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# **ACTA HISTRIAE**

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*Skalne poslikave v Hekimdere pri vasi Çiçekli v okrožju İlkizdere v provinci Rize v Turčiji / Pitture rupestri a Hekimdere, vicino al villaggio di Çiçekli, nel distretto di İlkizdere della provincia di Rize in Turchia / Hekimdere Rock Depictions near the village of Çiçekli in the İlkizdere district of the Rize province in Türkiye (foto/photo: Okay Pekşen, 2022).*

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## MARITIME ARCHETYPES OF MONTENEGRIN WOMEN: HEROISM AND SOLITUDE

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### ABSTRACT

*The paper examines the evolving role of Montenegrin women within a patriarchal society, where prevailing norms have often rendered women inferior or invisible in public life. Despite these challenges, Montenegrin women have significantly impacted the country's history and culture, taking on diverse roles as mothers, wives, sisters, nurses, warriors, pillars of the household, artists, educators, and sailors. Women's connection to the sea in Montenegro is particularly significant, reflecting both practical and symbolic ties. From their involvement in maritime activities to their portrayal in cultural narratives of waiting for loved ones at sea, their bond with the maritime world is a key aspect of Montenegrin identity. This paper explores two dominant archetypes: the woman who waits, embodying patience and loyalty, and the female warrior, a symbol of strength and elegance, navigating the intersection of tradition and modernity. These archetypes are further examined through discourse and artistic representations that highlight the enduring and multifaceted roles of Montenegrin women, especially their profound connection to the sea.*

*Keywords: women in maritime, patriarchal society, gender roles, female warrior, waiting women*

## GLI ARCHETIPI DEL RAPPORTO TRA LA DONNA MONTENEGRINA E IL MARE: EROISMO E SOLITUDINE

### SINTESI

*Il presente articolo tratta dello sviluppo del ruolo della donna montenegrina che in una società patriarcale veniva spesso considerata inferiore rispetto all'uomo oppure invisibile nella vita pubblica. Nonostante queste sfide, le donne montenegrine hanno lasciato un'impronta profonda nella storia e nella cultura del proprio paese assumendo ruoli diversi: quelli di madri, mogli, sorelle, infermiere, guerriere, pilastri della famiglia, artiste, educatrici e marinaie. È particolarmente significativo il rapporto delle donne montenegrine con il mare. Si tratta di un legame nello stesso tempo pratico e simbolico, rispecchiato sia nel loro coinvolgimento nelle attività marittime sia nel*

*modo in cui venivano rappresentate nella storia culturale: come donne in attesa del ritorno del proprio amato via mare. Questo legame tra le montenegrine e il mare è un aspetto chiave dell'identità montenegrina. Il presente lavoro, quindi, esamina due archetipi dominanti: la donna che aspetta, simbolo di pazienza e lealtà, e la donna guerriera, simbolo di forza ed eleganza, che naviga tra la tradizione e la modernità. Il presente lavoro esplora anche i riflessi che questi archetipi producono sia nella lingua sia nelle opere d'arte che ritraggono le caratteristiche archetipiche più salienti della donna montenegrina, specialmente questo suo profondo legame con il mare.*

*Parole chiave: le donne e il mare, società patriarcale, ruoli di genere, donna guerriera, donne in attesa degli amati*

## INTRODUCTION

This paper examines two dominant concepts within the narrative of women in Montenegro, focusing on their roles in a patriarchal society that traditionally assigns girls the roles of future wives and mothers. Based on a literature review of the representation of women in Montenegro, the paper explores the socio-linguistic, cultural, and ethnographic aspects that illustrate the diversity of roles among Montenegrin women. Additionally, it discusses the concepts of pride, bravery, and heroism found in Montenegrin ethnographic heritage, which are manifested in women's behaviour, particularly as 'warrior women' and in the 'man-woman' traits of Montenegrin women. The paper also introduces the concept of waiting, specifically in the context of the traditional and patriarchal settings of the Bay of Kotor (also known as Boka), which is recognized as a centre of seamanship. This idea of waiting, linked to the wives of seafarers, is examined not only as a local phenomenon but also as part of a global trend.

To illustrate the current status of Montenegrin women both on land and at sea, the paper discusses recent developments in the modern world, including liberalization and democratic policies that have contributed to the promotion of women's welfare and the welfare of women seafarers. This includes the efforts of organizations such as the International Transport Workers Federation (ITWF, 2023), the International Maritime Organization (IMO, 2023), and the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2003). Alongside these international conventions, Montenegro has also implemented the National Strategy for Gender Equality 2021–2025 (2021) and the National Strategy for Sustainable Development until 2030 (2016).

These strategies serve as important documents for the implementation and evaluation of measures aimed at enhancing gender equality and visibility in social life (Gender Equality Profile of Montenegro, 2021).

The aim of this article is to explore how the two dominant concepts related to Montenegrin women – warrior women and those who are waiting – intertwine to reflect the unique cultural and historical context of Montenegro. We argue that these paradigms are not static; they have evolved in response to the changes brought about by emerging feminist movements, the economy, emancipation, and democratic developments.

In the first part of our research, we examine warrior women in patriarchal Montenegro both before and after the Second World War, highlighting how language reflects social realities through the phrase *čoe-k-žena* ('man-woman'). We also analyse visual representations of female warriors, specifically in various works of art. In the second part, we explore the existing literature regarding the specific community of women seafarers at both the local and global levels. We analyse the connection between seafarers' wives who are waiting for their husbands and their roles in upholding family and social values. We present narratives from women waiting in the Bay of Kotor and delve into literature concerning the global community of seafarers' wives.

In the third section of the paper, we demonstrate how changes in the modern world and the establishment of women's associations have paved the way for women to assume roles traditionally dominated by men and we describe mechanisms designed to enhance the visibility of women. In conclusion, we summarize how the past and present converge in the efforts of Montenegrin women to overcome the burdens of a patriarchal and war-affected history. We also recommend conducting a comprehensive analysis to gain valuable insights into the universality of certain concepts related to women, particularly in small and gender-stereotyped nations.

