

Rural History 2010

Oral history and the history of forests

Rosemarie Fiebranz

“I never liked doing housework”

*A discussion on intersections of norms, made visible by a woman
doing men's work in forestry in mid-20th century Sweden*

Joan, born 1932, grew up in a crofter's home in a forest district c. 600 kilometres north of Stockholm (in the midst of the Swedish region called *Norrland*).¹ She never married, and she spent her whole career in a rather masculine occupational setting, working as a logger. In September 2004 I spent a sunny afternoon in the kitchen of her parental home, where she still lives, listening when she told me her life story. We met again in 2007, and the two interviews makes up the keystone material for this paper.

Today this forested area in mid northern Sweden is very sparsely populated. The rural district with an area of c. 1 300 sq.km had about 4 000 inhabitants 1935, in 2007 no more than c. 1 500 people lived here.² During the late 19th and early 20th centuries a kind of Klondike spirit was prevailing in the neighbourhood, when hundreds of men came from other parts of Sweden, and Finland, to work here as lumberjacks. There was shortage of housing for the young lumberjacks who wanted to get married and settle down, although some parts of the district did not get proper roads until the mid thirties. Families dwelled in outbuildings and bake houses at the old smallholdings.³

The ordinary logger in this area, as well as in most of northern Sweden's forest regions, lived as a part time farmer, if he was married. This is also valid the other way around: The ordinary small-scale farmer in northern Sweden also worked as a part time logger, from c. 1880 up to c. 1960. The forest companies only offered salaried employment a few months each year: at the winter fellings from December until March, and at the timber floating in May–June. For the rest of the year, the loggers' families relied on their small scale farming, which included access to some acres of land and two to four cows in the barn. No actual grain growing (except small amounts of barley) is possible in this area, but hay was cultured at the small stubbles and collected in the forest, where the cattle also grazed in the summer. The

¹ *Norrland* ('the Northern part of the country') encompasses c. 2/3 of the Swedish land area.

² Official Statistics of Sweden (SCB) 2007, and a local survey 1936. Population density 2007, 1,12 inhabitants/sq.km; 1935 3,08 inhabitants/sq.km.

³ Recorded interview with 'Joan', born 1932, 040930. This interview is the main empirical source for this paper, and will not be footnoted henceforth. Joan speaks a pronounced dialect, and my transcription and translation of the quotations cannot make her expressive narrative full justice.

unmarried men often migrated seasonally to get jobs, e.g. at the saw mills in the coastal area, or if they stayed in the neighbourhood all the year round, they could work as farm hands or road builders.

The interviews with Joan were made as a part of the project Woodland life, in which I have made interviews with elder women, of whom most have been married to loggers.⁴ When analyzed in comparison, the 75 years old, retired woman logger's narratives are illuminating in many ways. As the only woman present in the male working gangs, she was often observing 'from outside', but as she had been brought up by her grandparents, she was also familiar with the traditional household organization of work. During her working life forestry changed a lot; the work was mechanized, and the (male) workforce gradually became employed all the year round. The older way of life, with small-scale farming for additional maintenance, faded away, and with it, e.g. women's customary work role in cattle-tending.

Processes of differentiation related to gender and sexuality are sparsely dealt with in the previous research on the working life of the 20th c. Swedish forest industry, albeit class have been discussed somewhat more, from the male worker's perspective.⁵ Here I will discuss the prospects to understand the construction and change of distinctions of work along the lines of gender, class, and marital status, in times of sweeping social and economic transformation. Among the themes to be considered are notions on masculinity and femininity related to work and family life. What was the wider significance of the prevalent heterosexual norm with its implication that in order to be seen as a grown up, qualified logger, you also needed to be married to an industrious woman?⁶ Also conceptions of physical strength and occupational skills will be discussed.

A distinctive feature in the use of oral sources is that informants often tend to interpret the experienced organization of work as natural, functional, and harmonious.⁷ However, by analyzing the narratives of an individual who broke established norms in one obvious respect – as a woman logger –, I hope to catch sight of further, historically important but elusive, norms and notions concerning gender and the gendered work division, family and sexuality; notions which also often has constituted as benchmarks in the representation of Swedish forestry working life around the middle of the 20th century.

⁴ The project is funded by the Swedish Research Council, Maria Vallström is my colleague in the project.

⁵ Bäcklund 1988 and Hjelm 1991 represents the traditional, gender blind economic history research of the field. Johansson 1990 brings up masculinity and class among lumberjacks in Sweden. Johansson 1989 and 1994, Nilsson 1999, and Nordin 2007 all deal with masculinity in forest settings, the latter two also focus on sexuality, while Lundström 1999 deals with the gender division of work among smallholders in *Norrland*, from women's perspective.

⁶ Johansson 1994, pp. 159–163.

⁷ Nilsson 2002; Hansson 2006.

