

The Strange, Sad Case of the “Bosnian Christian Girl”: Slavery, Conversion, and Jurisdiction on the Habsburg-Ottoman Border

ALISON FRANK JOHNSON

HISTORY, DEPARTMENT OF GERMANIC LANGUAGES AND LITERATURES,
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

This article examines the case of a Bosnian brother and sister at the center of a diplomatic dispute between Austria and the Ottoman Empire in 1852. Mara Illić had to cross the border into Austria in order to board a ship that would take her to Anatolia with the household of a paşa who had been banished. Milan called upon Austrian authorities to “liberate” Mara, whom he claimed had been enslaved when she was “forced” to convert to Islam as a young child. Austria’s defense of its seizure of the girl and the Ottomans’ insistence that she be returned reflect tension over sovereignty, jurisdiction, and personhood. The border brings into stark relief the conflict between different ways of conceptualizing categories like freedom and slavery, contract and coercion, confession and nationality.

Keywords: Austria, Habsburg Monarchy, Ottoman Empire, Turkey, Bosnia, Serbia, Belgrade, conversion, slavery, jurisdiction, harem, sovereignty, Military Frontier, borders

ALIFETIME AGO (the lifetime of my youngest son, who wasn’t yet born), I sat in the Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv in Vienna and ordered all the boxes I could find related to the nineteenth-century slave trade. I received five. Most of the documents pertained to the Habsburg monarchy’s treaties and agreements with other powers, principally Great Britain, to regulate piracy and the slave trade in the Atlantic, a project in which Austria played a marginal role. Others outlined allegations that the lax policies of Austria’s largest shipping company, the Austrian Lloyd, enabled the Mediterranean trade in slaves from Northern Africa to Istanbul.¹ Nestled within a box labeled “Slave Trade, Piracy, etc.,” surrounded by British applications for search warrants and reports on the infamous pirate “Negri,” was an entire folder dedicated to the fate of “the Bosnian Christian girl, Maria

The author gratefully acknowledges her indebtedness to: Emily Greble, Derek Beales, William Gervase Clarence-Smith, Robert Donia, Walter Johnson (always), Mark Mazower, Sabrina Perić (for research in and translation from Serbian), Dominique Reill, Tim Snyder, Aleksandar Shopov (for archival research in Istanbul as well as translation of documents in Ottoman Turkish), Maria Todorova, the two anonymous reviewers for the *Austrian History Yearbook* (one of whom was later revealed to be the erudite and generous Aimee Genell), the participants in the “Balkans as Europe” conference at the Institute for Human Sciences in Vienna, Austria, and Gerhard Gonsa and his colleagues at the Haus-, Hof-, und Staatsarchiv in Vienna, Austria.

¹The results of this research were published in Alison Frank, “The Children of the Desert and the Laws of the Sea: Austria, Great Britain, the Ottoman Empire, and the Mediterranean Slave Trade in the Nineteenth Century,” *American Historical Review* 117, no. 2 (Apr. 2012): 410–44.

Austrian History Yearbook 51 (2020): 39–59 © The Author(s), 2020. Published by Cambridge University Press.
doi:10.1017/S0067237820000077

Illich,” who, the file suggested, had been “rescued” from slavery in 1852.² Austrian authorities had taken the little Bosnian girl from a Sarajevo harem while it briefly passed through Austrian territory on its way to Ottoman Bursa; she was subsequently sent to live in Belgrade, within the autonomous Principality of Serbia. She had, as far as I can tell, never set foot on a ship nor had she ever met a pirate. But this framing—the filing away of her story under the rubric “slave trade, piracy, etc.”—profoundly affected the way I thought about her story for years. The box “slave trade, piracy, etc.” became not only where I found Mara’s story, but what I made of it, why I cared about it, and how I explained it to myself and my imaginary reader.³