## PATRIARCHAL MONTENEGRO AND 'WARRIOR WOMEN'

Literature resources about women in Montenegro reveal a wide range of features that have shaped the mindset of Montenegrin women: toughness, quietness, and invisibility. There is an impression that a woman functioned only as a man's companion through life during the turbulent period of Montenegrin history (Tepavčević, 2018, 237–238). The reason for this in Montenegrin society centuries ago can be seen in the submissive role of women towards their husbands within a tribal-like society, which was reflected in a woman's private and personal status (Stojanović, 1974). In a patriarchal society, the values of honesty and innocence were at the fore. The choice of a groom's future bride was based on the statement that 'Beauty is for the world and goodness is for the home' (Rajković, 2010, 147). The Montenegrin family retained its traditional values and women were seen as 'another's happiness' or 'supper', and were expected to carry on the family line by giving birth to male children. This illustrates how a woman's destiny depends on the choices made by other men (Rajković, 2010, 147).



Many travellers have portrayed Montenegrin women as obedient, faithful, courageous, and capable of taking on a man's job. They are ready to handle weapons, fight, and protect their families simultaneously. Women accompanied their husbands on military missions, walking for two or three days without rest, carrying food on their shoulders, serving them wine and brandy, and tending to their wounds (Muzej žena Crne Gore, 2018). Piguet also portrays women not only as exceptional partners to their husbands but also as participants in military campaigns alongside them (Jovanović & Potočnik Topler, 2022, 422). There is a story about the tall, brave, and gracious Milica, a heroine who defends her family from the Turks. She joins the battle alongside her husband and child. When her husband is injured on the battlefield, she dresses his wounds and continues fighting until she ensures that her family is safe and then she repels the Turks. Yet, this proud woman comes home as a shadow of her husband. One might say she was like a servant or a slave (Markoti, 1997, 25–26). In light of this, there is a perspective that suggests that the model of traditional Montenegrin masculinity can be attributed to Montenegro's history of constant wars, particularly during the Ottoman siege. This viewpoint is closely related to the socio-constructivist theoretical framework dominant in masculinity studies, which asserts that 'men are not born but made' (Banović, 2016, 50).

This saga of wars, which has permeated Montenegrin history for centuries, has shaped the image of 'moral purity, firmness, integrity, and sacrifice of Montenegrin women' (Labudović, 2021, 16). The discourse of the Montenegrin 'warrior women' flourished in the second half of the nineteenth century, and female patriotism was represented in a series of paintings featuring Montenegrin warrior women. These paintings were featured in the Montenegrin journal titled *Crnogorka* (Ćirović, 2022, 178).

Ćirović notes that the motif of the armed woman, rooted in real historical conflicts, has evolved into an idealized portrayal that highlights the conventional notions of feminine beauty while simultaneously incorporating aspects of vulnerability and defensiveness. This antagonism between femininity and heroism prompts a profound exploration of women's roles and perceptions during wartime (Ćirović, 2021, 119). One famous artist that drew inspiration from the women of Montenegro and Bosnia-Herzegovina was the Czech painter Jaroslav Čermák. His fascination with the women of Montenegro and Herzegovina and nearby places, noted during encounters in 1862, inspired the creation of artworks that capture the intricate realities of women's lives in the turbulent Balkans. The artist's work intertwines numerous layers of meaning, showcasing diverse expressions of femininity. It embodies the spirit of a Madonna-like figure, illustrating the attributes of womanhood and resilience reminiscent of warriors from Slavic heritage (Ćirović, 2021, 106). Interestingly, historian Theodor Mommsen visited Montenegro in the same year, in 1862. In his letters about his journey to Montenegro, written to his wife, he expressed a critique of the Montenegrin perspective towards women in general. In closing, he referred to an anecdote from the time of Prince Danilo, noting that, for a Montenegrin man, being regarded as feminine was seen as the utmost disgrace, even more humiliating than death itself (Knežević & Köck, 2022, 356).



*Fig. 1: Černohorská madona – Černohorka s dítětem, Jaroslav Čermák (Photo © National Gallery Prague 2024).*



Fig. 2: *The Warrior Mother*, Teodor Valerio (Ćirović, 2021, 113).

ration as it represents an archetypal model of a Montenegrin women, embodying attributes such as generosity, chivalry and liberty. Thus, the term ‘man’ in ‘man-woman’ is a gender-neutral category, subliming the ethical qualities of the Montenegrin identity, those of manhood or dignity and heroism<sup>1</sup> (Todorović, Todorović & Miličković, 2022, 129). The phrase, linguistically, highlights the concept of male dominance in language, particularly through the use of the term ‘man’, which implies a hierarchy in which masculine is regarded as superior. It also points to the fact that in patriarchal societies, women often remain in the background, refraining from entering spaces traditionally associated with masculinity, such as warfare. This reflects broader social norms that reinforce gender roles and the perception of masculinity as dominant (Ćirović, 2021, 111). A similar concept, characterized by remarkable resilience, is often described as ‘Spartan courage’, where grief is

Nevertheless, the (self-)humiliation of women was most prominently manifested in the tradition of blood feuds, where women played a central role in the cycle of vengeance and endured acts of dishonour. The offender’s group would attempt to send one of their women into the victim’s home, purposely tying herself to the fireplace. In such cases, the offended party would forcibly free the woman, an action viewed as disgraceful. Consequently, the head of the victim’s household found himself compelled to accept the woman as a guest and to accept the initiation of negotiations (Darovec, 2017, 81).

The courageous spirit of Montenegrin women, evident in their participation in wars and their role in challenging stereotypical gender roles within a patriarchal setting is encapsulated in the phrase *čoe-k-žena* (which translates as ‘man-woman’).

This phrase deserves further elaboration

<sup>1</sup> Since the publication of Marko Miljanov’s book in 1901, the phrase ‘dignity and heroism’ has entered the national language and literature to portray the ethnographic image of the Montenegrin people and their collective mindset. One of the main messages of the book *Examples of Dignity and Heroism* is reflected in the sentence: ‘Dignity is protecting others from yourself and heroism is protecting yourself from others’.



not overtly expressed. This concept is further illustrated by a notable social trend in the nineteenth century, where young women referred to as *talije* would assume traditionally male roles, cut their hair, and participate in battles, embodying a sense of identity and purpose traditionally associated with Montenegrin men (Vukčević, 2006, 159).

