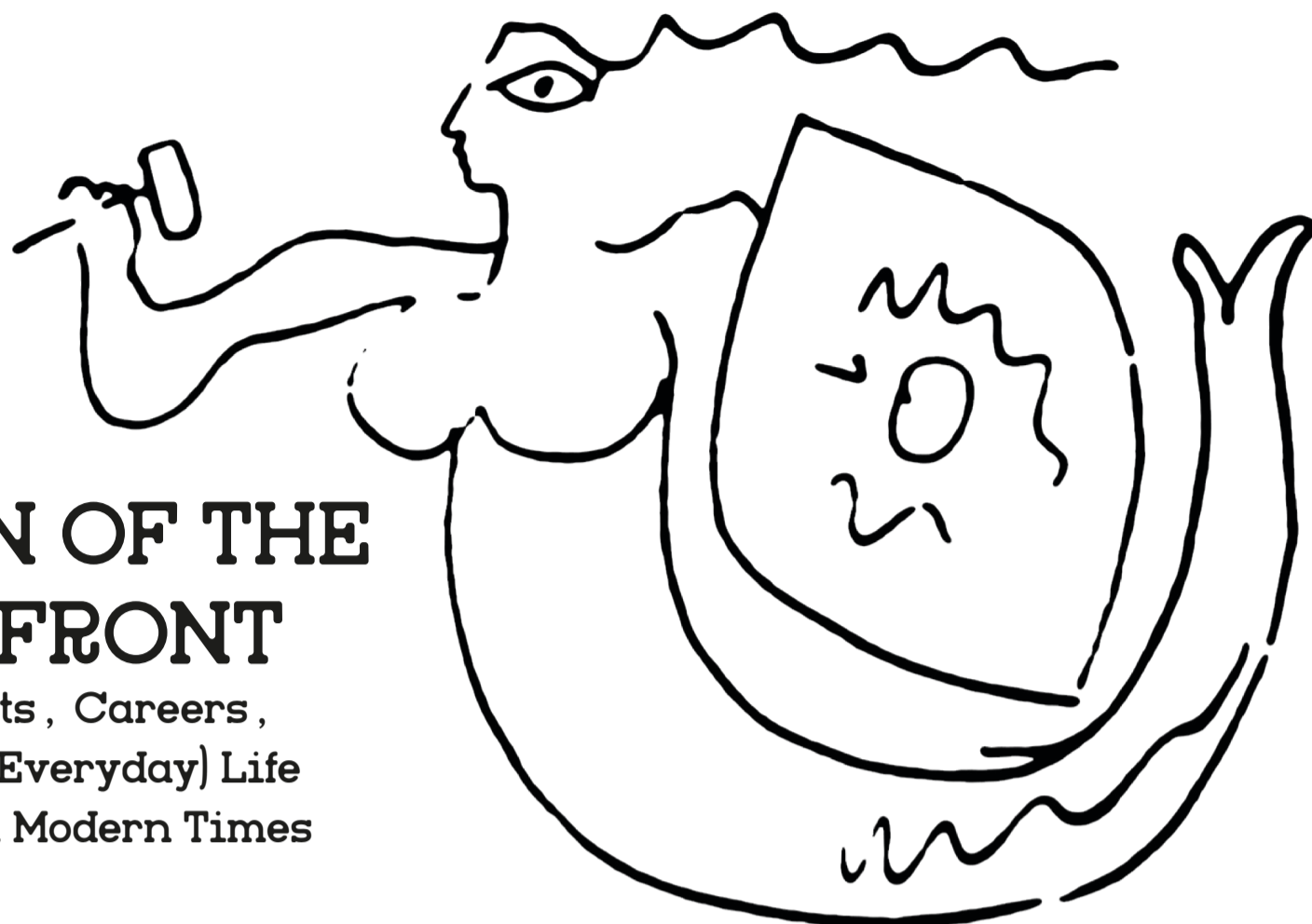


International
Hybrid
Workshop



WOMEN OF THE WATERFRONT

Gendering Ports , Careers ,
Relations and (Everyday) Life
Trajectories in Modern Times

ROME

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Casa Internazionale delle Donne
Sala Simonetta Tosi | Via Lungara 19

