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To cite this article: Lars Östlund , Alexander Öbom , Amanda Löfdahl & Anna-Maria Rautio (2020) Women in forestry in the early twentieth century – new opportunities for young women to work and gain their freedom in a traditional agrarian society, *Scandinavian Journal of Forest Research*, 35:7, 403-416, DOI: [10.1080/02827581.2020.1808054](https://doi.org/10.1080/02827581.2020.1808054)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02827581.2020.1808054>



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## Women in forestry in the early twentieth century – new opportunities for young women to work and gain their freedom in a traditional agrarian society

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### ABSTRACT

Logging and forestry have traditionally been seen as a purely masculine sphere. The aim of this study is to analyze women's introduction into and situations in the forestry sector in twentieth century northern Sweden. We interviewed 30 women who worked as cooks between the 1930s and the 1960s, and examined written sources. We found that driving forces behind the emergence of a system involving forestry cooks included state investigations, rationalization of the forest sector, the effects of WW2, and overall modernization of society. Our informants were unmarried and young when they started working, and their introductions to the job were characterized by encouragement and pressure in their surroundings. They had prior knowledge of cooking, but few underwent formal training. They were, in most cases, hired by the forest workers, and portray the camps as egalitarian social systems. It is clear that the Swedish system was rather unusual internationally, and these women had a definite impact on modernizing a workspace far from cities and industries. For the women, the job entailed hardships, but also a sense of freedom. Conceivably, a seed of women's liberation in twentieth century Sweden was planted by these thousands of young women working in the northern forests.

### ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 21 August 2019  
Accepted 5 August 2020

### KEYWORDS

Cooks; logging; forest history; gender; boreal forest

### Introduction

The nineteenth century was a dramatic period in the forest history of northern Sweden. Agricultural colonization and establishment of new settlements in the boreal coniferous forest, which had already started in the late eighteenth century, was in full swing and reaching the most remote areas. Traditional activities such as low intensity pastoralism practiced by farmers and Sami reindeer herders were successively either being replaced, displaced or diminished in importance by a new economy. The forestry resources thus successively became a more important source of income for the rural population through selling processed potash ( $K_2CO_3$ ), tar derived from pines, and saw-timber logs from privately owned forestland (Björklund 1984; Östlund et al. 1997). In addition, farmers (and especially younger and middle-aged men) had the opportunity to work as loggers, horsemen and log-drivers in the rivers, during the winter and in the spring when farms needed less attention (Lundgren 1984). This new economic development changed northern Swedish society fundamentally both economically and socially.

Logging and forestry work have traditionally been seen as a purely masculine sphere, both in Scandinavia and in other areas where large scale logging of hitherto unexploited forest resources took place in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (cf. Reiterä 2012). The timber-frontier, which swept across northern Europe and North America in the second

half of the nineteenth century, created a huge demand for forest workers in different capacities; they were either locally recruited or migrant workers. Therefore, men working in the forest during this time created a narrative of forest work being work done by men.

However, women did have different and important roles in forestry in the Nordic countries during this time; they worked in silviculture, they maintained farms while men worked in the forest, and they were cooks in forest camps (Krogstad 2003; Löfdahl 2018; Reiterä 2012). Their stories have, for the most part, been ignored or marginalized. Research focused specifically on forestry cooks in northern Sweden is to our knowledge virtually nonexistent, with the exception of a few student essays. Women, therefore, have had no place in the traditional narrative of forestry work.

This study expands our knowledge about women working as forestry cooks during the 1930s to the 1960s in northern Sweden. Based on in-depth interviews with 30 women aged 80–104 years, we present these women's personal and first-hand experiences of the world of the remote logging sites in the forest. We combine these interviews with unique contemporary records detailing the work situation for these women. The overall aim of the project has been to investigate the context of the logging frontier and forestry work in the early nineteenth century in northern Sweden, and to examine how opportunities developed for young women to

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 Supplemental data for this article can be accessed <https://doi.org/10.1080/02827581.2020.1808054>

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take part in this process. As this research is intended to offer a first insight into this research field, our focus is general, highlighting various aspects of the situation around these women in order to make them and their work more visible. In accordance with this intention, we aim to answer the following questions:

- a) How and when were women included in forestry work and as cooks in logging camps? And how and when did this system end?
- b) In a broader perspective, what driving factors enabled the introduction of women into forestry work, foremost as cooks in logging camps?
- c) Who became a cook and what was the age and background of a female cook in the logging camp?
- d) What were the main social challenges for the female cooks in an otherwise all-male workplace?

The structure of the paper is based on these themes and we have therefore merged the results and the discussion. Based on this analysis we also want to broaden our scope and discuss the development of the niche for women in forestry in relation to other countries with similar settings (i.e. timber-frontier development in rural areas). Further, we raise questions about the importance of the opportunity to work outside the home/household for the women themselves and the consequences of this.

### Previous studies and a theoretical framework

The situations faced by young women who worked as forestry cooks in northern Sweden have previously been highlighted in a master-level essay by Ojaniemi (1997), a bachelor-level essay by Hultmar (2002) and, more recently, in a master essay by Löfdahl (2018). These essays have contributed to improve our understanding of forestry cooks' situations and they constitute virtually the only research devoted specifically to this topic in northern Sweden. While they are student essays, they do provide an important background also for this study and therefore we refer to these works extensively in the results section – when our findings converge or diverge with theirs – but we also recognize, however, that this small collection constitutes a highly limited body of research. This perception can be substantiated further if we look at the material on which this previous research is based. Ojaniemi (1997) interviewed nine former cooks face to face, and four via telephone, and the author herself recognizes the phone interviews as less useful (1997). Hultmar's (2002) respondents were even fewer; five former forestry cooks and four male forestry workers, while Löfdahl's (2018) interview material is more extensive; 14 former cooks. These three essays have a general focus on the immediate situation for the cooks, and therefore there is a need for a more extensive analysis with a broader focus. Our findings could possibly raise new questions and illustrate gaps to be filled by more specifically oriented future studies.

It is also very important to contrast these women and their work-situation to the social and physical environment in which they lived and worked. Ella Johansson (1989, 1994)

and Vallström (2010) have described the situation in and around the forest camps in northern Sweden. Although much of their focus lies on male forest workers, they do briefly highlight the situations for women, and this literature has also been useful to contextualize the cooks' roles and positions. Their descriptions of how men as well as surrounding society often perceived women's work also play important roles for this study. They highlight how women's work was generally conceived of as something right in between "real" work – such as the work conducted by men – and leisure time. The household work typically associated with women was difficult to categorize as one or the other, and therefore also difficult to position within the concept of forestry work at large.

Another important aspect is to compare the situation in northern Sweden to other countries where intensive logging of remote forests took place at the same time. Here, it has been relevant to refer to sources describing how cooking and forestry camps were organized in neighboring countries (Hovensjö 1975; Krogstad 2003; Løchen 1958/1960; Reiterä 2012), where the systems were arranged in ways similar to that in Sweden, and in North America (Brashler 1991; Conlin 1979; Neary 1985; Parker 2015; Soucoup 2011; Walls and Zimpel 2002) where the literature indicates that camps were generally larger and that male cooks were more common.