As Joan's mother became a single parent and had to find work far away from home, Joan was brought up by her mother's parents. Her grandfather, himself a logger and crofter, was the son of a crofter, and the grandmother was the daughter of a freeholder. The grandparents' four sons all died as children or rather young out of tuberculosis and other diseases. As a child and teenager Joan worked with her grandmother at the small farm, and she quit school after the fifth grade. From the age of 18 Joan followed her grandfather logging. Aged 21, in 1953, Joan took over her deceased uncle's tools, the felling saw and the axe, and started working as a logger for the forest company, SCA. After a few years of logging with hand tools, Joan could afford to buy her first motor chain saw in 1957. She stayed on living in her childhood home with her grandparents until they passed away in the seventies. When I met Joan she was retired, after having spent her whole working life as a logger. She still lived in her grandparents' croft, far away from the nearest neighbour and the village.

Woodland work in the fifties and before

Gendered work

The gendered division of labour in the forest areas of northern Sweden in the first half of the 20th century had great similarities with the patterns described for the same area during the two previous centuries. The traditional lifestyle rested on the notion that all people – men, women, and young children – should work to support themselves, albeit by organizing work jointly in households, which preferably had some access to land for cultivation. For people of both sexes, regardless of age, diligence was seen as an important and necessary capacity:

To be a 'work person' or 'workman' was a clear status that could be achieved by an assiduous individual, man or woman. This ability to work was always referred to whenever a person was spoken of, and it did not so much refer to raw physical strength as to zeal and thrift.⁸

Many work tasks in the forested areas required the use of horses, traditionally associated with masculinity in the Swedish agrarian society. A man keeping a good, able-bodied horse also displayed positive masculinity and strength.⁹ Among chores that were seen as 'men's work' was the work with the horse-drawn devices in the fields, e.g. in harvest and haying. Taking care of the horses, the stable-work including giving them forage and water, etc., was also

⁸ Johansson 1989, p. 201.

⁹ Fiebranz 2002, pp. 138–142.

men's responsibility. Tasks connected with timber (often demanding horses) were also seen as male: logging, floating, and transporting timber with sledges. Woodwork like building houses and carpentry, as well as fishing and hunting, were work very seldom performed by women.¹⁰

In accordance with the general ideal of diligence smallholders' wives were seen as indispensable members of the household work unit. Women's main fields of responsibility in small-scale farming in *Norrland* were attached to the cow-house, with milking and caring for cows and small animals, and to the refining and cooking of foodstuffs. In addition, textile work was a female area. Cleaning and washing, but also the heavier tasks as carrying water and preparing the firewood, were seen as typical female work.¹¹

The work capacity of both men and women were crucial for survival and standard of living for freeholders, tenant farmers, and logger families living in crofts with small land plots.¹² There was also a further prerequisite taken for granted in the social order: to be a resident and well-established person in the woodland area, you had to live in a heterosexual relationship, preferably in marriage. The forestry work organization, up to the mid fifties, was dependent on the small-scale, cattle-orientated farming for the workers' subsistence. In this organization, the main part of the work with the cattle, and the food maintenance, rested on women's work, i.e. the loggers' wives.

Thus, work was divided according to gender (and age) in the loggers' households. But certain work tasks engaged all available labour, i.e. men, women, and children together. However, at occasions like harvest and hay making, men had leading parts while women assisted: he cut with the scythe, she handled the rake.¹³ Joan recounts: "the woman went after him and raked together the hay". This custom and others like it also elucidates the signification of power in the gendered social order. Similarly, notions of the relationship of work and rest which implied power became obvious at those large work gatherings. It was the normal state of things that women were persistently working, and never were seen seated for some rest.¹⁴ Joan told me:

[...] then the man was out, he mostly cut, and the wife was out and worked as much as he did. And at noon, then they went in for rest, the guy laid down, either on the ground or on the floor, and fell asleep for a while. The wife cooked, and she had fowls, maybe she had a pig, and she also had some calf, which she had to feed. And he got up and had his meal, and then he lay down again and melted the food while she washed up. And when she had dried the dishwater off her hands,

¹⁰ For 18th–19th c., see Fiebranz 2002, chapter IV. For 20th c., Lundström 1999.

¹¹ Ibid. Interview with Joan. Kaldal 2000, p. 94.

¹² Johansson 1989; Lundström 1999, pp. 160f.

¹³ Lundström 1999, pp. 155f. Osterud 1991 lucidly shows the same pattern in nineteenth-c. American small scale farm work.

¹⁴ See also Lundström 1999, pp 159f. and Johansson 1989.

then he stood up and straightened, and said: “yes, we’ve got enough rest now, let’s go out and continue!”
And this is no joke! It was like this!