The Ottomans did not consider Mara Illič to be either a slave or a Christian.⁴ To file the dispute between Austrian, Serb, and Ottoman authorities over her fate under “slave trade, piracy, etc.” would, from the Ottoman perspective, make no sense. This was, in their correspondence, a case about the Ottoman Empire’s ability to decide what protections for minority religions were required within its own territory; even more than that, it was about Ottoman sovereignty over Ottoman subjects and about the safe passage of those subjects through Austrian territory. For autonomous Serbian Belgrade, however, it seems to have been about jurisdiction “shopping,” that is, about choosing the most convenient of various available legal norms and picking a moment in time and space that made it possible to lay claim to those norms over others.⁵ It was not Mara who was able to navigate these competing jurisdictions, but rather her older brother, Milan, the young man whose actions initiated the Austrian archival record and whose untimely death coincided with its final pages. The Austrians, as you, Gentle Reader, will soon learn, only intervened in Mara’s fate at Milan’s request. It was Milan who captivated me as I read through Mara’s file. How did he find out that Mara was in Austria? How did he know so much about Austrian law? Why did he prefer to place her at the mercy of the Austrian military? And how did he come to die? I was only ever able to answer the third question (it became clear that Milan was using the Austrian military as a tool to ensure Mara would end up in Belgrade, not Bursa). I was

²Mara Illič’s name appears in the Austrian archival sources in a variety of spellings: Maria, Mara, Marie; Illič, Ilič, Illich, Illic, Ilits, Ilic—always preceded by “das bosnische Christenmädchen,” the Bosnian Christian girl. In the only documents that bore her signature, Mara signed her own name with the simple consistency of the illiterate: “X.” Although the Austrian scribes preferred the Catholic form “Maria,” the clerk who transcribed the girl’s testimony (while translating it into German) wrote her name “Mara”—perhaps because that was the form she used in her spoken testimony. It is for this reason that I use the version “Mara.”

³One could argue that combining files about the slave trade with files about piracy reflected “the effort to draw an analogy of piracy to slave trading,” which Lauren Benton examines as “a cautionary tale about the ease with which the legal approach to piracy,” based on a putative universal jurisdiction, “was foundational for other prohibition regimes.” Lauren Benton, “Toward a New Legal History of Piracy: Maritime Legalities and the Myth of Universal Jurisdiction,” *International Journal of Maritime History* 23, no. 1 (June 2011): 228.

⁴There is a large and excellent literature on slavery and the slave trade in the Ottoman Empire—too large to be cited in full here. Many works are cited throughout this article and I direct the curious reader to the collected footnotes. Important works that informed my earliest investigations but are not cited in this article include Y. Hakan Erdem, *Slavery in the Ottoman Empire and Its Demise, 1800–1909* (London, 1996); Ehud Toledano, *Slavery and Abolition in the Ottoman Middle East* (Seattle, 1998); Ehud Toledano, *The Ottoman Slave Trade and Its Suppression, 1840–1890* (Princeton, 1982); Ehud Toledano, *As if Silent and Absent: Bonds of Enslavement in the Islamic Middle East* (New Haven, 2007); and Ceyda Karamursel, “Ottoman Slavery as a Tool for Historical Analysis: A Review of Recent Literature,” *New Perspectives on Turkey* 50 (2014): 193–203.

⁵Here I am inspired by Lauren Benton’s invitation to pay more attention to jurisdictional conflicts, that is, to consider “the complex and contingent configuration of imperial law—not as a structure of command but as a set of fluid institutional and cultural practices.” Lauren Benton and Richard J. Ross, “Empires and Legal Pluralism: Jurisdiction, Sovereignty, and Political Imagination in the Early Modern World,” in *Legal Pluralism and Empires, 1500–1850*, eds. Lauren Benton and Richard J. Ross (New York, 2013), 2.

so haunted by Milan and his sad fate that, for a brief time, I thought about naming the son I carried as I wrote the first drafts of this essay after him. (We didn't.) But I couldn't figure out what to do with his story as a historian until I stopped thinking about slavery in its connection to the slave trade and piracy and started to think about slavery in its relationship to questions about jurisdiction.⁶ Austria, with a small Muslim population, and the Ottoman Empire, with a substantially larger Christian population, both appeared to offer potential refuge to one another's minority subjects, a possibility that generated substantial friction after the Ottomans refused to extradite Hungarian revolutionaries who had fled to the Ottoman Empire following the counterrevolution of 1849.⁷ Mara's alleged Christian faith may have inspired Austrians to help her, but it offered them no legal means of doing so. Concerns about legal precedent regarding sovereignty over their subjects may have led the Ottoman regime to want to keep Mara. But Milan cared neither about sovereignty nor precedent nor jurisdictional questions: he wanted his sister. Milan invoked slavery not to make a point about some putative civilizational divide but rather to marshal Austrian resources to achieve his ultimate goal: settling Mara in Belgrade, near him. And in this, small, autonomous Serbia was happy to advise, not only because Mara could be restored to Christianity but also because, I have come to believe, this sort of manipulation of more powerful neighbors was an important part of how Serbia's "autonomy" was practiced.

