizations. Through our review of Hungarian-language literature and the interviewee data that we have analysed and presented in English, we offer a case study from Hungary which can be used in other comparisons.

Women herders in Hungary, just like the majority of pastoral women in the world, had—and still have—multiple responsibilities and diverse tasks and roles in everyday work around the livestock and in the family, influenced by livestock type and cultural traditions. Hungarian male herders argue that without the support of women, they could not sustain this profession and way of life (cf. Bharwad and Shroff 2007). Some aspects of women's work have changed little (e.g., responsibility for household work, raising children, working with young animals), while others, like dairy work and bureaucratic paperwork, have changed fundamentally since the beginning of the twentieth century.

Hungarian herder women seem to be more innovative and adaptable than their male counterparts, but many women are still cautious about replacing traditional methods with as yet untested modern solutions. Hungarian women herders are keepers of tradition but also active agents of change and innovation (cf. Fernández-Giménez, Ravera, and Oteros-Rozas 2022).

While the feminisation of work around livestock is observable in Hungary, in parallel with mechanisation, there is no trace here of the type of feminisation as seen in Romania, for example, which is driven by the husbands moving abroad to work (Kelly 2000) or finding a job outside pastoralism, while their wives remain in rural areas (like the Maasai, see Poelking 2017). Earlier in the twentieth century, most herder women were either born into a herder family or married into one from a peasant family, whereas recently the number and proportion of neo-rurals is increasing, so there are increasingly diverse

realities experienced by women herders today (cf. Fernández-Giménez, Oteros-Rozas, and Ravera 2021). Unlike many pastoral women in developing countries (Mera Declaration 2010; de Jones and Flintan 2020), Hungarian women herders usually do not suffer disadvantages in terms of education or healthcare.

It is not typical for Hungarian women to regularly herd livestock on the pastures (cf. Bharwad and Shroff 2007), though most of them do it, when needed—for example, when the men are away or when the herds are separated into mothers and barren individuals. Livestock mobility has been decreasing for centuries in Hungary, and in the post-communist period (after 1989) it decreased even further with privatization of land. A nexus of factors then contributed to the spread of fenced grazing systems (paddocks), which need less personal attention and which thus contribute to the loss of herding and landscape knowledge. Hungarian women herders are rarely involved in biodiversity management of protected areas; as herders, regardless of gender, have not (yet) been invited to join the decision-making bodies of national parks. The argument of Bharwad and Shroff (2007), namely that traditional herders in Europe are respected for their land stewardship, is therefore less pronounced in Hungary, although the situation is slowly improving (see Sáfián, Sáfián, and Molnár 2022).

To prevent and counteract exclusion and discrimination, herder women have started to create their own networks globally, in Africa, India, and Europe, to address their specific needs (Mera Declaration, 2010; Fernández-Giménez, Oteros-Rozas, and Ravera 2021). Networking among herder women in Hungary is only a recent development (see the film *The Time of Hungarian Women Herders*, Csányi 2023), learning from the experiences of Spanish women herders (*Ganaderas en Red*), although women herder producer networks have not yet emerged in Hungary. Innovative research methods—for example, feminist approaches (Köhler-Rollefson 2018; Fernández-Giménez, Ravera, and Oteros-Rozas 2022; Ravera,

Oteros-Rozas, and Fernández-Giménez 2022; Ravera, Fernández-Giménez, and Oteros-Rozas 2023), gender-sensitive projects (de Jones and Flintan 2020), collaborative research led by women scientists or even by women herders—are not yet typical in Hungary, but again, the situation is improving.

We acknowledge that the present research has several limitations. Topics such as land and livestock ownership issues, women's veterinary knowledge, the role of women herders in family and community level decision making, and how satisfied women herders are with the responsibilities they have recently taken on were not the focus of the earlier ethnographic and autobiographical research, nor were they central issues in the interviews conducted for this study. These are, however, important issues that warrant future investigation. It is well documented that over time, the responsibility and autonomy of women over household and livestock decisions increases, and their choices can substantially influence the continuity and future of herding in their families (cf. Malhotra, Nandigama, and Bhattacharya 2022; Poelking 2017). Empowered pastoral women with leadership skills and an innovative mindset are key to the future of these families and communities (Castelló and Romano 2023). There is, however, always a lot happening behind the scenes, so it may never be clear who is really responsible for what and how decisions were made (cf. Bhasin 2013; Köhler-Rollefson 2018). Innovative research methods are required in order to better understand the still hidden changes and their drivers (Köhler-Rollefson 2018; Fernández-Giménez, Ravera, and Oteros-Rozas 2022).

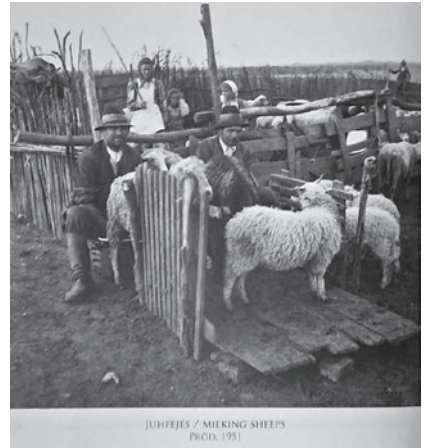
In conclusion, we hope that our study will initiate similar studies by, with and about women herders in Central and Eastern Europe and beyond, and can help make women's voices heard and facilitate the resilient adaptation of this ancient but still highly relevant form of livelihood. *"We do not want to break out, we want to stay in this [livelihood], but we would like to get a bit more respect for what we are doing for the land*



Figure 1. Women's roles in pastoralism in past and present-day Hungary



1a: Women's shearing team in the Bakony region in 1934. The women: Gáborné Molnár born Mária Bagi, Zsófia Bagi, Józsefné Kövecses born Mária Oroszlán, Imréné Kiss-Tóth born Mária Molnár, Karolina Bagi and Imréné Kövecses born Ágnes Oroszlán; the men: Gábor Molnár and József Bagi. Photo credit: Károly Tamás.



1b: Wife and daughters driving sheep to the "milking hole" (Pród, 1951). Photo credit: Ákos Janó.



1c: One of the last cheese-making herder families (Zsuzsa Kurunczi and János Dani, Bogárczó, Makó, Hungary). Photo credit: Magyar Konyha, Sebestyén László.



1d: Ibolya Sáfíánné speaking at the meeting of the Carpathian Convention on pastoralism in Vatra Dornei, Romania (April 2023). Photo credit: Zlatica Csontos Schimi.

and people," a woman herder summarised their thoughts at the meeting in Olaszfalu, Hungary, 2023.

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