One can find an explanation of the great amount of women’s work responsibilities in the fact that the flexibility of the division of work was one-sided. I.e., for men it was taboo to do women’s tasks, such as cow-house work or tending babies.¹⁵ If a woman could not do her ordinary work due to illness, another woman had to replace her – a family member, a neighbour or a relative. Her husband was not expected to milk the cows, at any circumstances. On the other hand, a woman could do men’s work if no man was available to do it, with the exception of the most distinctive masculine tasks, like logging. The handling of the firewood is an example of a heavy task, partly gendered as male: chopping and sawing wood. However, as a laborious task, that had to be performed every day, it often fell to the women’s lot when the men were absent.¹⁶

In Norrland’s forest areas additional trades had been practiced by both sexes for centuries, due to the relatively meagre agriculture. When industrial forestry expanded male wage labour were available during the felling season, since the growing period is relatively short in Norrland, whilst the small-holders’ households still got their principal sustenance from agriculture. The work tasks in logging and timber transports, for which wage workers were needed, were also linked to important notions of the traditional gendered division of work; masculinity was connected to horses and working with timber. The substantial working efforts of loggers’ wives, in cattle breeding and agriculture, were the prerequisite of this flexible way to ensure the labour supply in forestry. Women’s work in agriculture, as well as with food preparation and textiles, guaranteed that the reproductive costs of the labour force were fulfilled, even if wages were low and employment only was offered a few months per year.¹⁷ Thus, the traditional, gendered social order became favourable for the forest companies.

Transformation of work roles?

The gendered understanding of work among smallholders in *Norrland* in the first half of the 20th c. thus rested on the notion that a farmer had to have a competent and industrious wife to manage his farming. The farming enterprise was seen as something that required joint efforts

¹⁵ Lundström 1999, pp. 156f. The disallowance of men doing cow-house work is also known from 18th and early 19th c. *Norrland*. Fiebranz 2002, pp. 138--139 and 342.

¹⁶ This one-sided flexibility has lengthy historical origin. See Fiebranz 2002, ch. IV for an overview.

¹⁷ Rannikko 1995.

of a couple, a man and a woman.¹⁸ This view can also be denominated as a kind of rural ‘heteronormalcy’; the supposed heterosexual identity is seen as self-evident, and is required as a corner-stone in the gendered social order. Jo Little has argued that rural areas are characterized by a certain heterosexual identity, including rather conventional gender roles, e.g. concerning family life and women’s work.¹⁹ The postulated social identity of this forested/rural area included marriage as the rightful setting, both for the organization of work, and for one’s sexuality.

The growing extent of men’s waged work for the forest companies can be one reason for a change over time of these gendered work ideals. Certainly, the traditional basis of the households’ sustenance was preserved, as the married loggers were supposed to have access to some land to grow some potatoes and forage enough to feed a couple of cows, at least. By those means the households had their security, to be self-subsistent when wage incomes incidentally were insufficient. Joan formulates what loggers made when they got married: “... then they had to rent some farm, to get work for the wife”.

For the most part the organization of work remained the same after the breakthrough of industrial forestry, up to the fifties. Gradually, it also became more common that women and young people had occasional incomes of seasonal work for the forest companies, e.g. with reforestation. However, the arise of the labour market for men, and the following increasing dependence on wages from forest companies and other employers probably influenced the notions of women’s work. Joan reacted to a certain way of talking among her workmates:

That is something which awfully annoys me. When I was in the woods, there were men talking like this; that we who were unmarried, the bachelors (and I), should consider their burden: that ‘they had to provide for their wives, as well’!

Joan returns several times to this manner of speech among her married workmates in the logging crews. This kind of talking implied that being married was seen as a load and that the wife had to be provided for, i.e. the logger had to work for two while their unmarried fellows just had to deal with their own provision. According to Joan there was no great acknowledgement of loggers’ wives’ work efforts among wage working loggers in the fifties. Joan apprehended it otherwise. According to her opinion, women contributed a great deal to the households’ sustenance by their work with the cows and the farming, among other things. Joan’s view in this respect corresponds well with the traditional gendered working order,

¹⁸ Lundström 1999. For 18th–19th c., see Fiebranz 2002.