A specter is haunting this story—the specter of autonomous Serbia. Over the course of the nineteenth century, the Ottoman Empire allowed or was forced to allow numerous provinces, first in the Balkans and then in the Arabian Peninsula, to become autonomous. Serbian autonomy, in particular, was hammered out in a series of uneasy compromises between the Ottoman and Russian empires set into motion by the Greek War of Independence (1821–29). The Ottoman Empire was already accustomed to a patchwork of different rights and practices and understood autonomous Serbia as one of many types of provinces in its “repertoire of imperial administrative practices.”⁸ Initially, neither Ottoman administrators nor European international lawyers understood Serbian autonomy to threaten Ottoman jurisdiction. On the contrary, as Aimee Genell as argued, “autonomy was a method of imperial administration appropriate for a large empire ruling diverse people and places, not a mark of damaged sovereignty.”⁹ A city like Serbian Belgrade, which Attila Aytakin has called “one of the most important theatres of Serbian nation-state-building,” was under dual administration throughout the middle of the nineteenth century. The city's large fortress was garrisoned by Ottoman troops and presided over by an Ottoman military governor. But the rest of the city was administered by Serbian authorities and inhabited by Christians, Muslims, and Jews, sometimes even in the same neighborhoods.¹⁰ As tensions between local

⁶This didn't happen magically. It happened when Emily Greble read an earlier draft and asked me “is there something about slavery as an international/transnational phenomenon that allows Milan (and the Austrian officers) a way around the rigid confessional socio-religious legal systems in place in Ottoman Bosnia?”

⁷Karl Vocelka, “Das Osmanische Reich und die Habsburgermonarchie 1848–1918,” in *Die Habsburgermonarchie 1848–1918*, vol. 6, *Die Habsburgermonarchie im System der internationalen Beziehungen*, part 2 (Vienna, 1993), 249–50. See also Heléna Tóth, *An Exiled Generation: German and Hungarian Refugees of Revolution, 1848–1871* (Cambridge, 2014). Both empires had made promises to extradite one another's deserters immediately, before they would have any time for conversion. Gr v. Klezl in Constpl; ad 12360 u 12602/D, 27.7ber.1852, F39/2.

⁸For this specific phrase and, more broadly, the argumentation of this entire paragraph, I thank Aimee Genell.

⁹Aimee Genell, “Autonomous Provinces and the Problem of ‘Semi-Sovereignty’ in European International Law,” *Journal of Balkan and Near East Studies* 18, no. 6 (2016): 538.

¹⁰E. Attila Aytakin, “The Production of Space during the Period of Autonomy: Notes on Belgrade Urban Space, 1817–67,” *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 18, no. 6 (2016): 588–89. Aytakin explains the complex web of municipal authorities on pp. 592–93.

(and potentially Serbian national) and central (reformist Ottoman) authorities grew in Serbia, but especially after Mehmed Ali's rebellion and the extension of autonomy to Egypt, Ottoman statesmen began to be more concerned that *autonomy* might threaten *sovereignty*. Hidden within this story are hints at how tension between Serbian authorities and both local and imperial representatives of Ottoman authority raised the stakes of the conflict over Mara Illić. With no claim to showing how Serbia was "destined" to achieve full independence—still decades in the future when the events described here transpired—this story rather helps reveal one aspect of what life under dual administration was like. We see here how one Bosnian could use not Serbian authority, but Serbs' knowledge of *Austrian* laws, to manipulate what Aytekin calls the "delicate balance" of Belgrade's dual administration.¹¹ And now to our story.