ABSTRACTS

KEYNOTE LECTURE

Valerie Burton (Memorial University of Newfoundland – Canada)
*Puzzling Amongst the Pieces: A Keynote Presentation for
'Women of the Waterfront'*

It is all of four decades since feminists set about profiling the power geometry of gender that crossed oceans and was articulated on the 19th and early 20th century waterfront. No lack of ambition accompanied the moves by which we foregrounded women's paid and unpaid work in the port and highlighted the significance of household management strategies that made a difference to the daily economic survival of the generations that experienced the changes in shipping and trade effected by capital and empire. Had the importance of this work been attended to in maritime history's mainstream participants in this conference might now be setting out without need of this reminder: we work in a field where a concern with and for women necessitates keen challenges to the gender-essentializing and naturalizing premises of dominant political economies/ecologies whether those are mobilized under liberal, neo-liberal or left-wing frameworks.

'Puzzling amongst the pieces' thus reflects on a sobering history of ontological displacement, epistemological misrecognition and theoretical denial in respect of the female subjects of maritime history. In this keynote I practise historiography as an act in the present on behalf of the future, and by means of personal and professional reflection on three pivotal areas of seafaring and merchant port history I suggest new prospects for our studies of women's work, relations and (everyday) life trajectories.

Taking issue with quotidian boundaries of maritime time and space in *Separate spheres* I reference the continued conceptualization of the merchant vessel as the venue of 'men apart'. By rendering women as the categorical rather than relational absence in men's working lives the totalization of the ship has furthered that separation of production and reproduction that makes the discounting of women's activities and claims to resources possible. *Sailortown women* considers how the forgetfulness by 'post-feminist' historians of the significance of the perniciousness of dual-standard sexual morality in port towns has ill-served perspectives on the tendentious and prejudicial character of the lines drawn between legitimate and illegitimate economic activity. Particular reference is made to the devaluing of women's personal service and care work outside and inside the home. In *Making fish* I profile eco-feminist claims that the long history of the commodification of women's labour in fish-processing requires our closer attention to the capitalist and patriarchal appropriation of natural resources. I concentrate on what fishing communities in crisis are coming to understand: the significance of sourcing an historical record that might dispel the binary closures that stand in the way of reconstructing economic and social relations for gender equity at local, trans-local, and global levels.

'Puzzling amongst the pieces' recognizes the claims of ontologies than are connected, dispersed, indebted and relational in a reconceptualization of the maritime economy as non-essentialist and situated. It invites delegates to consider how their own work might remain within the struggle against the disempowerment that stems from the modelling of men as at the centre and women as peripheral and centripetal in the post-1800 maritime world whilst not reproducing the multiple exclusions that have historically characterized that model.

1st SESSION

La donna è mobile: Female Mobility, Labour, Sexuality and Coercion in a Global Perspective

Sagarika Naik (Independent Researcher – India)

Gendering communities: Trans-national Networks in Yangon (Rangoon, Myanmar), 1840–1937

The Japanese prostitutes (*Karayuki-san*) for instance, served only to their Japanese clients. Oriya hotels in Rangoon port provided the comforts to thousands of Uriyas that they pass through. Some Tamil brothels in Rangoon were open only to Chettiars. A Cantonese of prostitute who located in the Rangoon Port put it quite simply in her testimony to a Singapore court, my customers are of various nationalists, including Tamil.

E.J.L. Andrew, *Indian Labour in Rangoon*, 1934

To fully grasp the processes regarding gendering communities and socio-economic activities in colonial European/Atlantic port cities, one must

consider the distinctive Asian experience. Besides setting aside the pre-existing idea that women alone could not travel and could not cross the sea, we need a micro-historical method to comprehend the gender dynamics while analysing the Asian port towns, their networks and connections patterns, where women were able to gain and maintain distinctive socio-economic positions. My paper will focus on the city port of Yangon (Rangoon, Myanmar) from the mid-19th century to the early 20th century. Over that period, when the development of commerce and industry also corresponded to the increase in the city's population, Yangon became a labour-migration hotspot for people primarily from India, China, Ceylon (Sri Lanka), and Malaya (Malaysia). I will also emphasise the challenges and hardships women faced on their voyages and illustrate how multiculturalism intersects in the Burmese port city.