¹⁹ Little 2003. See also Nordin 2007, and Nilsson 1999, on bachelors’ lives in *Norrland*.

described above. This traditional working order where apparently undergoing some change at the time. The ongoing creation of the Swedish welfare state, *Folkhemmet*, and the housewife–breadwinner ideal connected with it,²⁰ may have impinged opinions, expressed like this.²¹

The notion of an indoor working housewife, supported by a man, was not familiar in Joan’s home when she was brought up. Joan’s grandmother Laura did not dedicate her husband much personal attendance, as many other loggers’ wives did.²² Joan said, “she wouldn’t have brought grandpa’ a clean shirt if he had called for it”. The particular views on domestic work in Joan’s home may have had something to do with her grandparents’ differing class backgrounds, her grandmother being a daughter of a freeholder. Freeholders’ wives may have had more of a high status-image compared to women married to crofters/loggers, which was not consistent with acting like an attendant at home.²³

From her parental home, Laura had got a sewing machine as a wedding gift (as had her six siblings). Laura occupied herself with this machine for a lot of sewing on request from neighbours. Joan described Laura’s activity as a trade (also known as a frequent additional source of income among logger’s/small holders wives)²⁴: “My grandmother was a seamstress. So she had an income of her own”. Laura was not formally trained for this trade, but in her youth she had followed the itinerant tailor for a while and learnt the elements of the handicraft. When married, Laura could contribute a great deal to the household’s income this way. Joan talked about a hierarchy, embraced in loggers’ households, which she called ‘the power of money’. I.e., the loggers, when bringing cash into the household, regarded themselves as superior to their wives. Maybe, this male superiority was a bit mitigated in Joan’s and other loggers’ homes, due to women’s incomes as seamstresses.

As a consequence of these conditions, and because of her own status as a gainfully employed logger, Joan reacted strongly against the “breadwinner talking” among her fellow loggers. She had observed the strenuous work of Laura, and the next door women, who also aimed to produce some small cash incomes by selling milk, butter and eggs to the forest company servants who stayed in the area as boarders on the farms.

²⁰ Hirdman 2001, pp 149 ff. In English, see Hirdman 1987.

²¹ Fiebranz 2010.

²² Lundström 1999, p. 160.

²³ See Johansson 1990 on class distinctions, e.g. concerning prestige and self-perception between owners of old homesteads and loggers leasing farms, and Lundström 1999.

²⁴ Also mentioned in further interviews in my source material.

An informal women's trade

One of Joan's neighbours, Wilma (born 1910), told me about her work.²⁵ She particularly remembered one hard winter in the beginning of the fifties. Her three children were at the boarding school in the main village, and her husband was away logging from Monday to Saturday every week. Wilma had five forest company servants boarded at her home, weekly Sunday evening to Saturday morning. When two neighbouring women fell ill and were confined to bed, Wilma had to replace them and handle their cow-houses with three to four cows each, beside the four cows in her own barn. Then her days were filled with cooking and washing up for the five men and the work in three cow-houses (milking, foddering etc.) every morning and evening. In addition she had to ski several kilometres between the farms to the neighbours' cow-houses. Water (for the household and for the cows) and firewood had to be carried, and bedclothes had to be washed. "I didn't think: I was just working".

When Wilma, aged 97, tells me the story, she chuckles: she was contented by the memory of being commended when she made the beds with both bottom and top sheets, and for cooking so well. Her toil with the boarders meant a welcome contribution of cash. However, Wilma did not relate this income as the main reason for taking the job on. Her neighbour Jenny, who usually took the boarders in, was ill. No one else could do it, so Wilma had to lend her a hand!

Thus, some loggers' wives had a kind of connection to the market when housing the forest companies' servants. The women actually ran boarding-houses, with clean bed-linen and well-cooked food, served for morning and evening meals, and for the men's nosebags every working day. This trade was not a chosen or calculated one for those women. Put another way; it was incumbent upon the logger's wives to put food on the table, wash up the dishes, carry firewood and water, make beds, launder and mend clothes for working men, and of course do the cattle-tending as well. These were not chores that a woman married to a logger or a smallholder could refuse to do, if she was healthy. If she could have some cash income for it, the better! From the forest companies' point of view, it was a mode of easily solving temporary housing issues for their foremen, in an area without organized infrastructure like inns and taverns.

Despite the fact that the work content was mostly the same for women in different social strata, in freeholders' households and in households of loggers not owning land, respectively, there were differences of some significance. Practically, the work load could

²⁵ Interview 070508 with 'Wilma', born 1910.

differ, and mentally, concerning the estimation of their achievements – both from their husbands, and from other people – the attitudes could vary. As mentioned above, there were signs of a kind of breadwinner ideal among loggers (with less access to land), which was not seen among freeholders.²⁶ Paradoxically, a housewife existence in the sense of being provided for by the husband, just doing indoor household tasks and child care, was not possible for the wives in families with limited land resources who got relatively less contributions to their maintenance from farming. On the contrary, for those women the necessity to add some cash to the household income was larger, especially in times of unsecure wage incomes from their husbands' work. The better-off farmer's wife presumably could fulfil more of a housewife's existence, either by having a servant or as her husband gradually engaged more in (commercial) cattle management.

For married women, possible cash contributions could be generated e.g. by casual work with reforestation, cleaning, and sewing. If they had no children of their own, they could work as cooks at loggers' camps.²⁷ Not only conventional jobs, but also the informal sector e.g. as the described boarding trade, could be of importance.²⁸ Some information do exist about loggers' wives who had annual earnings equivalent to one or two loggers' monthly salaries from picking and selling bilberries and lingonberries.²⁹ However, there are very few known examples of women, married or unmarried, working as loggers in the fifties (or earlier) as will be shown below.