Based on these descriptions, we can assume that there was some similarity to the Swedish case also when it comes to how women and their work was viewed in neighboring countries. Here, the general question of the "invisibility" of women in many professional situations in the twentieth century is highly relevant. Work in forests is almost exclusively associated with men. While focusing on the contemporary forestry-related situation in a broad set of societies across the world, Arora-Jonsson et al. (2019), have highlighted a pattern which is nonetheless highly relevant in the context of early twentieth century forestry in northern Sweden as well. They describe how forest work not directly related to timber, and most often performed by women, is generally not recognized as work (2019). As the authors are pointing out, "women's care work, often invisible, underpins the recognized and overtly valued commercial work, widely considered as men's work" (Arora-Jonsson et al. 2019, p. 157). The cooks work was indispensable for the new forestry system which was built up around collective households, and it enabled the male forest workers to focus on other tasks. So while the more or less informal and often unpaid tasks carried out by women – cooking food, maintaining a decent indoors environment etc. – have tremendous importance for forestry, it is nevertheless staying under the radar, without being perceived as part of it (2019). As arrangements were similar in Norway and Finland, it is possible that this pattern holds true for those countries as well.

This can be connected to the common perception in mid-twentieth century Sweden that the role of the cook was to improve the standard of the forest camp – physically and morally – with her unpaid work (Vallström 2010), and, as Johansson (1989) has pointed out, it was common among male forest workers to perceive women's work as very different from men's. While it was easy to define men's

work, and to conceptually separate their working time from their leisure time – those two categories did not really exist for women, who were constantly working, more or less intensely, according to this view (Johansson 1989).

Arguably, all the informal tasks which women were expected to do – tasks difficult for men and for society at large to categorize as either work or leisure time – contributed to making the role of women relatively invisible in the narrative of forest work; a type of job often imagined as very concrete and clearly physical. And if, as Vallström mentions, the few women who actually were loggers were regarded not as women by their surroundings, but simply as loggers – without referral to any gender – or sometimes even perceived as men (2010), women did simply not fit in easily in common imaginations about forestry. Even though they were there, they were not “seen”, and perhaps that is also a reason they were hardly remembered.

It is also conceivable that the sense of freedom reportedly experienced by male forest workers (Johansson 1994) to some extent were enabled by the fact that women did relieve them of certain types of duties. Although this entails obvious downsides for the women, it does not necessarily imply that all women felt exploited, however, and as we demonstrate in this article, the work situations in which these women found themselves offered positive sides for several of the women too. In her doctoral thesis, Arora-Jonsson (2005) focused on how women have organized themselves with specific regard to forestry and forest management in the 1990s–2000s. She highlights that “a focus on formal institutions tends to make invisible the role of those whose voices are not easily heard within them, especially those of women” (2005, p. 38). This statement indicates that a focus on more informal institutions and work situations, such as those around the cooks, could make women’s contribution visible, and their voices heard. Arora-Jonsson have described that it is essential to not only highlight women’s invisibility but also how women actually describe needs and issues (2005). In line with this, we argue that informal work situations – to some extent at least – actually offered the cooks space for freedom to decide things for themselves.

## Material and methods

### *Setting and history for the logging in northern Scandinavia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries*

At the beginning of the nineteenth century most of northern Sweden, as well as northern Finland and northern Russia, had large areas with unlogged old coniferous forest (Linder and Östlund 1998; Östlund et al. 1997). This was in stark contrast to the industrialized parts of Western Europe where forest resources had been used and often depleted in earlier centuries. This created a timber- or logging-frontier in the nineteenth century affecting northern Europe and where the accumulated forest resources were utilized for the first time (Björklund 1984; Josefsson and Östlund 2011). In turn, this led to a fundamental transition of the northern Swedish economy. The previous reliance on small scale farming,

reindeer herding by the indigenous Sami people in the interior northern parts, and local pre-industrial enterprises such as iron-works was complemented by large-scale commercial logging for export of sawn products (Söderlund 1951). The logging frontier swept over and encompassed almost all the forestland in the north, saw the establishment of a large number of sawmills along the coast, generated income for forest owners and created an immediate need for forest workers (Josefsson and Östlund 2011). The agricultural colonization preceding, but also overlapping, the development of the logging frontier in time resulted in a sparse network of new frontier settlements in the forested interior parts of northern Sweden (Uhnбом 1942). This development was a very important pre-requisite for the logging of the forest since the establishment of a network of small villages and settlements in the interior forest provided a workforce for the logging of timber (Bäcklund 1988; Lundgren 1984). More than 200,000 workers were engaged in the developing forestry sector at the turn of the century around 1900, although this was an area of Sweden with very low population density (Johansson 1994). Furthermore, the farmers were less occupied with agricultural activities during the winter when the logging took place, thus providing a welcome income. In connection with logging, floating of timber down the rivers also provided a source of income for farmers (Törnlund and Östlund 2006).

The logging of the forest transformed at the turn of the century when much of the old forest had been cut at least once. Increasing demand for pulpwood and acceptance of smaller trees by the sawmills led to successive waves of logging in the forest (Josefsson and Östlund 2011). This created forests with low densities and which, in turn, initiated worries for the long-term sustainability of the timber industry (Arpi 1959). A further consequence was the introduction of new, “modern”, forest management methods, such as active regeneration, thinning of younger stands and ditching to drain wet areas in the forest (Östlund et al. 1997). These new methods also led to an increasing need for people working in the forest on tasks other than logging.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, logging camps were primitive and organized in a variety of ways according to local traditions (Wallner 1938). The standard of the cabins was often rather poor and the loggers cooked for themselves, with limited variety in the diet (Figure 1). At the beginning of the twentieth century “modern” ideas began to influence the rural forestry work (Johansson 1994; SOU 1933:38). This led, among many other things, to demands for improved living conditions and health among the forest workers when they were staying in the primitive logging cabins for extended periods in the winter (Löfdahl 2018).

### *Materials and methods used in the study*

This study is primarily based on semi-structured qualitative interviews with elderly women who worked as cooks in logging camps in northern Sweden when they were young. 30 former forestry cooks were interviewed during the project. The interviews were held in 2016, 2017 and 2018, and the women were born between the years 1910 and



**Figure 1.** Older type of logging cabin with fireplace in the middle and individual coffee-pots on the fire. Photograph from the Forestry Museum in Lycksele (FML).

1940. The time span in which these interviewees were active as cooks extends from 1936, when the first one started her work, to 1967, when the last informant worked her final season, although the majority of our informants were active in the 1950s, after the heyday of forest cooks (the 1940s). Geographically, they were working in the northern counties of Västerbotten, Norrbotten, Västernorrland and Jämtland. Selecting the women to interview was undertaken with the assistance of contacts at the forestry museum at Lycksele in Västerbotten. Women either contacted the museum in order to supply material or were contacted by the museum because the staff had knowledge of their previous work. After identifying the first former forestry cooks, we were able to find others through these initial contacts by the “snow-balling” effect often used in this type of study (Trost 2010). This method led us to more than 35 former cooks, of whom we were eventually able to interview 30. Prior to the interviews we produced a template with questions (see Appendix 1). The questions were open and although we followed this template in each interview, we allowed deviations if specific information was offered (Ryen 2004). All the interviews were recorded and transcribed. The information from each interview was then divided into themes which were then used for the analysis and compilation of results. In order to facilitate the analysis of the interviews we have, in the text here, classified the answers by using words in the following manner:

0–25% (1–7 informants) = *a couple*

26–50% (8–15 informants) = *some/a few*

51–75% (16–22 informants) = *several/many*

76–99% (23–29 informants) = *most*

100% (30 informants) = *all/everyone*

All quotes in the text are numbered, and the original quotes – in Swedish – can be found in Appendix 2. Within quotes, information within square brackets [...] constitutes information added by the authors.

