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## Naked masculinity?

### Forest students portrayed in photographs and oral history

#### A men's profession

In an old black-and-white photograph there are nine naked young men in their twenties leaning against each other in a forest. Somebody has drawn a big black snake on the picture to cover part of their nakedness. The picture is subtitled: "In the paradise of Karhujärvi." The boys are forest students and the photo was taken during their summer training period at the Hyytiälä Forestry Field Station in 1932.<sup>1</sup> Why was this picture taken and what does it tell us?

While working on my doctoral thesis concerning the professional culture of Finnish university-educated foresters from the 1860s to the 1990s<sup>2</sup> I noticed many interesting photographs taken by foresters, especially during their studies. I decided to use these pictures along with my interview material. This article focuses on the individual experiences behind the stories of oral history and photographs.

In 1908, the academic education of foresters was transferred to the University from the Evo Forest Institute, where foresters had been educated for almost 50 years. The first woman started her studies in forest sciences in 1918 and by the end of the 1930s altogether four women had become university-qualified foresters. During the Second World War there were 16 female forest students at the University. After the war and in the 1950s, 13 women were enrolled as forest students at the University. In the 1960s it was already common to have a couple of women in every course.<sup>3</sup> Before the 1970s women were only a small minority in a male-dominated group of students. The last course of only men started in 1961. Thus, for the first 60 years,

students studying for a degree in forestry were exclusively men, and almost exclusively men 50 years after that. Women got jobs in forestry even more slowly; before the 1970s many of them ended up as housewives or in other professions, often after they had worked for a few years in the field.<sup>4</sup>

This is the factual background to my analysis of the positions of male and female forest students in their professional culture before the 1970s.<sup>5</sup> What were the joint and distinctive individual experiences that can be seen through gender? I also consider the relation and dimensions of oral history and photographs as sources in my analysis of the professional culture of foresters.

### The joint and distinctive experience

In both the oral history and photographs concerning the forest students' studies the Hyytiälä training period is the most commonly described.<sup>6</sup> Forest studies were organised strictly as a course that combined both theory and practise. It meant that in addition to university lectures there were several on-the-job training periods arranged outside the university and the capital city. The most important of these, and common to everybody, was the so-called first summer training at the Hyytiälä Forestry Field Station in Juupajoki. This included a variety of practical forest activities in the area. Hyytiälä was a kind of boarding school in the countryside where the student group worked and lived together for three months.

In the interviews with men Hyytiälä was seen as an opportunity to get experience in practical work and the forest itself. The same wish had often already been central when choosing the forestry profession. Part of the studies consisted of forestry excursions made during the Hyytiälä summer. There was also spare time for sport, playing cards, partying, brewing alcohol, drinking, and building traditional course "monuments" like a jetty, a tennis court or a gate at Hyytiälä. The idea of members of a course as a uniform unit became clear while staying together for the whole summer: it was the time and place for the birth of their feeling of togetherness, the

forester spirit.<sup>7</sup> The course photographs have almost the same contents as the oral stories. The summer was spent in physical work, excursions, celebrating and doing sports. There are plenty of photographs, for example, of wood-cutting, ditch-digging or lecturing in forests. Although the buildings and views of Hyytiälä were immortalized by the camera course after course, most of the pictures illustrate people, the particular student group itself, the group working, resting, riding bikes to the practise area, entertaining in their leisure time or posing in different group photographs.

Men did not usually talk about their female fellow students in their oral stories about their student days.<sup>8</sup> If there were women in a group and an interviewer approached the subject, the question was usually discussed briefly and neutrally. The interviewer was told that women were treated equally, fairly or in a gentlemanly way.<sup>9</sup> A few men mentioned that the girls had to adapt themselves to masculine ways. Other men noted for some reason or other that the girls kept to themselves.<sup>10</sup>

When women talked about Hyytiälä, gender was always present. It had to be taken into consideration even when telling about physical aspects of living, because the girls lived in another building called "the castle of maids". They needed to express how they managed the heavy manual work and whether they were treated equally or not. Sometimes they recollected some military behaviour at Hyytiälä, something that men did not talk about at all.<sup>11</sup> Many of these women told about fair treatment and the feeling of fellowship with the boys,<sup>12</sup> but some considered the Hyytiälä summer almost a punishment because they believed the boys tried to get rid of girls there.<sup>13</sup> Also men's comments on being "gentlemen" could mean giving girls special treatment and calling them "miss". When girls asked for equality instead of special treatment, they ended up playing a masculine game: the same male rules for everybody without any mercy or exception.<sup>14</sup> The familiar stories told by the men concerning excursions, parties, drinking, sporting and the forester spirit were seldom mentioned in the female oral history.<sup>15</sup>