The rise of a breadwinner/housewife ideal can be seen diverging with a reality, in which women always had been working, and where no other life style was conceivable. In a long-term view, this would change. It became more accepted for smallholders' and loggers' wives to stay indoors, just doing housework and caring for small children. The male cattle-tending taboo would diminish, as the dairy farming was increasingly seen as a commercial enterprise, and men as a result were milking cows more frequently. As a response to the Social democratic housing policy, also the building of company funded modern loggers' homes, without access to land or cow-houses, increased during the fifties. Those new living conditions implied that loggers' households should have the ideal composition: A breadwinning, year-round employed husband, and a housewife, occupied at home with cooking and child care.³⁰

²⁶ Compare Lundström 1999, p. 168.

²⁷ A closer mapping of what salaried employments that were available for women (married and unmarried) in those settings during the fifties remains to be done.

²⁸ Informal female job sectors in resembling areas are discussed in Isacson 1994 and Lagerqvist 2008.

²⁹ Lagerqvist 2008, pp. 167 f.

³⁰ Lundström 1999, pp. 153, 158; Fiebranz 2004; 2010; Vallström 2008; *SJA* 1956:15.

A single woman's career

Thus, one's sex and social position influenced the work content and how it was regarded. Then, what about one's marital status, what would life look like for a person who chose not to get married? Unmarried men existed in the neighbourhood, but this state was not frequent among settled men, according to Joan. If they were employed by the forest company, they could live at the *skogsstation*, a lodging house situated c. thirty kilometres away. There women were employed to cook and take care of laundry and cleaning for the single loggers. If an unmarried logger had access to a dwelling with some land, a woman could be hired as a housekeeper to take care of woman's work, including some cattle tending. Frequently, such a housekeeper eventually could 'advance' to be the logger's wife. The coexistence which came about according to work reasons then was transferred into married life. Normally, the unmarried stage in a logger's life should be temporary. Living at the lodging house was never meant to be permanent. A grown up, fully ripe man who was at the maximum of his working capacity, was expected to be a married man.³¹ As pointed out by Hubbard, related by Little, living alone can also be seen as a 'scary sexuality', when related to the heterosexual norm.³²

That is to say, for men single life could involve the risk of not being treated as a sexually reliable, fully grown-up person. Practically, being unmarried primarily meant problems at home; some woman had to be hired to deal with tasks that were perceived taboo for men to do – or simply were seen as impossible to solve for a man. On the other hand, waged work could be the same for the unmarried as for the married man: seasonal logging, temporary farm-hand jobs or road construction work.³³ However, the prospects of promotion in forestry work normally presupposed keeping a horse, to take on commissions for timber transports as a sleigh-driver. I.e., to keep a horse you had to have access to enough land, and hence you also had to be married.³⁴

How could an unmarried woman manage to support herself? Joan had never, as far as I know, planned to marry. When asked what openings for support that existed in her youth, she mentioned that several of her female age-fellows worked as cooks at logging camps for some years:

And sometimes it went so bad for the poor creatures there; it was there in the cabin they got themselves a fiancé. It was there they were talked to bed. Yes, and

³¹ Johansson 1989.

³² Little 2003, p. 404.

³³ Also shown in Nilsson 1999, p. 135.

³⁴ Johansson 1989.

then it came to marriage and children, and then they had to get some pightle to have their cows on as well...

For these women, the unmarried state was seen as just temporary. Children, marriage, farming and cows in the barn appear to be the kind of determined women's life that was predominant also in the eyes of Joan. I tried to press her a bit to tell me something about what other possibilities there were for women to live, and to support themselves. She could not really think of any female occupations, but mentioned something vague about ironers, and that some girls could get jobs as maids for the forest company servants. Then, what was the reason for Joan's choice of career, to work as a logger, a job that was extremely male-dominated? To be a cook had never been an option:

No, I was never good at cooking – it could be, if I should be punished for something, then perhaps I could be placed in front of the stove to cook – it is servitude!

The division of work had turned different at Joan's home farm, already when she was a teenager: "I rather went to the cow-house and grand-ma' cooked, as she liked it. Then, I had in fact made my share after all, in a sense!" Consequently, from her teens Joan made as her part of the women's work at the croft, the work with the three cows in the cow-shed: milking, watering, haying, and cleaning out the manure. Commonly in the vicinity, it worked the other way around: the eldest daughter made the indoor tasks, like cooking and tending babies, while the wife worked in the cow-shed. Joan insisted on her antipathy for housework, and accordingly she did not get a traditional female upbringing.