To complement the information from the interviews we have also used primary archival material in the form of notes, cookbooks, instructions, course schedules and photographs, kept at the archive at the forest museum in Lycksele (listed under unpublished material in the reference list). We have also undertaken systematic analysis of secondary historical source material. The most important have been articles in the Swedish journals “Skogen” (“The Forest”) and “Skogsindustriarbetaren” (“The forest industry worker”), which reported on professional forest-related issues during the studied period. A number of articles deal with living conditions in logging camps, the introduction of female cooks, loggers’ health and welfare among other related things. Furthermore, we have also used several national public reports (Sw. Statens Offentliga Utredningar; SOU), which were directed towards health and living conditions for the forest workers in the northern parts of the country. These primary and secondary sources have been compiled and then used to interpret and contextualize the transcribed interviews.

## Results and discussion

### *Women as cooks in the logging camps – the introduction of a new system for improving forestry work in the early twentieth century*

The informants started working as cooks in logging camps between the years 1936 and 1957, in most cases after being asked or encouraged by family members, relatives, villagers, or representatives of forest camps right before the start of the logging season. One former cook explains: “Kronojägaren

[a state forester] in Örträsk, who was responsible for the logging, he just came to our home and asked whether I could become a cook" (1). Informal verbal contacts were also the most common path into the job for 13 former cooks interviewed in a previous study (Ojaniemi 1997), in which the author concluded that more formalized forms of recruitment, through newspapers for example, played an insignificant role (Löfdahl 2018; Ojaniemi 1997). Indeed, of our interviewees, only one said that she got the job by applying for it herself, after she had seen an announcement in a local newspaper, and none can recall any job interviews or written contracts. This pattern of informality is fairly consistent with that described by Arora-Jonsson et al. (2019) regarding forestry-related work performed by women, and a lack of written records could possibly have contributed to the relative invisibility of these women in contrast to registered male workers.

Hultmar (2002) portrays the job of an assistant cook (Sw. hjälpkocka) as a common precursor to work as an independent cook, a pattern not supported by our material, as only one of our informants was an assistant cook, and she did not continue as an independent cook. Johansson (1994) describes another path into the job, common in the early days of forestry cooks. Newly married couples with no home could be temporarily accommodated in forest camps, and as the women were then expected to prepare food for all, they apparently became some of the first cooks (1994). But our informants were not amongst the very first cooks (probably, few of them are still alive) and none of them got the job this way either.

Two interviewees stated that they were hired by a forest company. Most others say they were hired jointly by the forest workers in the camp. One interviewee said she was hired by the camp's horse driver, and two of them could not recall who hired them. A few interviewees stated that they had family members or relatives who worked as loggers or horse drivers in the first camp where they were employed as cooks, and of these, all indicated that the presence of these family members/relatives was a contributing factor to why they started working as cooks. One interviewee recalls: "My dad and my brothers were there [in the forest camp], so I guess it was them who took me there, and recruited me" (2). This pattern was also found by Ojaniemi (1997). Several of the interviewees said that at the time they thought the salary was relatively good, but often because they were not used to having any salary at all; "I don't remember the cook's salary, but I do remember that I thought I was rich, because I had never had any money. But in fact it was not that much" (3). Those who had been maids described the cook's job as more profitable though, something also highlighted by Ojaniemi (1997), which could explain why the job was preferred above working as a maid, one of the few other jobs available (Lundmark 1995). Most interviewees stated that their parents had a positive attitude to the job, and in some cases, it was even the parents who promised the forest workers they would send them their daughter; "She [the informants mother] did it without even asking me first, but I thought of it as a sign she believed in me and my capabilities" (4). Another cook, who strongly disliked the job,

went home after one week in the camp, with the plan not to return; "I took all my things in order to move back" (5). But when she got home, her mother immediately forced her to return to the forest camp. "If I hadn't been able to handle it, they would probably have felt ashamed in the village" (6). None of the informants said they had parents who were directly negative about the job, something which resonates with the findings of Ojaniemi, who also points out that the introduction into this job was often not characterized by individual initiatives, but rather by encouragement and pressure from the surroundings (1997). To deny that these women had any individual motivation is misleading, however, and those who were allowed to make the final choice themselves in many cases say they accepted the job offering because they wanted to try something new or because there were few alternative jobs available.

Thirteen of the respondents worked as cooks for only a single season, seven of them worked for two or three seasons, and ten of the informants worked for four or more seasons, so cooking careers varied greatly in length (see also Ojaniemi 1997). The respondents worked their last seasons between the years 1942 and 1967. For some, marriage was the reason for quitting, and they explained that the job was difficult to combine with having your own household and family (see also Ojaniemi 1997), but it is worth pointing out that this did not always lead to an immediate end to a cooking career. A few informants worked one more season after they had married, and one of Hultmar's respondents brought virtually the whole household to the forest camp for several seasons, finally having not only her husband, but two children and a cow there (Hultmar 2002), so there are exceptions.

Of our respondents, some stated they stopped because they found other jobs, or because they simply did not like the cooking job. In addition, a few said they stopped because they did not get any more requests, something which further highlights the situation that few took the job on their own initiative. A few respondents also added that there were no more forest camps and cooking jobs available in their vicinity "It seems no one needed a cook" (7), as it became more and more common that forest workers returned to their homes after every workday. Searching for a cooking job further afield may not have been attractive enough; "I don't think I was interested in that either" (8). The end of the period when female cooks were employed is characterized by a general lack of workers within the forestry sector. There were discussions within the forestry sector suggesting that "an even better living-standard" could be the solution to attracting more people to work in this sector (SOU 1949:19). This led in two directions, one was to improve cabins, provide better food and hire more cooks, but the other one was to transport loggers from their homes to their workplaces in the forest on a daily basis. In general, the system of logging cabins in remote forests started to disappear in the 1960s and this was primarily due to the building of roads in the interior of northern Sweden (Rautio and Östlund 2012).

After permanently quitting as cooks, our interviewees experienced very different life trajectories. While some of

them married and became housewives in their own homes, others, whether they married or not, started working with other jobs – in stores, in school canteens, in retirement homes, or with home care, for example. One woman found a job in Africa and another one became a local politician. Many of them clearly state that they developed as individuals thanks to being forestry cooks.