An equally significant meaning of the female warrior pertains to extraordinary women in Montenegrin history who defied traditional roles. These individuals earned the title of warriors by challenging societal norms and advocating for freedom of thought, emancipation, and women's right to education. A notable example is Jelena Vicković<sup>2</sup> who founded the first private school for girls in Cetinje in 1867, which transitioned to a state school just two years later. Primary education became mandatory<sup>3</sup> in 1879.

The narrative of empowering Montenegrin women is explored in the book *Women of Montenegro* (Todorović, Todorović & Miličković, 2022), which chronicles the lives of numerous women spanning a millennium – from the



Fig. 3: Girls' school at Cetinje (Markoti, 1997, 107).



Fig. 4: Course for young drivers in Nikšić, July 1945 (Muzej žena Crne Gore).

- 2 When she arrived in Cetinje, she gathered girls from poor families in her apartment and began teaching them handicrafts, religious studies, reading and writing. In 1874, the municipality of Cetinje decided to transform her private school into the first girls' school, which was opened next to the boys' school, with Jelena Vicković continuing as a teacher there (Muzej žena Crne Gore, 2018).
- 3 In 1879, the Act on Mandatory Education was adopted. Article 25 states that whenever a school for girls is founded, the law applies to it. Additionally, Article 26 allows parents to enrol their daughters in a boys' school in regions where there are no girls' schools, if they so wish. However, this option was not available once the girl reached the age of ten, after which she was not able to attend a school for boys (Muzej žena Crne Gore, 2018).



Illyrian Queen Teuta, through the realms of Duklja and Zeta, the Petrović royal dynasty, and into the modern era of the twenty-first century. These women made significant contributions to the nation, embodying the qualities of sacrifice, dedication, courage, and diplomacy. Their legacy includes contributions to education, revolution and works of art, as well as many other virtues, such as honour, sacrifice, commitment, diplomacy, bravery, and more (Todorović, Todorović & Miličković, 2022).

Women had a significant role in the Second World War. Female partisans died in battles, and were imprisoned together with males and children in prisons and war camps. One of the famous brigades numbering 286 women was the 4th Montenegrin Brigade. They demonstrated exceptional versatility, playing pivotal roles in both combat and support positions. On the front lines, they distinguished themselves as machine gunners, commanders and nurses dedicated to the care of others (Dabižinović, 2018, 27). It can be said that during and after the Second World War, the role of the Montenegrin woman emerged prominently, characterized by their capability to lead while also caring for their families (Dabižinović, 2018, 27). This development significantly altered the traditional perception of women in Montenegro and laid the groundwork for the establishment of the Antifascist Organization of Women, as well as new movements aimed at the emancipation of women (Dabižinović, 2018, 27). Women's education in socialist Yugoslavia and Montenegro was a tremendous advantage as it helped women recognize the importance of schooling. The variety of available schools expanded significantly, particularly due to rapid industrial development and the emergence of new specialized programmes (Dabižinović, 2018, 31).

## THE WAITING WOMEN

The Bay of Kotor is one of the most picturesque bays in the Mediterranean, known for its attractive geographical position, and winding shoreline. Maritime tradition has flourished for centuries in the region, which is known for its tumultuous history involving maritime and land battles, as well as its rich seafaring tradition and shipbuilding heritage. Due to its favourable location by the sea, various peoples and cultures have shaped the history of the bay, including the Illyrians, Romans, Venetians, Austrians, Italians, Russians, Ottomans, and French. The Bay of Kotor can be described as an amalgamation of Eastern and Western influences, while still preserving its own cultural and social characteristics (Radojičić, 2009). People living in the hinterland and northern regions of Montenegro primarily earned a living from livestock breeding, farming and agriculture (Radojičić, 2009), while those in the Bay of Kotor were largely dependent on living off the sea. The more prosperous economy in the coastal towns was connected to advancements in seafaring, overseas trade, and links with Adriatic towns, Italy, and Western cultural trends.

In terms of job division, the seafaring profession was mainly reserved for men, while a limited number of women sailors navigated local waters. Women are mostly depicted as companions to their husbands, who were sailors or captains. For example, in the second half of the eighteenth century, there were 16 women sailors in Boka (Vijesti, 2012), in the town of Herceg Novi. Considering that sea voyages in the past could last for decades, it is noteworthy that Mara, the wife of Captain Milišić, sailed with her husband on two sailing ships for nearly ten years (Palavršić, 2018, 184).

Women participated in local fisheries in the Bay of Kotor and were known for their hard work and skill. However, their roles were primarily focused on tasks such as knitting, repairing fishing nets, and transporting fish to nearby markets, rather than actual fishing (Pešić et al., 2016). The women of the Bay of Kotor, particularly those from higher social classes, were recognized for their handicraft skills (Dabižinović, 2018, 15). Their husbands would bring back expensive materials, lace, and cloth from their sea voyages. Women, especially those of higher social standing, were noted for their stylish and urban appearance, often wearing dresses made from luxurious materials embroidered with gold and silk (Radojičić, 2009).

Nevertheless, the image of women in the Bay of Kotor is equally heroic. Seafarers' wives often raised their children alone, as their husbands' sea ventures could last for years. The Montenegrin term for a high-class captain's wife is *kapetanica*, which is a Romance loanword from the vernacular, dating back to the period of Old Montenegro and the Highlands (Tešić, 2017). This term frequently referred to wives who stayed at home, raising their children and waiting for their husbands' return (Dževerdanović Pejović, 2017). The official role of women in one of the most prominent maritime organizations in the Bay of Kotor, the Boka Navy<sup>4</sup> is not well-documented, given that the navy is primarily a military organization. However, women would accompany their husbands and participate in local events, often wearing traditional festive garments reminiscent of the Venetian style.



Fig. 5: A young Boka woman (Seferović, 2014, 100).