Joan's training and work assignments during her growth were not confined to female gendered tasks. As her grandparents' sons had died young, there were no boys at the croft to follow Joan's grandfather in forest work the customary way.³⁵ At the age of 18, Joan replaced her deceased uncles and followed her grandfather to work on his small forest parcel. He taught her the tricks of logging.

When Joan first tells me about this time period, the result from the events sounds obvious: after learning the craft while working together with her grandfather for a couple of winter seasons, she was employed as a logger by the forest company where she stayed on until her retirement. But later during the afternoon, when discussing why so few women ever worked as loggers in the area, Joan burst out:

³⁵ Johansson 1989.

No, Good Lord!, one had to push oneself there by violence, it was more or less as if women could feel tempted – to be sure, it was men’s territory, women were not allowed to press themselves into it!

Joan did not specify from whom the resistance came – the forest company servants, the prospective work-mates, or possibly from her own family. The last-mentioned is probably less likely, while the existence of some resistance from Joan’s fellow workers is work more plausibly. It is known, e.g. from North American forestry, that physically demanding, outdoor work like logging has been perceived as not suitable for women. Notions of masculinity and status have been connected with logging, and loggers may look at the prospect of having a woman work-mate as being degrading for them.³⁶

Anyway, Joan seems to have had success in the end as she was strong-willed, and probably did have enough capacity and skill for the work, since she had already been trained working along with her grandfather. According to her, she went well with the team of workmen:

I was alone in the woods together with the chaps. And it was like this sometimes, that the chaps, they were so used to [me], so I became just a logger, they even talked such ‘men’s talk’ sometimes, and I had to sit and listen to it.

In photos from her youth, Joan has close-cropped hair and male work-clothes. She contently reveals that it happened more than once when strangers visited the working team, they mistook her for a young boy. This can be interpreted as a strategy to conform to the crew by acting “as a man”, or adopting an alternative masculinity. The ‘men’s talk’ Joan had to listen to, accordingly can be understood as her work-mates’ way of testing her capability, or even carry on to show their resistance by their sexual talk.³⁷

However, a youngster working as a logger can be regarded as an apprentice, not yet fully trained for the craft. Gradually, the youngster is expected to attain his skills and reach his mature physical strength.³⁸ Precisely the working capacity, or rather the lack of physical strength, have often been emphasised as a cause for the almost total absence of women among Swedish loggers in this period, when work was performed with hand tools or the first generation of heavy chain saws.³⁹ Logging is a craft encircled with narratives on the extreme backbreaking nature of the work, that only the strongest, most masculine of men would have

³⁶ Enarson 1988.

³⁷ See Enarson 1988 on sexual harassments towards female forest workers in North America.

³⁸ Hjelm 1991, pp. 31–34.

³⁹ In 1952 the Swedish Forest Worker’s Union (SSAF) according to *SIA* had 217 female members. Due to the central salary agreement, women’s salaries then was 82 per cent of men’s salaries. Women paid half membership fee (*SIA* 1956:22). In Karlbom 1968, the total number of members in 1952 is specified to 34 824, of whom none was a woman, but 1 326 paid half fee.

managed to work hard enough to earn well doing piecework.⁴⁰ By contrast, sometimes other readings can be seen. *Men* with less physical strength could manage well in the craft: “physically weak men could compensate and overcome their disadvantage with well-kept tools”.⁴¹

From her prospect as a woman logger, Joan told me about similar experiences:

One has to be fair and say, [that] men have more strength than us, to be sure. He is stronger, of course, he has more physical strength. The Almighty has been a bit unfair on that, to be sure.

– But you managed well, anyway, with forest work?

Oh yes, the cunning of woman passes the wisdom of man. You have to place things to manage [the work] with less physical strength. One puts things all right. Not all men were strong either. There were men in the woods that were weaker than me. They wouldn't admit [that], probably. And they could be rather good workmen, as well.

What Joan has in mind is the working technique, that it was important to use one's head as well, to plan the job. The technique to edge (*ställa*) the tools was of great significance, to rasp and cross-set (i.e. to make the right grading of the saw teeth) the felling saw. I could notice that Joan did not want to vaunt, but she repeated once or twice: “I dare telling you, my way of rasping the tools was passable”. She also compared her capacity with her kindred men's, whose tools she had tried: her uncle from whom she got her tools when she started her work in the woods, and her grandfather. Neither of them actually could edge properly, Joan established. The beginning with her uncle's saw was terrible. “But later on when I learned to rasp, then it came out much better!”

Joan's professional identity as a logger was not about emulating men by physical strength. Instead, she used her ‘female cunning’: good technique and well-kept tools helped her to do the work as well as, if not better than some men did. Traditional indoor tasks like cooking, baking and decorating had never engaged Joan. She did not conceal that she neither liked nor mastered such things. Joan did not embrace the important parts of the heterosexual norm which shaped women's life; neither the female gendered work or the position as a wife. By that she could avoid to perform any indoor ‘woman's chores’, instead she secured her job skills in her male occupation.