### *The societal driving factors behind the introduction of female cooks in logging camps*

During the 1920s and the 1950s shared households and female cooks became common practice in the logging-camps out in the forest (Göransson 1940; Hultmar 2002; Löfdahl 2018; Ojaniemi 1997). Once this system came into being, it expanded quickly and an increasing number of women entered the forest sector. They were usually engaged and paid by the forest workers themselves, which the women included in this study also state; this means that they cannot be found in taxation records etc. However, it has been estimated that about 4000 women were working as cooks during a normal winter, sustaining around 50,000 forest workers in northern Sweden (Anon 1942). During the peak-period in the winter of 1942–1943, as many as 6000 women were active as cooks in the forest. Altogether these numbers show that the system of female cooks grew rapidly and was extensively practiced. It is therefore interesting to try and understand why and how this system emerged and developed. We have found four major driving forces: (1) state investigations about the living standards and health status of the forest workers led to new legislation; (2) the Swedish forest sector underwent an overall rationalization process; (3) the effects of WW2, such as an increased demand for firewood and food-rationing; and (4) the overall development and modernization of society at the time.

In the early 1900s several provincial physicians raised concerns about the poor living conditions of the forest workers (Ager 2011; Anon 1929). This became the starting point for the investigation “The living- and working conditions of the forest workers in Värmland, Dalarna and Norrland” initiated by the Swedish Social Directorate (*Sv. Socialstyrelsen*). This detailed investigation was based on both poll-inquiries with workers, state officials and authorities as well as field-visits to 173 logging sites. The investigation presented detailed accounts of type of accommodation for forest workers in the different regions (Anon 1917). In summary, the situation was considered really bad, with cold, small and filthy logging camps. Further, the investigation stressed the profound changes in the economic, social and cultural lives of the small-farmers in northern Sweden as a result of the dramatic expansion of the Swedish wood industry. The investigation led to the first law aiming to control and improve the living-standard of the forest workers in 1919 (Wallner 1920). The law stipulated that the timber owners were responsible for providing the forest workers and horses with housing of a certain standard. The size of the logging cabins should provide every worker with at least 5 cubic meters of air and the headroom should be at least 2 meters (i.e. in places not

intended for sleeping) (Wallner 1920). The county board administration officials became responsible for ensuring that this new legislation was followed and to educate timber owners and forest workers in improving housing and overall hygiene.

Although overall living conditions were improved thanks to the new legislation, historical photographs and narratives from this time depict a very basic standard of living (Tigerstedt 1900). The fire-place was usually cluttered with frying-pans and coffeepots (Figure 1). Because of the wage-system, where workers were always paid on a piecework basis (i.e. for each item of saw-timber or pulp-wood), each logger or horse-driver was more or less functioning as an individual entrepreneur. This also influenced the household organization in the logging camps. The valuable American pork which was used, together with flour to produce a classic “pancake” (Sw. kolbulle) and the coffee were paid for and prepared individually. According to Bellander (1924):

the from filth marbled tables are filled with plates and coffee cups, which have not been in contact with dishwater since they left the shelves of the stores... the constantly unmade bunks show the same mess. Sheepskins, blankets, clothes of different levels of intimacy and colors share space with rucksacks, shoes, tobacco- and sugar-packages and a lot of other things. What the floor looks like you will only have to imagine. You can hardly see it! In this state, thousands of Swedish forest workers spend approximately one third of their life and undertake some of their most important functions; eating and resting. Their work is hard and strenuous and, for our country, of immeasurable importance

Bellander (1924) compares the poor standard of most logging camps with that of a cabin in Dalarna where the workers had taken their own initiative to establish a collective household and had hired two women to plan and cook four meals a day.

The interior of the hut was filled with daylight in all corners, thanks to three big windows. I immediately understood that there were women here. Well swept floors, clean windows, white-polished tables with shining stacks of plates, shining pots on the fire-place and made beds. This is seldom the result of male work. This was a place to enjoy good food and delightful rest.

As described previously, our informants were often asked by others to join the forest camps to become cooks, which makes the question regarding why women, rather than men, took on this type of job relevant to examine on the level of society at large. Our focus has not been to investigate the motivations of those who found and recruited these young women, but it can be assumed, based on written sources, that there existed a general perception in society that women were better organizers, more used to housework, more economical, and cheaper – because of lower salaries – than men (SOU 1933:38; Vallström 2010). The system were therefore dependent upon these young women.

According to Bellander (1924), the collective household had many advantages. He specifically points to the following four: (1) diet: as more varied and wholesome food could be cooked; (2) hygiene: as clean clothes and a clean camp would prevent diseases from spreading; (3) morals: as “rude behavior generally is suppressed in the presence of women”; and finally (4) economic: as his calculations showed that each man would



**Figure 2.** Course for young female cooks led by the teacher Dagny Hedfors. Photograph from the Forestry Museum in Lycksele (FML). Archive # 2, folder Silvanum.

save between 0.30 and 0.50 Swedish crowns a day in camps with collective cooking. This was mainly due to the economies of scale when buying food in bulk.

Only two years later, in 1926, a new article in the journal “Skogen” stated that female cooks were quite common at the logging sites in upper Dalarna (Getee 1926), and the much improved living standards were attributed to both the law of 1919 as well as the hiring of these women. The female cooks also saw to it that wooden stoves were installed next to the open large fire-place in the middle of the cabin, further improving the living standard in these huts.

In 1937 a new law on “living conditions during forestry work” (Sw. Skogshärbärgeslag) was adopted. Basically it was similar to the earlier version, but now also included workers on railroads, road- and waterway constructions. Another important expansion of the law stated that cabins intended for 10 people or more, should be arranged so that collective cooking could be facilitated (Anon 1937a).

The housing and living standards out on the logging sites improved over time (Figure 3). This was the result of a combination of factors, such as the investigations leading to new legislation as well as the intensive information campaigns about collective cooking by the official labor inspectors (Sw: Yrkesinspektionen) (Anon 1942). The information campaigns included producing films and hand-books which were circulated at the logging sites in the forest (Handbook for cooks, FML). These handbooks came in many different editions containing a lot of information including everything from how to clean the cabins, creating a home-like atmosphere, butchering carcasses, recipes, weekly menus for calculations of food consumption and much more. Special courses for female cooks were even arranged (Figure 2), where they learnt how to cook nutritious food at a low

cost using practical recipes (Anon 1935, 1937b, 1943; Original food recipes for cooks in logging camps, FML, Wallner 1934a, 1934b).

The National fuel commission (Sw. Statens bränslekommission) was formed during the Second World War, with the goal



**Figure 3.** Modern logging cabin and a female cook standing by the wood-stove. Photograph from the Forestry Museum in Lycksele (FML).

of securing the availability of firewood (including wood used for producing gas to fuel cars and trucks) during these years. The regulated cutting of firewood led to even more logging camps in the forests and an even larger need for female cooks.

The Second World War also affected the forest work more indirectly as food rationing put severe restrictions on the amounts and type of food that could be purchased. The official labor inspection organization started to offer courses for female cooks in order to teach them how to cook nutritious, delicious and varied food despite the lack of many staple food items. Between the years 1940 and 1944, 207 courses attended by a total of 2098 women were held and, in addition, 2490 cook consultants visited logging sites in the forest between the years 1942 and 1944 (Anon 1945). The courses also included information about how to cut large pieces of meat, how to render first aid and overall order and tidiness in logging cabins ([Handbook for cooks](#), FML; [Original food recipes for cooks in logging camps](#), FML).