4 The Boka Navy (the fraternity of seafarers) was founded in 809, and is the oldest existing maritime institution in the world. Due to its cultural and historical significance, as well as the activities of its members, it was inscribed on UNESCO's list of Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2021 (Sbuteaga, 2022).

The narrative of the Bay of Kotor often emphasizes the themes of waiting and solitude, particularly in relation to life on the coast. There is a perception about women seafarers in neighbouring Croatia:

*It can be said that there are two zones in contemporary maritime Europe: the first includes northern maritime countries, while the second encompasses the southern ones. In the north, it is not uncommon to see a woman captain navigating a ship; however, such a sight would be sensational in the south, including in our country. In the north, the title of woman captain is a recognized profession, whereas, here, it refers to the wife of a sea captain (Lovrić, 1993, 92).*

The lack of historical data about Montenegrin seafarers' wives and their roles in society has led to an insufficient appreciation of their contributions, particularly during the two World Wars. The narrative of seafarers' wives in the folklore of the Bay of Kotor conveys a deep sense of introspection, uncertainty and contemplation. A woman might wait for her seafaring husband to return for many years, even up to 15 years (Seferović, 2014). This prototype of Boka women, condemned to wait, is recorded in the church on one of the two islands off the coast of the small town of Perast. The story of Jacinta Kunić presents one of the most salient cases of women whose fate both began and ended in waiting. 'But what is a Boka woman? A woman who waits' (*No, što je bokeška žena? Persona čekalica*) (Seferović, 2014, 80).

One of the most famous legends that captures the solitude and tragic fate of women who are waiting is the tale of *The Three Sisters*, or as it is most commonly referred to in the Bay of Kotor: *Tre Sorelle*. This legend is associated with an abandoned mansion in the local settlement of Prčanj.<sup>5</sup>

5 The interior of the Church of Our Lady of the Rock in Perast features various artefacts, including 2,500 gold and silver plaques that record the dates of sailors' departures and their expected arrivals. If a plaque displays only one date, it indicates that the sailor did not return from the sea. One of the most famous legends is about a woman named Jacinta Kunić, who waited for her husband for 25 years. He did not return from the sea, and during her wait, Jacinta crafted an icon from her hair. As her hair turned grey over the years, the colour of the icon changed from dark to grey as well. This icon is preserved on the island. According to legend, the island of Our Lady of the Rock was created by seafarers who placed stones and the remains of wrecked ships on a rock where local fishermen had discovered an icon of the Virgin with Christ. In gratitude, the seafarers and fishermen vowed to build a church on this site (Seferović, 2014, 79). The fifteenth-century Gothic palace tells the story of three sisters named Filomena, Graciana, and Rina. The sisters all fell in love with the same sailor and nobleman, who was in love with one of the sisters, Rina. Out of pity for her two sisters, Rina deprived herself of her love and dedicated herself, together with her sisters, to a life of solitude and prayers in their home. Upon hearing of this decision, the heart-broken sailor set out to sea and never returned. As the years went by, the first sister passed away and the remaining two sealed her window. After the second sister died, the third sister sealed her window as well. Tragically, after the third sister died, her window remained open as no one was left to close it (Seferović, 2014, 118).

The tales of solitude experienced by the women in the Bay of Kotor, were captured in a documentary directed by Živko Nikolić, titled ‘The Women Are Waiting’ (Žene čekaju, 1977). This documentary was filmed in the Bay of Kotor, amidst the ancient stone walls of the sailors’ homes. As a distant ship’s foghorn resonated over the water, the women experienced a profound sense of silence and solitude, reflecting their lifestyle (Rakonjac, 2021, 436). Some of the interviews in the documentary read as follows:

*It is very difficult to raise children without men, especially boys. You must be strong. Sometimes, when the father returns home, the children do not recognise him, as they only remember his picture. [...] I prefer staying home rather than going out, because if I go out alone, someone might say: ‘Look, he is drowning at sea and she is walking with her friends.’ I could not bear those rumours (Rakonjac, 2021, 436).*

Another seafarer’s wife says that she prefers to stay at home and wait, because if she goes out for a walk especially after 7pm, it might be misinterpreted ‘I hear music from the balcony of a nearby hotel. I then see other women walking with their husbands, and sometimes, when I walk alone on the street, I feel awkward.’ In addition to narratives filled with loneliness and melancholy, the faces of women waiting for their husbands ‘speak more than words; this inner drama is reflected in both their youthful and wrinkled faces’ (Rakonjac, 2021, 436).

In the era of globalization and active online communities, along with the support of organizations advocating for women in the maritime sector (Women in Maritime, 2021), women are now sharing their experiences through blogs or personal stories. Attention-grabbing websites discovered during this research are dedicated to supporting the wives of seafarers and their families in areas such as health, social life, and family issues. An example is the article *Advice for Seafarers’ Wives, Partners and Families* (The Mission to Seafarers, 2024). The rise of online space for seafarers’ wives has enabled women to share their concerns, particularly regarding the lives of seafarers. Additionally, writing about the challenging life of seafarers at sea has promoted shared group values and perspectives, such as depicting seafarers as heroes. As a result, Chinese women have felt comfort, discovering that their partners had a demanding and unique life at sea (Tang, 2010). The findings of scholarly articles examining the experiences of seafarers’ wives are more or less consistent, highlighting issues such as women’s social isolation, emotional labour, and stress resulting from their partner’s lifestyle (Thomas, 2003). Regardless of their location, seafarer’s wives in the UK, China, and India require support networks (Thomas, 2003; Thomas, Sampson & Minghua, 2003). Seafarers’ wives bear the responsibility for the success of their husbands’ careers as well as for preserving the customs and tradition of the maritime seafaring community, particularly in small patriarchal cultures with a rich maritime heritage, such as that of the island of Chios (Katsounis,



Lekakou & Paradeisi, 2020). The situation is similar in the Philippines, where a seafarer's wife has a vital role in organizing social and family activities and cherishing kinship (Sampson & Acejo, 2016).