On 20 August 1852, Bosnian native and Belgrade resident Milan Illić petitioned the commander of the Austrian garrison in the border town of Semlin to "liberate" his sister "from slavery and return [her] to Christianity."¹² Semlin, or Zemun in Serbian, is now a municipality within Belgrade's city limits, but in the 1850s it was on the Austrian side of the Habsburg border with Serbia, separated from Belgrade by the Sava River to the south and east and bounded by the Danube River to the north. This was a region English consul James Henry Skene called "the frontier lands of the Christian and the Turk," reflecting Milan's own elision of national and confessional categories.¹³ Milan told a story about kidnapping, imprisonment, and forced conversion that he had been told would trigger Austria's intervention. The garrison commander had it in his power to write the story's last chapter, Milan suggested. Would it include freedom, salvation, and a family reunited? The Austrian garrison commander, Field Marshal Lieutenant David Krätner von Thatenburg (1793-1858), like other Austrian officials manning the border with the Ottoman Empire, had already heard vague tales about the treatment of Christians in Bosnia, where Milan and his sister had been born and, according to Milan, held captive. Cases of enslaving Christians, the Austrian chargé d'affaires in Istanbul alleged, were "uncontestedly known to arise all too often in Turkey."¹⁴ Milan was deemed a credible witness. And, thanks to Austrian laws banning slavery on Austrian territory, Krätner had the legal authority to intervene, not to protect Mara as a "Christian" but to prevent her return to the Ottoman Empire if it would mean her reenslavement.

When interviewed the following day, Milan reported that he had been born to a Christian peasant couple in the village of Pale, to the southeast of Sarajevo, in the Ottoman province of Bosnia.¹⁵ He did not know exactly how old he was, but guessed that he had been about eleven years old at the time of his father's death, which had occurred about eight years

¹¹Ibid.

¹²"Unterthänigste Bitte des Milan Illich, um Befreiung seiner Schwester Mara Illic aus dem hier befindlichen Fazli Pascha Harem, Nr. 253," Semlin, 20 Aug. 1852, Haus-, Hof-, und Staatsarchiv, Vienna, Austria (HHStA), Ministerium des Äußern (MdA), Administrative Registratur (AR) Fach 39/2, "Skavenhandel, Piraterie, Baraterie, Kaperei, Generalia" (henceforth F39/2).

¹³James Henry Skene, *The Frontier Lands of the Christian and the Turk: Comprising Travels in the Regions of the Lower Danube, in 1850 and 1851*, 2 vols., 2nd ed. (London, 1853).

¹⁴Ed v. Klezl, Büyükdere, to MdA, Vienna re: "Beschwerde der Pforte aus Anlaß der gewaltsamen Befreiung der Maria Illic aus dem Harem des Pascha von Fusla in Semlin," 11 Sept. 1852. LXIXA_C.

¹⁵Pale now lies within the city limits of Sarajevo.

previously.¹⁶ After his father died, Milan recounted, his mother had become the lover of a Muslim, a romantic entanglement that carried immediate religious and legal implications: she converted to Islam, and left the children of her first marriage—Milan and his younger sister, Mara—with their grandfather, Petar Illić.¹⁷ A local Ottoman dignitary, whom Milan (and all the Austrian officials who commented on this case) called Fazli Paşa, but who appears in Bosnian histories as Fadil Paşa Šerifović (1802–82), allegedly called the children to his household and insisted that they, in Milan’s words, “take on the Turkish religion.” Milan, who would have been about thirteen, refused, at which point, he said, he was “thrown into prison” while his younger sister “was taken to Fazli Paşa’s harem with the womenfolk [*Weiber*],” despite “the pleas and entreaties” of their grandfather.¹⁸ Milan recalled spending four years in prison, steadfastly refusing to convert, before the Ottoman general Omer Paşa.

Latas “liberated” him in 1850 during the suppression of an uprising in the region.¹⁹ Milan then made his way to Belgrade in 1851, where he began to learn the locksmith’s trade.²⁰ When, Milan explained, he heard in August 1852, “by fortunate chance,” that Fadil Paşa’s harem was passing through Semlin, he knew the chance to be reunited with his sister had come: Belgrade was separated from the Austrian military commune of Semlin only by the Sava River. Milan was able to secure a pass from the “Serbian Police Bureau” for the purpose of crossing the Sava and asking the Austrians to free his “poor, unfortunate” sister from “slavery.”²¹

¹⁶According to an Ottoman document written in Sept. 1850, long before Milan left Bosnia for Belgrade, Milan was the son of Andrija Illić. The document said that Milan was seventeen, which would make him nearly nineteen in Aug. 1852. Draft letter from Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the governor of Bosnia. Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi (Ottoman Archives of the Prime Minister’s Office, BOA), Hariciye Nezareti Mektubi Kalemi (Ministry of Foreign Affairs. HR. MKT), 37/7 (2 Zilhice 1266/9 Sept. 1850). Aleksandar Šopov found this document in the state archives in Istanbul and provided the translation from Ottoman Turkish.