The improvement in the conditions in the logging cabins were clearly linked to other changes in the forest work in the post-war period. Rationalization of work, new logging techniques and new forestry methods were introduced successively (Ager 2011; Hjelm 1991; Lundmark et al. 2013), driven primarily by a need to reduce costs in the very labor-intensive forestry sector. One important part of this was to make the work more appealing since many people left the rural areas at this time and moved to towns and cities. The depopulation of northern Sweden had started and the commercial forest companies had to make the work more attractive in order to retain forest workers. It was further argued that good living standards out in the forest could perhaps also stop the work-force from leaving the inland forest villages for industrial work by the coast, a trend which had already started in the mid-1940s (SOU 1949:19).

Finally we conclude that each of these four driving forces comprised smaller components and also that there was interplay between them. Sometimes it is difficult to distinguish between the causes and effects, for example with the better housing standards. It has sometimes been argued that better housing enabled women to enter forest work, whilst in other cases it has been suggested that women were responsible for this improvement.

### ***The female cooks – who were they and what was their background?***

All but one of our interviewees were unmarried, childless, and between 13 and 25 years old when they started working as cooks in logging camps; one interviewee had a one-year old daughter which she brought to the camp when she started working. They were all between 14 and 35 years old when they left his type of work. This roughly resembles the characteristics of informants in other studies (Hultmar 2002; Ojaniemi 1997). However, we also found another exception, where a mother became a forest cook, leaving her two teenage daughters at home to take care of the farm. In this particular case, the mother was unable to milk the cows due

to having one finger amputated as a result of severe frostbite ([Letter correspondence with a female cook](#), FML).

In our study, two of the women had given birth to children before they stopped working, and both of them took their children to the forest camp for at least one season. Most of the former cooks were living with their parents when they took the job, except one woman, who was living with her siblings alone, since both of their parents had died. Several cooks were from relatively large families with five or more siblings. Most respondents had grown up in villages situated fairly close to the forest camps where they worked, but a couple traveled a long distance – more than 100 km – from their homes to become cooks, something which resembles the situation for Ojaniemi's informants: all but two of them worked as cooks near their home villages (1997). Many of our interviewees had been working in forest plantations prior to becoming cooks, while some had worked as maids (see also Ojaniemi 1997). A couple of them had picked berries or cones to sell. Besides those jobs, the interviewees had no previous work experience.

Many interviewees were used to preparing food before they started working as cooks, since they had been cooking food in their own homes on a regular basis; "When I grew up you assisted your parents much more compared to what today's youth are doing, or compared to what my own daughters have done too" (9) (see also Ojaniemi 1997). However, most interviewees had not taken any formal cooking courses except for a simple course for a few weeks in school or studies at agricultural schools (Sw. jordbruk- och lanthushållsskolor), where cooking was part of the syllabus. Vallström (2010) has used the example of formal courses directed specifically toward new forest cooks to highlight the fact that ideologies of modernity and professionalization affected knowledge which had previously been informally transferred from mother to daughter (Vallström 2010). Such professionalization might not have extended far though. Our interviewees were active relatively late in the era of forest cooks and, nevertheless, only one of them – the one who had applied for the job herself – had taken such a course, as did only one of Ojaniemi's informants (1997), and none of Hultmar's (2002). For our interviewee, this course lasted a few weeks at the beginning of the season, it was practically oriented, and the informant acted as a cook for forest workers who were cutting trees, like in any real camp. "There you learnt quite a lot of things, which was very good" (10).

Several other interviewees indicated that they did not know much about the situation they would face in the camp prior to their arrival in it: "I had no idea whatsoever what it was about" (11). They were aware they would cook food, and since they knew how to cook, they just assumed it would work out. Many informants also said that they at least knew some things about forest work, since they had family members who were, or had been, forest workers. A few even had a family member – a mother or a sister – who had been a cook in a forest camp, and in those cases, the interviewees often had more knowledge about the situations they would face. A few informants also mentioned that one needed to be physically strong in order to become a cook; "We were vigorous and stable women. You couldn't be

weak, but you had to have a certain dimension and level of strength." (12).

### *What were the main social challenges for the female cooks in an all-male workplace?*

There were strict gender roles in the forest camps. The image which many of Johansson's (1994) male forest worker informants had of women, as people who were constantly working, can also be found in the stories told by female cooks themselves. Several of them said that they never sat down at the same table to eat food with the men after serving them. According to a few interviewees, that would have been against the norm. "I was too shy, and it was not customary either" (13) and it would have prevented them from maintaining their image as constant workers (Johansson 1989). This is also reflected in their perceptions of their work-hours; many cannot really specify them nor recall any shift from free time to working time, but rather, that they worked all their waking hours – from around 5 or 6 in the morning to around 10 at night. Their day was characterized by periods of less intense and more intense work (see also Johansson 1989, and compare Arora-Jonsson et al. 2019). Some women said they might have had a few hours of less intense work in the middle of the day, which would leave time for knitting, for example, while the food was on the stove. But most of their waking hours were apparently spent working: cooking, cleaning and doing the dishes. "It is definitely the toughest job I have ever had" (14), one interviewee clarifies. Despite having longer workdays than the men, most of our interviewees paint a picture of the forest camps as egalitarian social systems, guided by unwritten rules, where orders were seldom given in any direction (see also Johansson 1994; Ojaniemi 1997; Vallström 2010). They portray a warm social climate in the camps; "It was like a family. No mobbing, like it can be nowadays. Never" (15), with little or no coarse language (see also Lundmark 1995; Ojaniemi 1997) and people were generally respected for their specific knowledge and for the work they performed, without bragging about it (see also Hultmar 2002; Johansson 1989; *Notes from interviews with cooks*, FML; Vallström 2010). The stories of our interviewees largely resonate with an argument made by Johansson (1989, 1994), that hierarchies which affected life in the villages were not brought to the forest camps, but that hard work on the spot and acquired status led to increased respect for certain individuals – attitudes arguably related to both traditional norms and "modern" individualism – even if it did not really create hierarchies (Johansson 1989, 1994). "No one was higher up than anyone else" (16), one informant recalls, and even if the work was tough, it is also clear that it in many cases was experienced as a job with lots of freedom connected to it, especially during daytime when the men were away;

It was free, I could do what I wanted when they were not there, and I could have a rest when they went to the forest. And I had to clean and wash up and so on too, of course. (17)

While Hultmar (2002) portrays the cook as inferior in relation to the so-called "kockfar" or "kockbas" – a man, also living in

the camp, who was to some extent responsible for the cook's situation – our interviewees' descriptions do not fully correspond to this. Several women described the so-called kockbas as someone who helped them, and as someone who could rebuke young forest workers for careless behavior, but in contrast to the portrayal in Hultmar's study (2002) none described him as a manager, or a superior. The only informant who said she was given orders by anyone was the woman who worked as an assistant cook, where the main cook used to tell her what to do, something the assistant was comfortable with, though: "I didn't feel like a slave" (18).