Countries with a maritime tradition have erected tributes to seafarers' wives as a gesture of appreciation for their patience and sacrifices (Yur & Nas, 2012). These tributes are often manifested in art, typically through statues placed in prominent locations along the shore. Notable examples of statues depicting waiting women include the Statue of the Little Mermaid in Copenhagen, the Gloucester Fishermen's Wives' Memorial in Massachusetts (which features a woman with two children), and the Monument to the Wives of Sailors in Novorossiysk (depicting a woman with a child gazing out to sea). In Montenegro, the bronze sculpture of the Ballerina in the town of Budva, often symbolically compared to the Statue of the Little Mermaid in Copenhagen, conveys a sense of solitude and longing. According to legend, the sculpture tells the story of a girl waiting for her sailor groom, who never returned from the sea.

## NEW CURRENTS

According to data from the Montenegrin website *Muzej žena Crne Gore* (2018), the post-war period brought significant historical changes. One section titled *Friends – The Movement of Women in Montenegro 1943–1953* highlights an initiative for change. Women asserted their rights to education and employment in an effort to break free from the restrictions imposed by the traditional patriarchal society (Muzej žena Crne Gore, 2018). Furthermore, important movements, such as the Antifascist Front of Women (AFŽ), united women in their struggle against injustice. Women came together and raised their voices at various events organised by local, rural, and municipal committees and trade unions. Despite their recognized contributions to the country's rebuilding efforts after the Second World War, women were not regarded as equals, and the patriarchal narrative portraying women as the weaker sex, along with the discourse of women primarily supporting the family, persisted in post-war Yugoslavia (Smolovic Jones, 2019). Further factors that have contributed to raising the importance of women's welfare among seafarers include the influence of: the International Transport Workers Federation (ITWF, 2023), headquartered in London with representatives in Brussels, the International Maritime Organization (IMO, 2023), and the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2023). Additionally, the initiatives undertaken by the International Maritime Organization, of which Montenegro became a member in 2006, aim to enhance gender equality in shipping and improve the inclusion of women in the maritime sector. The International Maritime Organization (IMO) has been actively supporting initiatives aimed at empowering women in the shipping industry, and collaborates with organizations such as the Women's International Shipping and Training

Association (WISTA, 2020). In 2022, the IMO established 18 May as the International Day for Women in Maritime to encourage women to take an equal role in the seafaring community. As stated by the former Secretary-General of the IMO, Kitack Lim, women working both onshore and onboard should be celebrated – specifically, all those ‘women who are contributing to the future of maritime: navigators, engineers, surveyors, CEOs, managers, representatives of government and industry, those chairing IMO meetings, and women in every role across the industry’ (IMO, 2023).

There is no doubt that the first sector to open its doors to a significant number of women in seafaring within the labour market is the cruise ship industry. Statistics indicate that approximately 19% of the crew on cruise ships are women, while 81% are men. Although women are involved in hotel management and hospitality on board, most are employed in positions referred to as ‘white-collar personnel’ (Alderton et al., 2004, 18). Similarly, the ratio of women to men in employment is 18:82, favouring men (Wu, 2003, 13). Additionally, the highest positions on cruise ships are predominantly held by men, as is evidenced by the fact that the first female captain was appointed only in 2007 (Končar, 2016, 155).

The integration of women into the seafaring profession must be examined from multiple perspectives and understood as a social, political, cultural, and economic phenomenon.

The third-wave feminism that emerged in the 1990s coincided with a growing economic necessity for increased female participation in the seafaring market. This period saw significant institutional changes and shifts in the organization of the household, which played a crucial role in the evolution of modern labour economics. As a result, there was a transition from the concept of ‘a woman with a job’ to that of ‘a woman with a career’ (Goldin, 2006). There are two avenues through which women may face discrimination in human resources practices: institutional discrimination, which arises from the inherent structures and practices within organizations, and personal discrimination, which is influenced by the attitudes and levels of sexism among organizational decision-makers (Stamarski & Hing, 2015). It is worth mentioning that the rise of the #MeToo movement in 2006 has highlighted significant concerns regarding sexual and gender harassment, as well as the inadequacies of the existing institutional bodies to address these issues. This movement has not only brought attention to individual cases of harassment but has also prompted discussions about the broader social and structural factors concerning women’s roles (De Benedictis, Orgad & Rottenberg, 2019).

One of the driving economic forces behind the improved inclusion of women seafarers is the shortage of officers in the labour market (Kitada, 2013). Given the data on this shortage, particularly regarding officers, there is a pressing need to recruit high-quality personnel and ensure sustainability. According to information available on the official website of the International Maritime

Organization (2023), women represent only 2% of the approximately 1.6 million seafarers worldwide. In the case of Montenegro, the traditional role of women in a patriarchal society – viewed primarily as those taking care of the family (European Union, 2017) – has long influenced the collective mindset, likely contributing to the scarcity of women in managerial positions, such as officers and captains. It is noteworthy that, as of 2010, women accounted for the majority (50.6%) of the approximately 620,000 citizens in Montenegro (Gender Equality Profile of Montenegro, 2021, 9). Moreover, Montenegro currently lacks an official Register of Seafarers, which would provide essential data about the roughly 7,000 seafarers, including information on gender, the types of vessels they operate, and the numbers of embarked and active male and female seafarers.

Montenegro and neighbouring Croatia – both ex-Yugoslav countries that share similar cultural and linguistic policies regarding gender – have implemented numerous initiatives aimed at encouraging women's participation in the shipping sector. Unlike Montenegro, the Republic of Croatia joined the European Union in 2013 and took significant steps to promote gender equality in preparation for EU membership. These steps included the establishment of national policies designed to enhance the status of women in various areas of society. Such efforts reflect Croatia's commitment to aligning itself with EU standards and values regarding gender equality and women's rights (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2024). Additionally, discrimination in language should be minimized, particularly in the naming of occupations held by women that have traditionally been designated by masculine<sup>6</sup> terms.