¹⁷There was no legal requirement that the Christian wives of Muslims convert, although there were substantial legal (and, where relevant, custodial) benefits to so doing. Sophia Laiou, “Christian Women in an Ottoman World: Interpersonal and Family Cases Brought before the *Shari’a* Courts during the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries (Cases Involving the Greek Community),” in *Women in the Ottoman Balkans: Gender, Culture, and History*, eds. Amila Buturović and Irvin Cemil Schick (London, 2007), 251–53.

¹⁸According to Leslie Peirce, “[A] woman’s right to custody was already tenuous under Islamic law, which awarded custody of fatherless boys at the age of seven and girls at the time of puberty to their paternal relatives.” This is further evidence that Milan’s case would have been considerably more problematic to defend than Mara’s; Milan should have been left with his grandfather. That said, a judge had the right to “exercise discretionary choice as to the appropriate guardian (*vasi*) for a particular orphan and, if he saw fit, could appoint someone outside the family.” Leslie Peirce, *Morality Tales: Law and Gender in the Ottoman Court of Aintab* (Berkeley, 2003), 221.

¹⁹In Sept. 1850, the governor of Bosnia was instructed to release Milan “since involuntary conversion is incompatible with both religious laws and individual consent” (*irtizâ-i şehinşahiye hilâf olacağından merhumun hal ve keyfiyeti muariz-i musiraneleriyle layikiyla bittahkik böyle ise sebinin tahliye ettirilmesine*). At that time, Ottoman authorities reported that Milan had been imprisoned for two years, not four. Aleksandar Šopov found this document in the archives and provided the translation from Ottoman Turkish. BOA. HR.MKT 37/7 (Zilhice 2, 1266/9 Sept. 1850). Omer Paşa Latas was himself a convert to Islam, having been born in in present-day Croatia (at the time, Serbian Kraina Janja Gora) in 1806 and christened Mihailo Latas. Selim Deringil, *Conversion and Apostasy in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Cambridge, 2012), 157–58; see also Heléna Tóth, “Émigrés: The Experience of Political Exile for Germans and Hungarians, 1848–1871” (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 2008), 162.

²⁰The German word is “Schlosser,” which can also be translated more generally as metalworker.

²¹Deposition of Milan Illić, kk [?] Garnisons Auditoriat, Semlin, 21 Aug. 1852. Attached to Präs. No. 253 K.K. Grenz Truppen Divisions Commando to Coronini Cronberg, 21 Aug. 1852. F39/2. It is not entirely clear to me what kind of document this “Paß” was. In the words of John Torpey, “the emergence of passports and related controls on movement is an essential aspect of the ‘state-ness’ of states.” Serbia was not a fully sovereign state, but rather an autonomous region within the sovereignty of the Ottoman Empire, and so the modern translation “passport” is unlikely to apply. Milan clearly, however, possessed some kind of document that allowed him to travel across the

In his deposition, Milan presented himself as a devoted brother (“I came across [to Austria] only because of her,” he averred) and an unfortunate child who had “fallen into captivity.” In the formal petition he had presented to the Austrian authorities the previous day, however, he had gone a step further. Milan-the-petitioner appeared as a devout defender of the “Christian” church who was also surprisingly and somewhat incredibly well versed in Austrian law. He “reverentially” and “submissively” begged Krättnr to return his sister “to Christianity and her family” for which both he and “the Christian church” would thank him.²² He also “humbly” but precociously referred to §16 of the *allgemeines bürgerliches Gesetzbuch*, the Austrian civil legal code that came into effect in the monarchy’s Hereditary Lands in 1812: “laudably famous Austrian law does not tolerate slavery in the blessed Austrian provinces.” The law, he continued, even allowed for “the removal of a slave from a foreigner [on Austrian soil], and the return [to the slave] of his natural human private rights.”²³ Because this document initiated his interactions with the garrison authorities, it seems unlikely that it was they who coached him; more likely, he was sent to Semlin by someone in Belgrade who knew exactly what he needed to say, perhaps the same person or persons who provided him with a “pass” to cross the river (possibly, as I will discuss later in this essay, the minister of justice, Alexander Simić). Someone, that is, who was knowledgeable in the various regional laws that might make it possible to push back against Ottoman sovereignty. Without knowing who that person was, it is impossible to say with certainty, but it raises questions about efforts in semi-autonomous Belgrade to offer protection and counsel to Orthodox Christians dissatisfied with their prospects within the Ottoman legal system.