At the time, visitors from other countries claim to have been surprised that young women were working among men in this type of context without problems (Meurice 1941). But by portraying many men as gentle or, in a few cases, even shy, some informants go against common stereotypes of loggers as masculine macho-types (see also Johansson 1994). When asked, and in some cases even before being asked, all of our informants said the forest workers were nice to the cook, and that there were no cases of sexual harassment. "The men were decent. You never had to be afraid. Nowadays a woman would not dare to stay around with fifteen, twenty men, because the men have become crazy" (19). One can, of course, not be entirely sure about the accuracy of such narratives, since, sexual harassment in the past could very well be something that the respondents did not want to talk about with a stranger. Hultmar (2002), for example, mentions that her informants initially told her there were no cases of sexual harassment, but that later in the conversation they acknowledged some rare occurrences (Hultmar 2002).

Even in our case, the women did, later during the interviews, mention social challenges, some of which would be classified as sexual harassment by contemporary standards, even if these women did not see it that way. A couple of them said they got tired of childish behavior, loud voices, foul-mouthed and flirty characters among the men. Various types of jokes were apparently common in many camps, especially among younger men, but at times the cook was included. Lots of these jokes were related to "kockburen" ("the cooks cage") – the small space where the cook slept. Although interviews indicate that it was a female sphere which men almost never entered, some men tried to violate the boundaries of it, for example by making peepholes in the wooden barrier, or by throwing clothes or socks over it. Similar behavior, which at least the men involved would consider jokes, has been described in other studies as well (see for example Hultmar 2002). In the cases of our interviewees, many women stated that they took this behavior as a joke, pointing out that they did not feel offended. In some cases, cooks even responded with their own jokes. When one woman had her bed sheets stitched together, she retaliated by putting pigs' feet in some men's beds (see also Hultmar 2002). Stories of love or sex in the cook's bed (see Ojaniemi 1997) are not present in our material.

Although none of the interviewees said they were afraid of the men living in the camp, there is one exceptional case where one older man used to watch the cook as she changed clothes. This cook, who felt exposed and uncomfortable,

stated that she was too shy to speak up. Two women were also afraid of men who did not live in the camp but who used to show up from time to time. One of them explained that, as she was standing in the kitchen when the forest workers had left for work, a representative of a forest company sneaked up behind her and touched her on the neck and down towards her buttocks. Comparable situations have been described in other studies too (see, for example, Hultmar 2002).

Johansson (1994) points out that, while modernity in the context of residence has been associated with a division of living space, where the interior of the home was separated into several rooms for privacy, the logging camps to some extent offered the opposite situation from people's homes – public, social life was connected to the interior, while privacy was found in the forest outside the buildings. When one of our informants feared that the men would not like her food, she went outside when the men started eating in order to avoid hearing any complaints. As Johansson has also highlighted, permanence, and an attitude that something which worked was not worth changing, characterized many forest camps (Johansson 1994). One interviewee who worked in the 1950s had the idea that her mother, who worked as a cook in the 1930s, faced exactly the same situation. Such a lack of change was arguably a result of the fact that many regarded forest work to be separate from everyday life: an interruption, where the main purpose was to make money, which meant people were ready to live with a few hardships during these periods (Johansson 1994). This idea surfaced among several of our interviewees (see also Ojaniemi 1997).

But finally, “modern” policies changed forest camps – physically, and, by extension, socially. As the majority of our interviewees were cooks in the 1950s, when significant physical changes had already happened, only eight stated that they worked in camps without a separate kitchen – where the cook prepared food where the men slept, and where the cook's bed was located in this same room (behind a curtain or a wooden barrier = “kockbur”). The clear majority – 25 women – said they worked in camps which had a separate kitchen which, in turn, had a smaller space containing a bed where the cook used to sleep. In these cases, it seems to have been common that, for most of the time, the cook was the only person who stayed in the kitchen (see also Ojaniemi 1997), the exception being when the men came in to eat. Three women said that they worked in camps where the kitchen – and the cook's bed – was not only in a separate room, but in a separate building altogether, and therefore, isolated from all men, an arrangement which became common late in the era of forest camps (Vallström 2010). Here, the female sphere had grown from encompassing only a bed to virtually a whole building, at least for most of the day. In one of these cases, the cook reported that she went to the men's cabin just once or twice during the whole season – when the men were not there – out of curiosity, and the only time she had contact with the men was when they came to the kitchen cabin to eat.

But even if separation of space diminished social interactions, and therefore also many types of social challenges, other issues continued. Some women were bothered by

behavior which led to a heavy workload for them, and by a lack of understanding of the cook's situation. In one camp, the men used to play cards in their own room every evening, and instead of coming into the kitchen, eating all together, they came in to eat one at a time when they lost during the game, meaning she would have to keep the food warm for the whole evening, without being able to do much else. This cook finally asked her uncle, who was one of the card-playing workers, if they could instead come in and eat altogether, and she got a clearly negative answer; “But are you insane girl? My uncle said, we must play cards first. So that did not work out.” (20). Hultmar writes about a cook who had the courage to burn a few of the decks of cards that the men used to play with (2002).

One of our respondents said that on Shrove Tuesday, when the wives and children of the forest workers were coming to the camp to eat, no one knew in advance the exact number of people who would be there. The cook felt that the men nonetheless assumed she would be able to cook enough but not too much food, as it was considered bad to throw food away. This cook also stated that she felt uncomfortable with the men's wives visiting, as she imagined they would judge her regarding how well she took care of their husbands. That Shrove Tuesday was not always a pleasant experience was also highlighted by Ojaniemi's informants (1997). In cases like this, the cooks were simply just expected to carry out extra work without extra payment, in order to improve the well-being of the forest workers, primarily, and if the forest workers did not see or realize that the cook had to work hard for this, it can definitely be described as invisible work – work not recognized as real work, worth paying for (Arora-Jonsson et al. 2019). Another woman said that she was told how many forest workers she was supposed to cook for before she took the job, and then, when she had already started, more forest workers moved into the camp regularly without her being informed, resulting in a steadily increasing workload for her. This stands in contrast to Ojaniemi's perception that the number of men used to remain constant during the season, making it possible for the cook to calculate her income beforehand (1997). While there seems to be no doubt that more men meant a higher salary for the cook (see also Ojaniemi 1997), there is some disagreement about whether the increased workload was proportional to it. The informant mentioned above thought it was not worth the extra money to have to cook for the increasing number of men, while another cook felt that more men did not require much more time or energy, it just required her to use a bit more of all the ingredients, and the larger salary definitely made it worthwhile. Several former cooks do not remember the exact number of forest workers they cooked for at any given time, but most informants thought that it must have been between 6 and 15 men.

Even though fetching water and collecting firewood was something the men used to do in most of the interviewees' camps (see also Hultmar 2002), four cooks said that they also had to supplement the supplies brought by the men, something also recognized by Ojaniemi (1997). One of our respondents even stated that she was the only one in the camp fetching water.

Three women were bothered by all the dishes which had to be cleaned and wiped, especially when the men put pressure on the cook – “Will you be done soon?” (21) – for example when they were all about to leave the camp together on Saturdays. However, one of these women points out that, although she now blames the men for not helping her, she did not do so at the time, since wiping dishes was considered a woman’s job.