However, the figures are not particularly encouraging, even for other maritime countries. Brcko, Androjna and Srše (2020) investigated the employment of seafarers in Slovenia, Croatia and Italy, providing comparative data that indicates that only a small number of women have attended maritime schools. Only a limited number – up to 20 – achieve the highest rank in shipping, with only six women serving as captains. In Slovenia, women make up 1.1% of seafarers, while in Italy the figure is 0.5% and in Croatia it is 10% (Brcko, Androjna & Srše, 2020, 63). It is also important to note that a gender work gap prevails in fisheries, which, like seafaring, is considered a male-dominated profession. The statistics are generally similar across the entire Mediterranean region: women are often perceived as unskilled and incapable of part-time work due to the long voyages involved (European Commission, 2019).

6 The language policy in Montenegro and Croatia must adhere to gender-sensitive language when forming professional titles. Titles for female positions are created by adding suffixes to the masculine forms (*-ica*, *-ka*, and *-inja*). However, care should be taken to avoid using female forms if they carry a pejorative connotation, as is the case with the Montenegrin term *kapetanica*, which refers to a shipmaster's wife rather than a female captain (Dževerdanović Pejović, 2021).

## THE CURRENT SITUATION AND POTENTIAL ‘COURSES’

The lack of women choosing male-dominated professions may be linked to legal and institutional constraints. Regarding legislative alignment and gender policy in Montenegro, one of the national strategic documents aimed at combating gender discrimination, the National Strategy for Gender Equality 2021–2025 (2021), seeks to enhance the national framework and legal capacity to address discrimination based on sex and gender. The Montenegrin Statistical Office regularly publishes a report titled *Men and Women in Montenegro*. The latest, eighth edition provides a brief overview of the roles of men and women, aiming to demonstrate through statistical data that they have ‘equal opportunities to exercise their rights and equally benefit from the results achieved’ (Women and Men in Montenegro, 2022). The most recent report on women’s employment shows that men account for 64.1% of legislators, senior officials, and managers, while women represent the remaining 35.9% (Women and Men in Montenegro, 2022, 68). Additionally, men are significantly overrepresented in military professions, holding 86.7% of these positions. Furthermore, data from 2021 indicates that among the overall 172,100 active employees, men comprise 51.4% while women make up 48.6% (Women and Men in Montenegro, 2022, 69).

According to data from the Montenegrin Statistical Office (Monstat) regarding the number of students who graduated in 2021, a total of 1,634 female students graduated in the last five years in Montenegro, representing 59.2% of graduates, while 1,125 male students, or 40.8%, graduated during the same period (Monstat, 2022). An analysis of internal data on the enrolment policy at the Faculty of Maritime Studies in Kotor (FoMSK) reveals interesting trends regarding the male-to-female admission ratio.

Charts 1–4 illustrate a trend of male to female enrolment in the technical programme departments over a six-year period, specifically in Nautical Studies and Transport (NST), Marine Engineering (ME) and Marine Electrical Engineering (MEE), as well as in the socially oriented study programme of Maritime Management and Logistics (MML).

As shown in Charts 1–4, among the 80 students enrolled in the Nautical Department of the Faculty of Maritime Studies in Kotor over the last six years, it is clear that predominantly men have enrolled in the technical departments. In contrast, the average number of women admitted to the social department of Maritime Management and Logistics significantly exceeds the number of enrolled male students (75% versus 25%, respectively), which shows a more favourable trend for female students. This pattern can be attributed to the fact that students of Maritime Management and Logistics, regardless of gender, often seek employment in port facilities and companies on land, including ports, marinas, harbour-master’s offices, manning agencies, and businesses in the forwarding, transport, and logistics sectors. It is important to note that not all students earning a bachelor’s degree at the Faculty of Maritime Studies intend to go to sea; therefore,



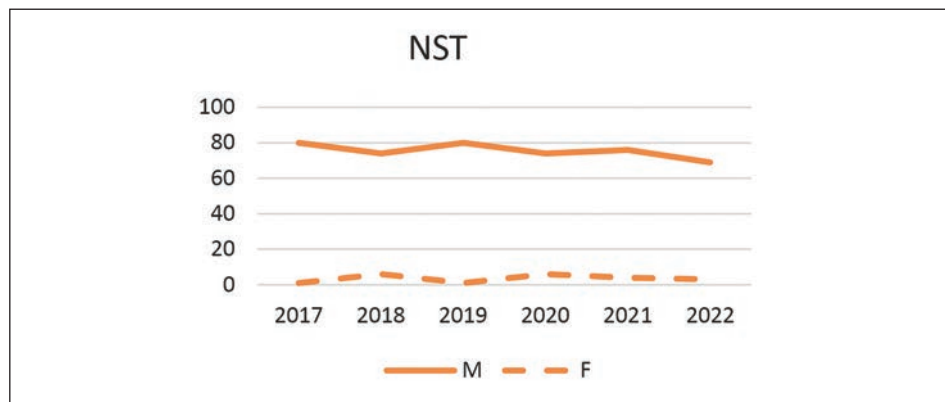


Chart 1: The male-to-female admission ratio for the NST study programme.

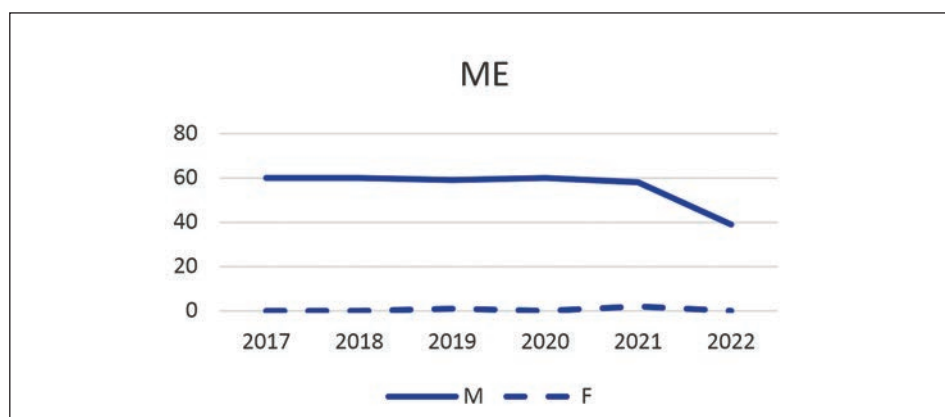


Chart 2: The male-to-female admission ratio for the ME study programme.

not all maritime workers can be classified as ‘seafarers’ in the strictest sense. Concerning managerial positions within the Directorate of Maritime Transport in Montenegro, which oversees seven state-owned companies (including ports, harbourmaster’s offices, and shipping companies in Kotor and Bar), women occupy, on average, only 18% of these roles (Gender Equality Profile of Montenegro, 2021, 71). This indicates that the sector must become more gender-responsive and implement a legal framework that facilitates greater participation of women. The same report identifies the sectors of energy, transport, and the environment as the three areas with the least gender awareness in Montenegro (Gender Equality Profile of Montenegro, 2021, 70).