Müge Özbek (Kadir Has University, Istanbul – Turkey)

*The Everyday Mobility of Women in the Istanbul Ports at the Turn of the 19th century**

This paper explores the everyday mobility of women in Istanbul ports at the turn of the 19th century through a 'mobility studies' perspective, considering it as a complex process influenced by factors like social demographics, class, age, race, family structures, and local transportation infrastructure. As the Ottoman Empire rapidly integrated into the global capitalist system from the mid-19th century onwards, Istanbul underwent significant physical expansion and infrastructural transformation. This aligns with a broader global trend, where port cities adopted infrastructure projects to enhance mobility, allowing people to cover greater distances in shorter timeframes. Harvey's concept of 'space-time compression' underscores the necessity for swift movement in both time and space, in tandem with the spread of capital. This compression was most keenly felt in Istanbul's ports, where spatial and temporal dynamics began to shift. Women unexpectedly make frequent appearances in this scene. Mobility studies emphasize the intimate connection between mobility and power dynamics. Doreen Massey extends Harvey's concept, introducing the idea of the 'power geometry of space-time compression.' She points out that increased mobility and accessibility do not uniformly benefit all social groups. Mobility is influenced by power relations, leading experiences and representations of movement to vary along lines of class, identity, nationality, religion, physical attributes, and gender. By focusing on everyday mobility of women, this paper aims to provide a new historical understanding into the 19th-century transformations of Istanbul and its ports with an intersectional gender perspective, highlighting the relationship between mobility and the social structures, inequalities, and power relations.

*This research is supported by Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey (TÜBİTAK) 3501 Project, *Everyday Mobility in Late 19th Century and Early 20th Century Istanbul*, Start Date: 03/15/2023- End date:03/15/2023, Kadir Has University, Istanbul.

Livinus Ikwuako Okeke (Imo State University, Owerri – Nigeria)

‘Women of the Waterfront’ at Calabar (Nigeria) and Bata (Equatorial Guinea): the Female Side of Igbo Migrant Labour, 1928–76

Ports in colonial Nigeria were full of patriarchal activities in tandem with the British colonial government’s parochialism. Port Calabar in Southern Nigeria served as the point of exit for migrant labour from Igboland to Port Bata in Equatorial Guinea, where Spanish plantation owners recruited labourers to be employed in the plantations of Fernando Pó (Bioko) and Río Muni. While few scholarly works on some aspect of migrant labour regarding women joining their migrant labourers’ husbands in Equatorial Guinea exist (Mbah, 2022), attention has not been given yet to women only and how they contributed to the West African port economy, i.e., acting as middlemen in the recruiting agency as well as in trade activities, including sex. Therefore, the paper aims to fill this scholarly gap by focusing on women of the waterfronts that facilitated the migration of able men to Equatorial Guinea from the Nigerian port of Calabar. Relying on primary qualitative sources from the National Archives of Enugu, Calabar and Ibadan in Nigeria, the paper will show how local women indeed altered the patriarchal character of colonial Igboland and, as a result, also that of Calabar and Bata waterfronts, providing enormous contributions to colonial Nigeria economy.

Letonde Hermine Gbedo (Comitato per i Diritti Civili delle Prostitute aps, Trieste – Italy) and **Veronica Saba** (Comitato per i Diritti Civili delle Prostitute aps, Trieste – Italy)

Trafficking in Women at The Italian North-Eastern Border: Patterns of Women’s Agency and Mobility from the Perspective of a 20 Years Long Anti-Trafficking Project

The Italian North-Eastern border has always been crisscrossed by migratory routes, which are constantly changing. However, it is only since 2015 that the boom in arrivals from the Balkan Route has given media visibility to this border. The mainstream narrative of the phenomenon as well as, to some extent, the gaze of practitioners have made the aspect of arrivals of men and young boys predominant. Although this is statistically a fact of the phenomenon, women crossing this border have always been there, albeit less visible and mappable than men. Beginning with this historical-contextual framework, the paper offers a discussion of the evolutions of female migration in this border area, tracing its main profiles with particular attention to those who have been trafficked. The paper aims to reason about both the vulnerabilities and mobility strategies of migrant women in the current scenario. While in fact on the one hand, vulnerabilities are a consequence of contextual conditions in which people on the move find themselves entangled, on the other hand, the aid system, in perpetual distress, does not always manage to meet the expectations of self-determination of women, who beyond projects and labels keep alive their survival strategies.