The special household organisation of work in Joan's home included that her grandmother Laura was present at home, and could function as “the wife” of both Joan and her grandfather: i.e. Laura maintained the female chores like cooking, cleaning, mending the

⁴⁰ Johansson 1990 (also 1989, 1994).

⁴¹ Johansson 1989, p. 208.

clothes and tending the cattle. Joan's life remained non-standard in more than one sense: As the sole female logger in the known surroundings, and as unmarried and childless. Joan also had some interests with masculine associations: she was among the first who used motor vehicles in her local village, as she drove a motorbike and later had cars. When her grandparents grew old and passed away, Joan continued to manage the croft independently, using a tractor and other kinds of machinery. On the other hand, Joan did never care about the housework. No advanced cooking seems to have taken place in the croft since her grandmother moved out for the nursing home in the seventies. Joan's life then turned into something resembling an old bachelor's way of life in many respects.⁴²

Conclusion

Joan's 'outside view' of things can bring some insights concerning the normative distinctions of hierarchic household positions, work tasks and the provider's respectability, among other things, which cannot be drawn straightforward along the lines of sex, or even gender. Several other processes are active here. Working capacity, manual skills, age, sexuality, and marital status do, altogether with ascribed gendered features, interact in intersections forming the social order of the woodland life. In this order a number of possible identities and positions existed, like "the logger's wife", "the farmer's wife", "the farmer", "the logger", "the spinster", "the crofter" (et al). Such identities were of course often blurred, and the telling of such occasions can be used to discuss normative distinctions like the ones mentioned above, through the use of oral sources exemplified in this paper.

Historically, the forestry's labour supply were fulfilled owing to the household organisation of work which placed men in the outdoor, heavy tasks that required the use of horses. The married men with access to a plot of land also brought a further resource, besides being available as wage labour in low seasons of agriculture. This resource was beneficial to the forest companies, to none or very low costs: the reproductive functions, including some small-scale farming to secure the households' food supply, were dealt with by the loggers' wives and other (female) household members. As incomes from logging and timber transports for long remained low, unsecure and irregular, the smallholders/crofters often preferred to maintain their farming as a kind of insurance up to the mid- or late fifties. By this order, women also were ensured job opportunities, albeit (mostly) unpaid – if they were married.

⁴² Compare Nordin 2007 on the lives of 'old bachelors' in *Norrland*.

For women who chose to stay unmarried the job opportunities were few. There were some positions as cooks at logging camps or with housekeeping, or casual jobs like cleaning. Some women could make a living by sewing garments for neighbours. Many single women left the region for industrial or office work in urban areas from the mid thirties onwards.⁴³ On the other hand, the prospect of being hired for logging was not reality for these women, due to the normative gendered work division. Joan, the informant frequently quoted in this paper, serves as an illuminating exception, as she spent her whole work career as a logger. By taking this stand and also by her choice to stay single, in effect she also conducted to an altering of her family life organisation. By the unusual female working life position she created, she also shaped, or had to subsume, a differing position relating to gender, family and household.

Joan had observed, and told me about, a process of change concerning the gendered work ideals, as a kind of breadwinner/housewife opinion was evolving in the course of the fifties. This new ideal differed from the traditional norms of the area, which included that all people, men and women, should work for their support. The new breadwinner ideal can be connected to the simultaneous rise of the Swedish welfare state, *Folkhemmet*, which included the goal of sufficient wages for married men (also for loggers) to support a family with a housewife with no income of her own. The housewife was expected to do indoor work and childcare, but not to do outdoor work like farming or cattle tending. This conjures an image in stark contrast to the traditional social order of the woodland region discussed in this paper.

Work in progress – please do not cite without permission!

/RF 2010-08-17

Rosemarie Fiebranz
Department of History
Uppsala University

rosemarie.fiebranz@hist.uu.se

⁴³ Hansen 1998, p. 45.