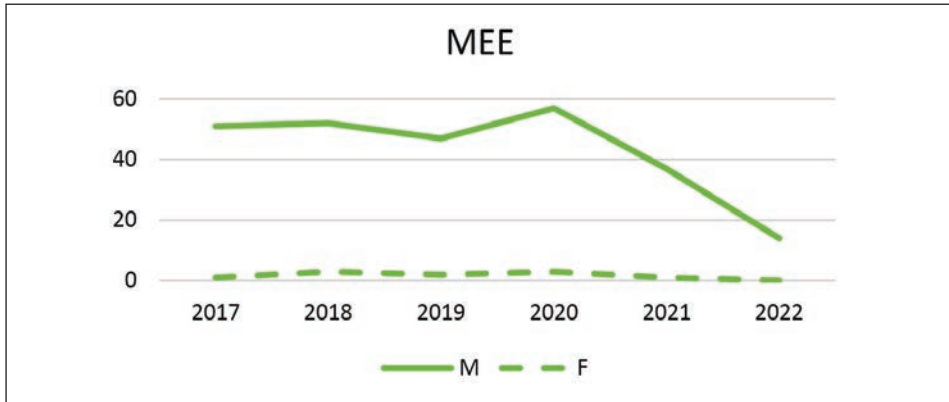


Chart 3: The male-to-female admission ratio for the MEE study programme.

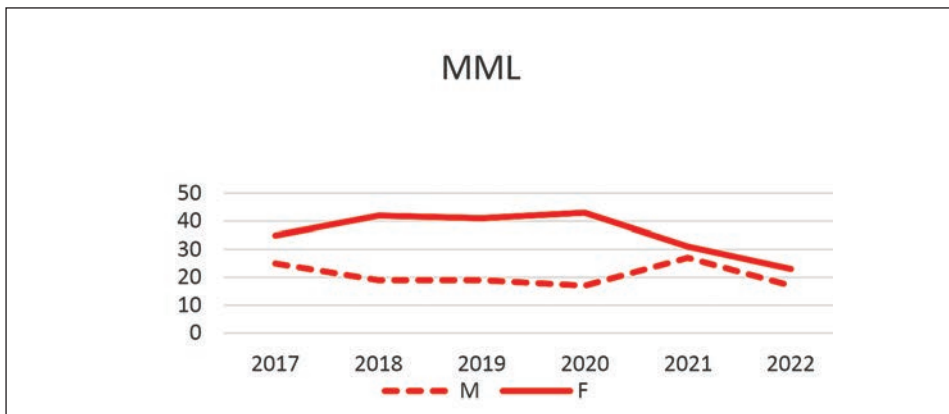


Chart 4: The male-to-female admission ratio for the MML study programme.

One potential initiative to promote women's participation in the seafaring sector involves the use of role models and education (Brcko, Androjna & Srše, 2020, 63). The Faculty of Maritime Studies in Montenegro has utilized its official website to share information about women seafarers in the country, particularly its alumni. By posting this information on higher education websites, the faculty aims to highlight the significance of this issue and the increasing number of women seafarers who have challenged traditional stereotypes. A recent article titled *Happy International Day of Women in Seafaring* (FoMSK1, 2023) was dedicated to the International Day for Women in Maritime. An analysis of the text on the university and faculty's official site reveals two key themes associated with Montenegrin women seafarers:

‘we are all equal’ and ‘in the same boat’ (Dževerdanović Pejović, 2021, 66). This perspective aligns with Kitada’s (2009) research on women in seafaring, which states that women often strive to integrate by working collaboratively as part of a team, sometimes maintaining a low profile and concealing their femininity while avoiding discussions about family issues. By doing so, women feel comfortable collaborating with their male counterparts and adapting to the male-dominated environment on board. The mentioned article features the experiences of three students employed in various departments. It illustrates how these women have overcome the superstition that a woman on the ship brings bad luck, indicating their ability to advance beyond the rank of sailor to positions such as officer or captain.

Moreover, the sentiment of being ‘the only woman aboard’, as one student noted in a text published on the faculty’s site in 2020: ‘Our ladies take over the helm’ (FoMSK2, 2020), is regarded as a privilege. One female navy captain also remarked that physical appearance is not important, stating, ‘Nobody would guess that I am the captain of the ship’. This supports Kitada’s (2013) conclusion that women seafarers around the world exhibit similar behavioural patterns, striving to fit into the male-dominated shipboard environment while establishing their own positions and integrity. This ‘maintainer’ strategy is considered the most stable approach among women seafarers (Kitada, 2013).

Regarding the gender profile in Montenegro, women are poorly represented in decision-making bodies, have a limited presence in the entrepreneurship sector, and are underrepresented in managerial positions (Gender Equality Profile in Montenegro, 2021). We believe that the number of women serving on ships will increase in the coming years, reaching at least the same percentage of women found in the Montenegrin military (14.7%), according to the article published on the official website of the Montenegrin Government (Ministry of Defence, 2021).