2nd SESSION

Working Out Maritimity: Gender, Labour and the Port Fact

Matthew Ylitalo (University of St Andrews, Scotland – UK)

A Sisterhood of Knives: Women, Casual Labour and Translocality in the Arctic Trade, 1900–1912

Throughout the history of Arctic whaling, women participated as active, albeit historically marginalised figures within the trade. As early as the 1830s, the purchase receipts of knives point to Scottish women cleaning putrid whale bone in the company yards. This practice persisted throughout the nineteenth century, however, towards the end of the century, the industry diminished to the point that whaling alone was no longer financially viable. To adapt, Scottish enterprises, most based out of Dundee, turned to hiring Inuit and local Dundee women, both as a cost-saving measure and as a means for expanding industrial production of more natural resources. Inuit women in Baffin were sought for their expertise in using *uluit*, traditional crescent-shaped knives, to prepare polar bear, walrus and fox skins for export and sale. They also quarried mica and hauled it to the quay for shipment back to Scotland. In Dundee, girls and young women used knives to separate the mica laminae from quarried rock and process it for future industrial use. This talk, therefore, shows that women in the Arctic and Scotland were active participants in this maritime trade, and crucially, I argue that their specialized, cheap, temporal labour enabled the industry to evolve and survive well into the twentieth century. On a wider scale, these women make an important case study that engages theoretical discussions about how we ‘do transnational history’. Are historical figures and groups such as these transnational figures? How can scholars frame those limited by social status, temporal employment, cultural expectations or geographical and financial immobility as important historical actors? Here, I maintain that the labour of a translocal sisterhood of knives not only affected their own immediate and connected experiences, but their outputs and the industry’s operating practices to which they were intricately included extended to a global scale.

Alexei Kraikovski (University of Genova – Italy)

Ladies on the Coast. The Female Dimension of Maritimity in Imperial St. Petersburg (Russia).

Thinking of the 18th and 19th century St. Petersburg (Russia) as a center of what Rolf Strootman described as a maritime empire, i.e., an urban-centered space of intensive and heterogeneous maritime connections, we see inter alia a number of functions performed by women from different social layers. In my presentation I will discuss the place of female actors in the complex process of emergence of Modern Empire which claimed for the position of a dominant Baltic maritime power in many spheres. I will discuss the place of female herring sellers in the streets of St. Petersburg, and opportunities of female participation in the shipping commerce, and finally the introduction of water mobility technologies into the habitual routine life of the elite of St. Petersburg, including court ladies and the representatives of the ruling

family. Eventually, I will place this story into the general context of maritime development of St. Petersburg as a maritime metropolis, materialization of a dream about new, westernized and maritime Russia, demonstrating that the female population of the capital had its own agency and voice in this story.

Ariana Domínguez García (University of the Balearic Islands – Spain) and **Daniel J. Albero Santacreu** (University of the Balearic Islands – Spain)

Gendering the Port: Reinterpreting the Landscape of the Fishing Community of the Port of Palma (1940–2023)

Women from the fishing community of the port of Palma (Spain) have carried out a wide range of tasks related to the sea (e.g., fishing, fish sale and fishing equipment). However, their social and economic importance has been barely addressed by research carried out in the Balearic Islands, which has mainly considered those activities intrinsically linked to the sea. This gender bias has promoted a conceptualization and interpretation of the fishing landscape, both in its terrestrial and maritime dimensions, as an eminently masculinized space. In this presentation we will develop an alternative viewpoint by reinterpreting from a gender perspective the role that certain key spaces have had in the fishing port. In this sense, we will analyse how the spaces involved in women's activities (e.g., dock, fish market) have been also crucial in the symbolic construction of the fishing landscape. In addition, we will address how female participation in certain religious festivities that take place in the fishing port have been also essential in the identity construction of the community (e.g., Sant Pere procession). By means of a multiproxy methodology based on spatial analysis, oral memory, documentary research and participant observation, we will study how certain spaces become 'points of articulation' of the communal identity and the social organization of these communities both, in a quotidian and extraordinary basis. Furthermore, we will approach how the different regulatory and legal frameworks implemented by the European Union have promoted significant changes in these 'meeting places' since 1980's, thus affecting the role that women have had in the landscape construction of these fishing communities. In short, we seek to apply an intersectional perspective that takes into account the many relationships that exist between landscape, people, gender and material culture.

