

I husbondens bröd och arbete.

Kön, makt och kontrakt i det svenska tjänstefolkssystemet 1730-1860

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AKADEMISK AVHANDLING

som med vederbörligt tillstånd av Handelshögskolans fakultetsnämnd vid Göteborgs Universitet för avläggande av filosofie doktorsexamen i ekonomisk historia framläggs till offentlig granskning fredagen den 15 juni 2018 kl. 10.15 i CG-salen, Handelshögskolan, Vasagatan 1, Göteborg.

Fakultetsopponent: Professor Maria Sjöberg, Institutionen för historiska studier, Göteborgs universitet



GÖTEBORGS UNIVERSITET
HANDELSHÖGSKOLAN

ABSTRACT

Carolina Uppenberg, 2018. *I husbondens bröd och arbete. Kön, makt och kontrakt i det svenska tjänstefolkssystemet 1730-1860*.

Gothenburg Studies in Economic History 20, Department of Economy and Society, University of Gothenburg, Gothenburg. ISBN 978-91-86217-19-8

The aim of this thesis is to analyze the power relations of labour and gender in the servant institution during the agrarian revolution in Sweden. The positions of servant, master and mistress are analyzed theoretically as a gendered, contracted position with both economic and moral dimensions attached to them. The analysis is applied together with a theory on bases of power, which are those areas where pretensions to power come in to force through material conditions; in this study being masculinity and access to land. The sources used are the Servant Acts, didactic and debate literature, and court cases.

Though the formal condition for a servant system to evolve is inequality – in the agrarian setting primarily between landed and landless people – previous research has tended to view the servant system primarily as a solution to the changing need for labour over time in the agrarian household. Through the Servant Acts, the Crown delegated control over landless people to farmers and could thereby ensure that farmers had access to labour, but the Crown also demanded farmers to use inflexible year-long contracts for servants. I show that by using the well-established year-long contract as a frame, masters and male servants were able to create flexibility. At the same time, the subservient position of a servant became less acceptable for men, since the possibility to become a landed head of household at the end of the period of service was eroded during the agrarian revolution. I find that the servant position underwent a discursive feminization, and those aspects point to a situation where the servant position became feminized and wage labour became a new power base for men.

The analysis of servants' wages shows that there were considerable opportunities to use the court to demand unpaid wages, for both male and female servants, although only a quarter of the cases concerned females. However, the legal right to be taken care of in the event of sickness does not seem to have been complied with. Taken together, this leads to the conclusion that servants were already regarded less as family members and more as part of modern labour relations during the agrarian revolution. Finally, the concept of agency is analyzed, showing a subtle gender difference in that the labour of female servants was taken more for granted than that of male servants.

Key words: servant, maid, farmhand, master, mistress, rural household, agrarian revolution, life-cycle servant, 18th century, 19th century, gender, patriarchy, contract, labour, Servant Acts, proletarianization, feminization, *laga försvar*, compulsory service

ISBN 978-91-86217-19-8
<http://hdl.handle.net/2077/55921>
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Printed by Brand factory AB.

Distribution:
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SE 405 30 Gothenburg