REFERENCES

- Bäcklund, Dan 1988, *I industrisamhällets utkant. Småbrukets omvandling i Lappland 1870–1970*. Umeå. (English summary: *On the outskirts of the industrial society. The transformation of small-scale farming in Lappland during the period 1870–1970.*)
- Enarson, Elaine 1988, "Kvinnliga skogsarbetare och de sexuella produktionsförhållandena", (Forest-working women and the sexual relations of production), in *Kvinnovetenskaplig tidskrift*, nr 2
- Fiebranz, Rosemarie 2002, *Jord, linne eller träkol? Genusordning och hushållsstrategier, Bjuråker 1750–1850*. Uppsala. (English summary: *Land, Linen, or Charcoal? Gender System and Household Strategies, Bjuråker 1750–1850*).
- 2004, "Arbetets platser – om könade förståelser av industrialismens rum: Per-Albintorpen, skogsarbetarbyarna och förändringen av skogsarbetarbygdens genusarbetsdelning", in *Tankar och texter – om industrisamhällets kulturarv i Västernorrland*. Härnösand.
- 2010, "Lagårdar och lönearbete. Modernisering och skillnadsskapande i norrländsk skogsbygd vid 1900-talets mitt", in *Scandia* 76:1.
- Hansen, Kjell 1998, *Välfärdens motsträviga utkant. Lokal praktik och statlig styrning i efterkrigstidens nordsvenska inland* (with an English summary), Lund.
- Hansson, Lars 2006, "Förflutna förväntningar. Erfarenhet av intervjumetod för (re)konstruerande av historiska förväntans- och farhågehorisonter", in L. Hansson & M. Thor (eds.), *Muntlig historia*. Lund.
- Hirdman, Yvonne 2001, *Genus: om det stabila föränderliga former*. Malmö.
- 1987, *The Swedish welfare state and the gender system: a theoretical and empirical sketch*. Uppsala: Maktutredningen.
- Hjelm, Jonny 1991, *Skogsarbetarna och motorsågen. En studie av arbetsliv och teknisk förändring*. Lund. (English summary: *Forest Workers and the Chain Saw. A Study of Working Life and Technological Change*)
- Isacson, Maths 1994, *Vardagens ekonomi: arbete och försörjning i en mellansvensk kommun under 1900-talet*. Hedemora.
- Johansson, Ella 1994, *Skogarnas fria söner. Maskulinitet och modernitet i norrländskt skogsarbete*. Stockholm. (English summary: *Free Sons of the Forest. A Study of Masculinity and Modernity among Loggers in Northern Sweden 1860-1940.*)

- 1989, “Beautiful Men, Fine Women and Good Work People: Gender, and Skill in Northern Sweden, 1850-1950”. *Gender & History*, vol. 1 No. 2.
- 1990, “Free sons of the forest. Storytelling and the construction of identity among Swedish lumberjacks”, in R. Samuel & P. Thompson (eds.), *The Myths We Live By*, London, New York.
- Kaldal, Ingar 2000, “Skog, arbeid och dagligliv i kvinners og menns fortellinger fra Trysil og Nord-Värmland etter 1930” (English summary: ”Gender, Work, and Forest in Narratives from the Changing Daily Life in a Woodland Region of Scandinavia”), in I. Kaldal et. al (eds.), *Skogsliv. Kulturella processer i nordiska skogsbygder*. Lund.
- Karlbom, Torvald 1968, *Skogens arbetare. Till minnet av Svenska skogsarbetarförbundets 50-åriga verksamhet 1918–1968*. Stockholm.
- Lagerqvist, Christopher 2008, *Kvarboende vid vägs ände. Människors försörjning i det inre av södra Norrland under svensk efterkrigstid*. Uppsala. (With an English summary.)
- Little, Jo 2003, “’Riding the Rural Love Train’: Heterosexuality and the Rural Community”, in *Sociologia Ruralis*, vol. 43, no. 4.
- Lundström, Catarina 1999, “Att gå över gränsen. Genusförhållanden på landsbygden i Jämtlands län 1900–1960”, in *Skilda världar. Om kvinnligt och manligt i Jämtland och Härjedalen under 350 år*. Östersund.
- Nilsson, Bo 1999, *Maskulinitet. Representation, ideologi och retorik*. Umeå.
- 2002, ”Kön som förutsättning och resultat. Om frågor och svar vid intervjuer”, in K Lövgren (ed.), *Perspektiv på intervjuer*, Nordiska museet/Samdok (Samdoks e-serie), Stockholm. <http://www.nordiskamuseet.se/Upload/Documents/18.pdf>
- Nordin, Lissa 2007, *Man ska ju vara två. Män och kärlekslängtan i norrländsk glesbygd*. Stockholm. (With an English summary.)
- Osterud, Nancy Grey 1991, *Bonds of Community. The Lives of Farm Women in Nineteenth-Century New York*. Ithaca, London.
- Rannikko, Pertti 1995, ”Restructuring of Forestry and Forest Villages in Eastern Finland”, in L. Granberg & J. Nikola (eds.), *The Peasant State*, Rovaniemi.
- Skogsindustriarbetaren (SIA)* 1956:15, “Lokaliseringpolitik i teori och praktik: Klyftan i Kall” (by Olle Rytterbrandt).
- 1956:22, ”60 000 plantor i Mullebo” (by Karin Fredriksson).

Vallström, Maria 2008, "Fathers little helper – the construction and contradiction of gender in a lumberjack village" (paper presented at the conference "Labouring Feminism...", Stockholm, August 2008).