Although women also have photographed the environment, themselves working, or their own study group in Hyytiälä, something is lacking in their pictures. It seems that leisure time especially distinguished the positions of men and women before the 1970s. Spending leisure time together demanded not only inventiveness but also the capability to co-operate, and a consensus of opinion. What was done together was also decided together. One cannot even imagine girls in certain photographs. For the young men, Hyytiälä, despite the manual work, or because of it, was "a paradise"<sup>16</sup> and "the last summer of young colts".<sup>17</sup> The common brotherhood, warm relations and freedom in a group of course brothers are seen especially in group portraits or playing the fool in leisure time photographs. It is often actually difficult to point at the concrete distinction between photographs taken by men and women, but the feeling they convey is obvious.<sup>18</sup>

At the beginning of the 1920s one girl and 39 young men were practising in Hyytiälä. Altogether 60 photographs documenting the summer were taken by one of the boys. What do they tell about the position of Martta? She is portrayed in ten pictures; many of them group portraits in the training area and at work. Sometimes she is sitting or standing a bit apart from the others. She did not (of course) according to the pictures take part in the beach life of the naked boys, in the nights of partying or in brewing alcohol.<sup>19</sup> Only one photograph shows Martta alone: sleeping under a tree beside a training area. The photograph is subtitled: "A woman in forest work."<sup>20</sup>

The position of men in Hyytiälä was self-evident and founded on a long tradition of brotherhood. Masculinity was a norm, which also meant the invisibility of gender.<sup>21</sup> A few women could not change the masculine culture, nor could they alone create a culture of their own. Their alternatives were to be isolated or to form a female group - or try to get the respect of the masculine group by obeying its cultural rules.<sup>22</sup> Both male and female oral and illustrated stories can be read as descriptions of the relations between men and women. In both type of sources men are placed in the centre, while the position of women is more marginal.

## The three dimensions

Oral history and photographs are connected in many ways. When a person tells his or her life story, it is a question of memories. Between the moment of experience and the moment of telling there is always a period of events that inevitably has an influence on the story and the way of remembering and telling it.<sup>23</sup> One chooses what the story is and how it is told. Choice is also involved in photographs. A photographer chooses the object, and an owner of photographs chooses what is preserved. As contemporary sources, photographs document a contemporary experience that is worth remembering.<sup>24</sup> The photographs are given meanings by organising and giving subtitles to them. The photographs of the university years are often placed in personal or collective<sup>25</sup> Hyytiälä photograph albums. As illustrated stories they can in a way be considered equal to oral stories. The photographs are also evidence of experiences: they became meaningful as maintainers of the feeling of togetherness and the professional culture - as a part of the collective memory.

The experiential environment of an individual in everyday reality is like a three-dimensional space around oneself. The past environments are often preserved in one's memory. The trace they leave in history and that a researcher meets is only one of their dimensions. By analysing stories, speech, texts or photographs a researcher can create a two-dimensional picture of the past. The third dimension, however, is the private experience itself and its individual meaning. This is what a researcher is looking for - and may, if lucky, get a glimpse of. Jan Garnert<sup>26</sup> has said that with the aid of interviews one can get near the recollections but seldom near the experiences. The photographs can be seen similarly: they are only pictures, which hide the real experiences. While trying to find meanings a researcher can analyse the contents or the common order of photographs. Sometimes the photographs or their subtitles and explanations allow a researcher to get closer to the experience and its meaning. Personal experiences, however, are stored in personal memories. The two-dimensional picture, which a researcher has created, includes, but often also hides, this third dimension.

The experience itself and its individual meaning as a third dimension of a photograph (or any object) also allow the individuals concerned to give different meanings to the object. The same evidence of the past can easily remind individuals of various memories and experiences. Things that to men represented memories of tight-knit togetherness could to women recall experiences of being on the outside or only on the outskirts of the naked masculine culture.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Lusto. V94012:23; [www.kantapuu.fi](http://www.kantapuu.fi), kuvahaku (search for "V94012:23")

<sup>2</sup> My Ph. D. thesis is based on a long historical perspective and from the point of view of individuals. My main material is oral history, 226 biographical interviews of university-educated foresters, which cover about a 70 years' period of their experiences in studies and work. Additionally, I also use photographs and student magazines. In my research I consider the professional culture as a process where a professional group of individuals not only creates but also maintains common manners, values and ideas by recreating common experiences and reminding themselves of professional aims. The professional culture of foresters can be seen as an institution of experiences and memories: it is built up during the student years and maintained in professional life. Arvidsson 2001, pp. 16-17; Ehn & Löfgren 1982, p. 90; Anttonen 1999, pp. 198-210.