3rd SESSION

**Women Who Mind Their Own Business:
Female Maritime Entrepreneurship between
Europe and North America**

Luisa Muñoz Abeledo (Santiago de Compostela University – Spain)

Business Occupations for Women in North-West Spanish Port Cities (1880–1915)

This contribution analyzes women's participation on business and commerce in some principal North Western Spanish fishing and commercial ports. The

study uses different and varied sources: trade directories, newspaper advertisements, industrial and commerce taxes to know the kind of business women did in different Spanish Atlantic ports (Vigo, La Coruña). The paper links those sources with demographic sources (nominative population census) commercial letters from different corporations to discover how important was female business participation in local economies, in which economic sectors were located, and if there was social mobility in their professional lives. The study reveals the activities of lower middle-class women in business, especially in commercial enterprise. Women entrepreneurs contribute to economic modernization and urban growth in those Spanish Ports creating employment through their participation on different local companies.

John Odin Jensen (University of West Florida – USA)

Female Maritime Entrepreneurs and the Marketing of Women's Domestic Labor on Canadian and American Great Lakes Vessels 1865–1910

Building on the chapter ‘The Labors of Lydia Dale: Domestic Labor on Ships and on Shore’ in the forthcoming MERMAIDS volume, this paper is a prosopography of women who became brokers of maritime domestic labor in large Great Lakes port cities. Operating ‘intelligence offices,’ women such as Ellen Easton of Buffalo, Elizabeth Honey, and Isabella Ross supplied domestic labor for businesses, middle-class homes, and, most notably, for Great Lakes commercial vessels. These women's involvement in the maritime economy, geographic location near ports and commercial districts, and interactions with a ‘maritime’ clientele made these women's businesses distinct among the larger pool of urban domestic employment brokers. Like the domestic servants who secured shipboard employment, these entrepreneurial women's choice to conduct business within the overwhelmingly masculine maritime domain provided them with enhanced personal and economic agency but could, in many instances, also place them on the social margins of urban and maritime life. Mostly born in Canada or the United Kingdom, these women combined their individual life experiences, social connections, specific national and cultural identities, and knowledge of the overlapping domestic and maritime economies and languages to become nodal figures in a complex international labor network. Pulling together fragmentary records from newspapers, vital records, and other sources, this paper presents a profile of female maritime entrepreneurship on the North American Great Lakes – a distinct region of the greater Northern European/Atlantic Maritime World.

Paola Avallone (Istituto di storia dell'Europa mediterranea-CNR – Italy) and **Raffaella Salvemini** (Istituto di storia dell'Europa mediterranea-CNR – Italy)

Women of the Sea. Some Examples of Female Entrepreneurs in the Maritime Universe of Nineteenth-Century Southern Italy

In 1788 the Procida priest and martyr of 1799 Marcello Eusebio Scotto in his Nautical Catechism focused on the extraordinary qualities of Procida women, ready to replace men in the management of the family but also in the management of 'family finances'. Scotti died tragically and did not have the opportunity to see those 5 women who, approximately 50 years after its publication in 1834, became part of the long list of shipowners on the island. This was not a prerogative of the island. Other women shipowners and owners of ships can also be found in Sorrento, Gaeta and Torre del Greco. We do not know whether they managed or at least had an active part in the administration and economic choices of these companies. The impression up to this moment is that they were more owners of ship's carats, brought as dowry, than owners of ships. However, new research has brought to light women from Procida capable of managing the ship company. This paper is aimed at this type of involvement where we will try to reconstruct not only the profile of these women, but also the economic dimensions of their business. The objective is to create a profile on women and economic power in a typically male sector, that of the sea.