Hygiene also constituted a social challenge for some respondents. One woman stated that the forest workers brought in lots of dirt from outside, which she had to clean up, and two cooks were bothered when men came in with wet sweaty clothes, which they hung or laid about the cabin. For one cook, the smell was the main reason she did not want to spend time with the men: “I did not want to stay in that dormitory, because you cannot imagine the smell in there” (22) (see also Johansson 1994). At times, there were minor verbal disputes between the men about similar issues; as an example, one interviewee described an incident in which one man wanted to open the door for ventilation, while another one got a bit angry because he did not want to lose the heat of the cabin. Johansson (1994) also highlights the fact that the cabin’s temperature constituted one of few issues that forest workers used to argue openly about, whilst they avoided arguing about more serious (personal or political) topics in order not to ruin the atmosphere (Johansson 1994).

Lack of salary was also largely a form of social problem. While Ojaniemi describes the cook’s salary as relatively constant and independent of how much income the forest workers brought in (1997), some of our interviewees reported that the economic burden during bad times was not solely placed on the forest workers – even cooks at times got very little salary. This could be, as one cook said, because of forest companies which went bankrupt, leaving the forest workers – and by extension, the cook – without pay, or because a father who was working in the forest camp had debts to the forest company. Something recognized among a few of our interviewees and in Ojaniemi’s study was that the cook could also be left without salary as it went to their parents, family or household as a whole, rather than to the woman as an individual (Ojaniemi 1997). Some of our interviewees had experienced this at least once. No or low pay could also be because of a lack of organization with the payment procedure, as the cook could not keep track of all the men and which one of them had paid her, especially since – as already mentioned – some forest workers left whilst new ones arrived in the middle of the season; “So I got almost nothing for these seven months” (23) (*Financial accounts for cooks in logging camps*, FML). It is noteworthy, though, that the “kockfar” used to help many cooks with similar issues.

It was not only helpful for the cooks to have some physical strength. A few former cooks also stated that they had to show some authority and to speak up on certain occasions – in order to make the situation endurable (see also Hultmar 2002; Johansson 1994; Vallström 2010). But while one cook even arranged a meeting in order to make sure all men helped her by fetching water, and another one argued against a man regarding a question of economics, some

women said that they did not dare to speak up against the men in any situation whatsoever. Some women actually describe it as a more effective strategy to stay away from the men in all circumstances unless it was absolutely necessary to engage socially (i.e. when they were not serving food); “My grandmother taught me never to play cards” (24).

Even though various social challenges existed, in few cases were they considered grave enough among the respondents for them to dislike the job. Those who disliked the job claimed to have done so for other reasons, in fact often related to a perceived lack of social situations. Some women describe the job as lonely, and some felt isolated, far from the rest of civilization, surrounded by forest. Although men in the forest camps might seldom have talked about fear of the dark (Johansson 1994), a few of our interviewees described fear or dislike of the darkness as a major reason they did not like being in the camp. A couple of respondents who experienced the earlier types of camps, without separate rooms and often without proper outhouses, blamed this lack of comfort even by the standard of the time on their perceived isolation from the rest of society. One cook blamed isolation for a temporary lack of food which her camp suffered, as even food sources were far away; “Over there we were almost about to starve” (25).

Although many interviewees said that they would not work as cooks again if they could, none of them – even those who disliked the job – said they regret doing it back then. As they did not spend any money while in the camp, those who were allowed to keep their salary for themselves – rather than contributing to their household’s economy – could often buy something which had not been possible for them to acquire before (see also Ojaniemi 1997).

### Concluding remarks – female cooks in forestry camps in Sweden in a broader perspective

The interviews with our respondents give a relatively coherent picture of the work as a female cook in logging cabins in northern Sweden. The work was hard; the cooks were respected and were able to carry out their work without serious risk of being harassed, despite the fact that they were working alone (or sometimes in pairs) in an all-male environment. The female cooks had multiple roles, but foremost they organized the living conditions for the loggers in a more healthy way by providing nutritious food at a low cost and a clean cabin.

As previously mentioned, it is difficult to determine whether better housing was a precondition for forestry cooks or if the cooks were responsible for the improvement, but what is clear is that both of these transformations occurred simultaneously and were interrelated. When camps were modernized the female cooks were seen as messengers of modernity whose role was to modernize it further (Vallström 2010). Women thus played a very important role in the modernization of forestry work in the twentieth century during the period of dramatic transition of the agrarian society of the region.

Many descriptions in the interviews are consistent with how Arora-Jonsson et al. (2019) describe the invisible and

often unpaid work which women do related to forestry today. One example is that of when men brought dirt into the cabin seemingly without recognizing that this increased the workload for the cook without giving her a higher salary. Even if men occasionally performed unpaid, informal tasks too (collecting firewood, water etc.) the general pattern was nonetheless that of women performing more or less invisible work to sustain men. Since it was increasingly common for logging camps to have a separate space for the cook (in the form of a room or even a building) a speculation from our side is that this might have made her even more invisible to the men and consequently to the overall story of forestry work in northern Sweden.

It is also clear that the system with one or two female cooks spending the winter in a logging cabin with 10–20 men was rather unusual in an international context. Visitors to northern Sweden commented with great surprise on the fact that young women were working in such a situation without problems of abuse or disrespect (Meurice 1941). There were other places in the world where logging frontiers moved into vast forests with low density of people and which had not been exploited earlier. Under these circumstances new infrastructure including transportation and accommodation for forest workers had to be set up. It was in this context that female cooks were hired in northern Sweden. In the USA and Canada, men or even young boys usually did the cooking in the logging camps (Conlin 1979; Neary 1985; Parker 2015; Soucoup 2011), although this situation changed temporarily in some cases during WWI and WWII due to the shortage of men (Soucoup 2011). Even if it seems as if male cooks were the general norm in North America, there are studies questioning this and suggesting that women were present in some cases (Brashler 1991; Walls and Zimpel 2002). To analyze the reasons for this gender difference compared to Sweden would be a very interesting topic of future studies. The logging camps in North America were generally also larger and therefore the cooking was organized at a larger scale with teams of cooks rather than just one or two (Neary 1985; Parker 2015). In Norway and Finland the logging camps and the system for cooking with mostly female cooks was similar to the Swedish system at the same time (Hovensjo 1975; Krogstad 2003; Løchen 1958/1960). Even in Norway, investigations and recommendations influenced the introduction of a system involving female cooks (Løchen 1958/1960), partly as a result of inspiration from Sweden, something which resulted in the establishment of cooking courses and new organization (Krogstad 2003; Løchen 1958/1960), and as in the neighboring country, two cooks could work together if there were many forest workers in Norwegian camps (Hovensjo 1975). In certain parts of Norway, however, forestry cooks were introduced much earlier – in fact as early as the 1890s, at which time the contractor was responsible for providing everything needed for the forest workers, including food, which often meant that the driver's wife acted as a cook (Løchen 1958/1960). Hovensjo (1975) describes a Norwegian development which largely went from a system where cooks were related to forest workers to a system where cooking courses were more relevant than relationships in getting cooking jobs in