<sup>3</sup> With "a course" (*kurssi*) I mean a group of students that have been studying together and that have been considered as a tight-knit group also later in the profession.

<sup>4</sup> See Kärkkäinen & Toivanen 1995; Saarimaa 2004.

<sup>5</sup> The material of the paper consists of 10 female and 30 male foresters' interviews and of 12 foresters' private photograph collections. Two of the collections were

photographed by women. The informants, photographers and owners of the photographs were born between the 1910s and '40s and studied between the 1930s and '60s.

<sup>6</sup> The training period at Hyytiälä is brought up in many contexts in the interviews. Photographs were seldom taken in the University or in the capital; almost all the pictures are from different training periods and excursions. Lusto. V95013/H11, SM/H12, V04032/H22, V95004/H23, V04031/H27, V95014/H31, V94012/H32, V01020/H33, V02005/H36, V04003/H36, EB/H43, V03004/H53. 'H' in the signum means Hyytiälä and the subsequent number is the year of the training period.

<sup>7</sup> Lusto. A02001: 10/m37, 24/m44, 25/m43, 67/m45, 68/m34, 70/m36, 80/m17, 83/m22, 86/m39, 107/m47, 113/m42, 115/m35, 126/m15, 158/m45, 161/m46, 163/m43, 172/m46, 206/m21, 225/m24. 'M' or 'f' in the signum means 'male' or 'female' and the subsequent number is the year of birth.

<sup>8</sup> Lusto. A02001:80/m17, 83/m22, 119/m21, 122/m19, 134/m21, 144/m20, 158/m45, 163/m43, 213/m45, 224/m23. Only two informants mentioned the girls as forest students without being asked, though very neutrally. 70/m36, 126/m15.

<sup>9</sup> Lusto. A02001:5/m18, 10/m37, 24/m44, 25/m43, 67/m45, 69/m37, 86/m39, 116/m14, 161/m46, 172/m46, 174/m43, 182/m41, 206/m21, 225/m24.

<sup>10</sup> Lusto. A02001:68/m34, 107/m47, 113/m42.

<sup>11</sup> Lusto. A02001: 16/f46, 20/f23, 38/f22, 49/f43, 66/f21, 105/f14, 203/f47.

<sup>12</sup> Lusto. A02001: 4/f38, 11/f21, 16/f46, 49/f43, 66/f21, 228/f40.

<sup>13</sup> Lusto. A02001: 11/f21, 38/f22, 66/f21, 105/f14.

<sup>14</sup> Lusto. A02001:49/f43, 105/f14.

<sup>15</sup> Lusto. A02001:see 16/f46.

<sup>16</sup> Lusto. V94012/H31:23.

<sup>17</sup> Lusto. A02001:225/m24.

<sup>18</sup> Lusto. For example V95013/H11:12, 18; V04032/H22:60, 103; V95004/H23:75; V04031/H27; V94012/H32:72; V04003/H36:488. According to Anja Petersen (1999, pp. 140-141) it is interesting how photographs are considered objective but analysing them is seen as very subjective. Photographs should also be analysed on different levels, not only considering what a picture concretely denotes, but what it connotes on a symbolic level.

<sup>19</sup> Lusto. V04032/H22: for example 77-80, 83-84, 88, 97.

<sup>20</sup> Lusto. V04032/H22:74.

<sup>21</sup> Brandth & Haugen 2000, p. 345; about homosociality and brotherhood, see also Kuosmanen 2001, pp. 41-43.

<sup>22</sup> Lusto. A02001:4/f38, 11/f21.

<sup>23</sup> Portelli 1998, pp. 68-69.

<sup>24</sup> As Seija Ulkuniemi (2005, p. 105) has shown, snapshots concentrate on special events and experiences. They do not portray everyday life as it really is, but as it is wished to be.

<sup>25</sup> Lusto. For example V94012/H32. The photographs taken at Hyytiälä were later copied, organised and subtitled in an album for all course members.

<sup>26</sup> Garnert 1993, p. 29.