4rd SESSION

Souls at Work: Women and Men Navigating 'Home-Ports'

Kristof Loockx (University of Antwerp – Belgium)

Identities, Experiences and Life Trajectories: The Women of Antwerp's and Boston's Sailortowns, 1880–1900

During the second half of the nineteenth century, the growth of trade and increasing migration created bustling neighbourhoods near the port, or so-called sailortowns. Both contemporaries and historians have long portrayed these waterfront districts as catering areas for seafarers looking for temporary shelter and entertainment. From a gender perspective, the literature has therefore generally examined (transient) women in the context of lodging houses and brothels. However, this focus explains why we know little about the identities, experiences and life trajectories of women who belonged to local sailortown communities. Based on a close examination of population registers and census records, this paper aims to explore age structures, geographical and social backgrounds, marital status, and occupations of women who officially resided in the sailortowns of Antwerp and Boston at the end of the nineteenth century. Moreover, apart from investigating group characteristics, the paper will also substantiate findings with individual life courses of women in order to better understand their experiences, decisions and actions. In sum, by studying the women of sailortown both individually and collectively this research aims to paint a more comprehensive and layered picture of female roles at the Atlantic waterfront during the second half of the nineteenth century.

Maura E. Hametz (James Madison University – USA)

Women Working Overseas: Alma Morpurgo's Maritime Migrations

Through the lens of the experiences of Alma Morpurgo, a polyglot who worked as a secretary and translator for the international insurance conglomerate *Assicurazioni Generali* in Trieste and *Nestlé* in Valparaiso and Santiago, Chile, the paper proposes to explore women engaged in corporate commercial relations in maritime societies. The research uncovers women's contributions in roles that required high level administrative skills, education, and literacy in multiple languages, but whose jobs were largely invisible in the corporate hierarchy. Women occupying gendered 'secretarial' positions 'below the corporate radar' performed vital tasks that complemented work done on quays, piers, and in port and maritime industrial facilities that have generally been the subject of studies of women in port culture. In addition, international contacts and practical skills including multi-lingualism afforded women opportunities for migration and helped them to reframe their lives as emigrants in waterfront communities around the world. Dismissed from the *Generali* in 1938 with the passage of the racial laws in Italy, Morpurgo sought work in the port communities in Fiume/Rijeka and Rome and attempted clandestine immigration to British Palestine before migrating to Valparaiso, Chile. The paper engages the literature of Jewish maritime migration and the 'victim diaspora' of the late 1930s and 1940s, and also, through Morpurgo's experience in Trieste as a Central European port, it highlights women's part in supporting and promoting social welfare and assistance for refugees in port cities where agencies like HIAS and the Jewish Joint Distribution Committee were headquartered. Finally, the paper examines the family and family units affected by the fluency of port and waterfront culture, and the lives of like Morpurgo who continually refashioned their lives and challenged gender norms and expectations as they moved, voluntarily or by necessity, to take advantage of economic opportunities in the maritime commercial world.

Erica Mezzoli (NextGenerationEu Project 'Ondine'-Tor Vergata University of Rome – Italy)

[We]Men in Love and [Wo]Men in Port. 'Aleksandrovanje' Couples Dealing with Multiple Dislocations

Nobody more than the 'women of the waterfront' live in a 'men's world'. Their emotional realm, normative framework, and working environment are shaped by men and, more generally, by the standardizing paradigms that patriarchy has managed to impose. However, being able to undermine the 'male breadwinner' notion, the 'women of the waterfront' were/are often able to question the traditional 'gender role' (i.e., the 'women in love and men at sea/work' paradigm) and class systems. In this framework, as Tadeo Pignol (2001) observed, the issue is not simply reduced to the mere acquirement of the dominant position within the couple's dynamics, but it regards also the appropriation of the symbols of modernity. The well-known case of *Aleksandrinke* – i.e., the maids, nannies, and governesses who migrated especially from the rural surroundings of Gorizia-Gorica to

Alexandria of Egypt in the decades straddling the 20th century – is exemplary. However, their fiancés and/or husbands – men whose circumstances made ‘househusbands’ before scholarly knowledge coined the term – lived in the same ‘men’s’ (i.e., patriarchal) world as well. In this regard, we have to keep in mind that those ‘husbands of’ had constantly to negotiate the dominant gender ideologies (i.e., the hegemonic notions of femininity and masculinity) of their milieu, the ‘reversed’ domestic economic power relations and also, more or less implicitly, struggle with their self-representation as men. Through the analysis of two male (a fiancé and a husband) love narratives recently published (2022), the communication aims to highlight the often ‘unhappy’ trans-‘gender roles’, transclass, and transnational negotiations that *Aleksandrinke*’s male partners had to make in order to ‘cope with’ their situation.