Initiatives aimed at promoting the inclusion of women seafarers in the maritime sector and recognizing their active roles are emerging from various sources. Firstly, as Montenegro progresses toward EU accession, it must adopt gender-sensitive policies and improve the integration of women across all areas of social, economic, and political life. The National Strategy for Gender Equality 2021–2025 (2021) aims to encourage women to support institutional policies that promote diversity and prevent discrimination. This strategy is aligned with key UN documents addressing gender equality, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (OHCHR, 1979) and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action from 1995 (United Nations Women, 2015), both of which seek to eliminate all forms of discrimination. Additionally, the National Strategy for Sustainable Development of Montenegro until 2030 (2016) addresses human resources and aims to ensure equal access to environmental and social resources, as well as equal opportunities for both men and women. Furthermore, regarding institutional awareness, Brcko, Androjna and Srše (2020, 63) recommend that maritime education institutions incorporate gender-sensitive issues into their curricula. In Montenegro, the promotion of women in maritime

professions is supported by government reports, NGO activism, the influence of international organizations, and campaigns that highlight the roles of women in traditionally male-dominated professions.

## CONCLUSION

Women in Montenegro have made significant progress from the confines of a patriarchal society, especially during the tumultuous periods of Montenegrin history, which has led to their gradual integration into traditionally masculine roles. The archetypal traits of women in Montenegro analysed in this paper often reflect a complex interplay of heroism and solitude, deeply rooted in the region's cultural and historical context. These traits encompass various areas, including the Bay of Kotor, the Montenegrin hinterland, and the northern parts of Montenegro. In addition, both concepts analysed in this paper testify that women have assumed multiple and diverse roles and that the Montenegrin narrative sublimates the notion of woman's beauty, toughness, bravery, and heroism, while simultaneously acknowledging the profound solitude that women experience (Vukčević, 2006; Seferović, 2014; Ćirović, 2021). The strength of a Montenegrin 'man-woman' lies in her capacity to embrace antagonistic roles: to raise a family and defend her family, heal wounds and carry arms on the battlefield, lead battalions, accompany her partner on sea voyages, and raise her voice in search of social justice. On the other hand, she manages to embrace solitude in her predestined role as the one who is waiting, creating the finest artwork, willing to learn, and gaining access to education. Regardless of their status – whether queens, nobles, saints, revolutionaries, fighters, humanitarians, artists, or ordinary women – the impact of their actions transcends time (Todorović, Todorović & Miličković, 2022, 12).

As a result of new trends arising from democratic movements and efforts to implement international laws and strategies related to women's empowerment, Montenegrin women have become more visible in positions that were traditionally reserved for men. However, it is clear that in certain sectors, such as transport, energy and maritime industries, women still lag behind men, particularly in managerial roles. This also applies to leadership positions on board, which can be attributed to inadequate legal and social policies, as well as the underlying patriarchal nature of the society, where women continue to bear the burden of family responsibilities.

The limitations of this study arise from its brief timeframe, indicating that a more thorough historical and factual analysis could yield deeper insights. Nonetheless, the challenge of this research lies in integrating various perspectives – socio-cultural, historical, and linguistic. By doing so, we portray Montenegrin women and their future pathways from multiple angles. Our approach allows other scholars to explore the position of women in different cultures, particularly in identifying the universal constraints imposed on women due to gender stereotypes.



## POMORSKI ARHETIPI ČRNOGORSKIH ŽENSK: JUNAŠTVO IN SAMOTA

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## POVZETEK

*Prispevek celovito obravnava položaj črnogorskih žensk pred drugo svetovno vojno in po njej v tradicionalnem patriarhalnem okolju. V njem so osvetljene različne značilnosti črnogorskih žensk, vpetih v prizadevanja, da bi jih vzgojili v dobre matere in žene, dobre »moške-ženske«, pogumne, poštene, predvsem pa podrejene možu. V luči tega predstavljamo različne vidike črnogorskih žensk, zlasti tiste, ki jih uvrščajo med ženske bojavnice v burni črnogorski zgodovini. Da bi zajeli čim širšo sliko, raziskujemo, kako se narativ o črnogorskih ženskah razvija glede na specifična geografska okolja, zlasti pa govorimo o ženskah, ki so odvisne od življenja ob morju. Prispevek osvetljuje tudi koncept čakanja, ki je skupen široki skupini žena pomorščakov in tako tvori specifično družbeno in kulturno skupnost. Ugotavljamo, da je položaj žensk po drugi svetovni vojni nekoliko vidnejši in da so takrat ženske postale odločnejše pri uveljavljanju svoje vloge v družbi in poklicih, v katerih so sicer prevladovali moški. Te spremembe opisujemo kot potrebo po skladnosti z »novimi vetrovi«, ki jih mora Črna gora izpolniti v procesu pristopnih pogajanj za članstvo v EU. Gibanja za opolnomočenje žensk v poklicih, v katerih prevladujejo moški, kot je pomorstvo, so postopoma spremenila podobo žensk, ki na ladji prinašajo nesrečo ali čakajo na povratek moža, v ženske, ki z ramo ob rami na ladji plujejo s svojimi moškimi kolegi. Zato prispevek s pomočjo primerjalne, analitične in interpretativne metode proučuje, kako se nova resničnost odraža v jeziku medijev in tudi umetniških del. Rezultati povzemajo »plovbo« črnogorskih žensk od patriarhalnega koncepta čakajočih žensk in žensk bojavnice do položaja »vseh v istem čolnu«. Da bi spodbudili ženske k delovanju v pomorstvu, podrobno predstavimo konkretne ukrepe, ki jih je sprejela Fakulteta za pomorstvo Kotor Univerze v Črni Gori, na primer predstavitve vzornic. V prispevku poudarimo tudi potrebo po pomembnejši vlogi pristojnih organov in odločevalcev na državni ravni. Vse paradigme, ki v prispevku predstavljajo prehod od starega k novemu, obravnavamo z družbenega, kulturnega in jezikovnega vidika. Ob tem upoštevamo pretekle dogodke, ki so pustili sled v kulturni in kolektivni miselni podobi črnogorskih žensk. Prispevek v zaključku nakaže možnosti za primerjalno etnografsko analizo položaja žensk v patriarhalnem in demokratičnem okolju.*

*Ključne besede: ženske v pomorstvu, patriarhalna družba, vloge spolov, ženske bojavnice, čakajoče ženske*

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