the forests (Hovensjo 1975). The same author also mentions, however, that many Norwegian forest camps remained without cooks even in the 1950s (Hovensjo 1975). There seem to have been rather distinct regional differences with, for example, more female cooks in the north-central region (Nord-Trøndelag) compared to other regions (Krogstad 2003). In addition, the overall scale of logging operations and the details of payment and organization differed somewhat between the countries (SOU 1933:38). In Finland, cooking was often done on an entrepreneurial basis and the cooks also sold goods to the loggers, but here it was also common to have female cooks in an otherwise all-male logging camp (Reiterä 2012). One study also showed that there seemed to be less of an egalitarian atmosphere in the Finnish logging camps, where actual logging work was considered superior and more important compared to cooking (Reiterä 2012). Our conclusion from this comparison with other countries indicate that a system with female cooks in logging camps was, with some regional differences, rather common in Scandinavia but not in north America. We suggest that these differences primarily were a result of smaller scale of operation in Scandinavia, but also due to the stronger links between the local society and the logging operations in this region.

Our study also reveals that the overall narrative of forestry in northern Scandinavia as being an all-male preserve is incorrect. Women have been largely invisible in this narrative, both in Sweden and in neighboring countries – something we can conclude after examining written sources on this topic, but this clearly does not mean they were nonexistent. Although this field of research is poorly studied so far, in Sweden and in other countries, it is clear that women did play an important role as cooks in the logging cabins and their work had a definite impact on modernizing a workspace far from cities and industries. We furthermore conclude that their influence was twofold: first they changed the all-male environment in the logging cabins simply by their presence and second their hard work and positive influence was respected by the loggers. One can probably safely contend that no one wanted to return to the poor food, dirty cabins and unhealthy conditions that preceded the arrival of female cooks in the logging camps. This group was therefore indispensable in early-mid twentieth century forestry, in northern Sweden and presumably also in the neighboring countries where female cooks also dominated.

As they were active a long time ago, former cooks are difficult to find today, and as a consequence we have only interviewed a small share of all those once active. Previous studies are based on even fewer interviews, so it is not surprising that some discrepancies are found. Our interviews indicate to a lesser extent than Ojaniemi's (1997), that it would have been possible for the cook to calculate her income beforehand, and there is also some discrepancy when it comes to the issue of formalization of education and work-preparation. While written sources indicate that thousands of women were educated through cooking courses (Anon 1945; Vallström 2010), these courses were not apparently undertaken by the large majority of our interviewees. Perhaps such courses became less common once again

during the 1950s, when most of our informants became cooks.

Generally, our interviews give a picture of an even more informal work situation for the cooks compared to what previous studies have indicated. The number of people to cook for could shift during the season, and the income too. It was a job which required flexibility and initiatives, as it was characterized by little permanence and little room for planning – both between seasons and within seasons. Written contracts were apparently almost nonexistent and whether there would be any job opportunity available at all was not known by these women before the season started. This informality might be connected to various forms of insecurity for the women, and it could also, as we mentioned previously, be a reason why the cooks have been so invisible, given the focus on formal institutions (compare Arora-Jonsson 2005; Arora-Jonsson et al. 2019). On the other hand, it was also arguably connected to a sense of freedom for these young women. Lots of uncertainty and lack of structure also meant that the cooks could perform their work in whatever way they wanted – there was, in most cases, no one else around who told them what to do. Arora-Jonsson (2005) has reported a similar pattern, but in another context (informal meetings among organized women). In difference to Hultmar's (2002) description of cooks who were somewhat inferior – either to the “kockfar” or to another cook when one started out the career as an assistant – we find few or no signs of hierarchies. Our interviews indicate that this job was egalitarian from the very start – few of our interviewees started out as assistants, or as wives to forest workers (Johansson 1994), for that matter. Being a forestry cook was in many cases a way for young women to get away from hierarchies and experience a degree of freedom and independence unseen back home in the villages. And this pattern resonates with what Johansson (1994) has reported for male forest workers. Apparently, female cooks and male loggers could, despite very different types of jobs, both experience the freedom which this egalitarian environment offered in contrast to village life.

Our intention is not to glorify the forest camps or the job as a cook. On the one hand, our material shows that the initiative to become cooks often came from other people, rather than from the women themselves. Parents had positive attitudes to the job, sometimes more positive than the women themselves. The job did in many ways not constitute a breakup of old norms but rather a continuation – where a traditional female role was transferred from the village to the forest. The job could therefore be seen as an extension of women's traditional care responsibilities. But simultaneously, many of the women themselves nonetheless say the job gave them a new sense of independence. Several of our respondents noted the sense of freedom they felt in getting a paid job, and often it was their first paid job. In our opinion, it is clear that the opportunity for paid work for young women was a rather unique thing in this rural and, at the time, rather poor part of Sweden. Probably one seed of women's liberation in twentieth century Sweden was planted by these thousands of young women working in the northern forests. There were also other aspects of forestry work that were performed by women during this period, such as log-driving, planting

trees, pre-commercial thinning and herbicide treatments of clear-cuts. These stories are yet to be told.

In a study like this, based on interviews and about events taking place a long time ago it is important to reflect over potential bias. It is here worth clarifying once again that even though this study might be the most extensive so far when it comes to the topic of forestry cooks in northern Sweden, 30 interviewees are nonetheless only a small share of all the thousands of forestry cooks who worked in Sweden. This sample cannot represent all cooks who were active in the country. And as many interviewees contacted a museum themselves in order to share their stories with us, it is possible that these individuals had more positive experiences than what cooks in general had. We have relied extensively on interviews and on the memory of the former cooks, focusing on events that took place many decades ago. For obvious reasons we have not been able to do observations in order to find support for what we have been told, although many contemporary written sources and photographs have been helpful to contextualize the stories. The core of the problem is also the very same motivation for our study; the history of women's work in forestry is a neglected topic in the Swedish as well as in the international forest history.

## Acknowledgements

First of all we would like to thank all the former cooks who generously shared their experiences and their knowledge; Siv Selin, Sonja Kvarnström, Selma Eriksson, Margareta Pettersson, Irma Sjölund, Irma Essebro, Gudrun Strömberg, Gunda Sandberg, Eivor Önnbo, Eivor Husing, Elisabeth Holmström, Eivor Andersson, Birgit Flodin, Anna-Gunborg Börjegen, Barbro Sundström, Klara Sundelin, Kristin Mårdner, Valdy Eliasson, Lola Lindberg, Siv Åhman, Eivor Forsberg, Mimmi Larsson, Inga-Lisa Backman, Inga-Brita Hagstedt, Eila Nilsson, Siri Lövgren, Gerd Persson, Alice Söderlind, Anna-Greta From, Gertrud Lundmark. Financial support was generously provided by Skogssällskapet, Sweden through the project “Skogsbrukets glömda hjältar”. Also many thanks to: Iréne Gustafsson, Gerd Aurell, Marica Lagerström and Gunvår Bäckström for providing help in various ways.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

## Funding

This work was supported by Stiftelsen Skogssällskapet, Sweden.

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