Whoever suggested to Milan that he refer to §16 of the Austrian legal code correctly predicted Krättnr’s reaction. On Austrian soil, Austrian law would prevail, and Austrian law strictly forbade holding a girl in a condition of slavery. As the Austrian minister of foreign affairs told the Ottoman ambassador in Vienna, “once she crossed onto Austrian territory, Maria Illic’s personal relationship to the harem was to be judged only according to our laws.”²⁴ To Habsburg officials, the story of Milan and his sister, the “Bosnian Christian girl, Maria Illić,” juxtaposed two states with radically different approaches to slavery: in the Ottoman Empire, slavery was tolerated and even recognized to be central to the domestic social economy; in the

Sava River and thus the Ottoman/Habsburg border. John Torpey, *The Invention of the Passport: Surveillance, Citizenship, and the State*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, 2018), 3. Aytekin notes that Ottoman Christians from other parts of the empire resident in Belgrade for fewer than seven years would almost certainly *not* have had the rights of autonomy granted to Serb Christians within the city. Aytekin, “Production of Space,” 593.

²²The only document that makes any mention of the particular “Christian” church to which Milan and Mara belonged is the hastily scrawled translation made of Mara’s 30 Sept. 1852 statement, taken and interpreted from Serbian to German as she spoke. The scribe wrote down, in German: “Ich heiße Mara Ilić, bin zu Sarajevo in Bosnien, von christlichen Eltern des g.n.u. Ritus geboren” (My name is Mara Ilić; I was born in Sarajevo in Bosnia, to Christian parents of the *g.n.u.* rite.) My best guess is this means “Greek, not Uniate, rite.”

²³Petition of Milan Illić, “Unterthänigste Bitte des Milan Illich, um Befreiung seiner Schwester Mara Illic aus dem hier befindlichen Fazli Pascha Harem, Nr. 253,” Semlin, 20 Aug. 1852, HHStA MdA AR F39/2. “Neither slavery nor the exercise of power pertaining to it is permitted in the Austrian Empire, and ... every slave becomes free in the very moment when he sets foot on imperial Austrian soil or even only on board an Austrian ship.” Strafgesetz über Verbrechen, Vergehen und Uebertretungen (27 May 1852), Neuntes Hauptstück, Von öffentlichen Gewaltthätigkeit. §95, durch Behandlung eines Menschen als Sklaven. The 1811 *allgemeines bürgerliches Gesetzbuch* prohibited “slavery or serfdom” in the hereditary lands (significantly excluding Galicia). Amendments decreed in 1826 already stated that any slave became free in the instant he or she set foot on Austrian soil or an Austrian ship or was sold to a subject of the Austrian monarch. *Allgemeines bürgerliches Gesetzbuch* (1811), Erster Theil, Erstes Hauptstück, §16; 19ter Hofdecret vom 19. Aug. 1826, Beylage, §1.

²⁴Minister of Foreign Affairs to Hr v. Klezl in Constpl; ad 13555/D, 1 Nov. 1852, F39/2. Emphasis in original.

Austrian Empire, slavery had been explicitly prohibited since 1812. From their perspective, the Illić case presented the Military Border as the familiar line dividing the Near East, with its outdated tolerance of slavery, from the Near West, with its natural rights-based opposition to enslavement of its own population; Austria allied with abolitionist Great Britain and the enlightened future, the Ottoman Empire allied with slaving tribes in Africa and the barbaric past; Bosnia poised delicately between the two, as so often, “a bridge or a crossroad.”²⁵

The dispute over Mara Illić occurred in the brief moment between Austria’s appearance in international news as the oppressive authoritarian regime that put down the Hungarian patriots during the rebellions of 1848 and 1849, and the exposure of the Ottomans’ dependence on support from the Western great powers during the Crimean War of 1853–56. It occurred between the first famous “Tanzimat” edict (the Edict of the Rose Chamber, 3 November 1839), which promised to protect the “life, honor, and property of all Ottoman subjects,” whether Muslim or not, and the second edict (the Reform Edict of 18 February 1856), which guaranteed the empire’s territorial integrity and, under international pressure in the lead-up to the Treaty of Paris of 1856, acknowledged it as a member of the “Concert of Europe.”²⁶ And it occurred before an Ottoman ban on the slave trade, in 1857, precipitated a category of “freedom suit” through which enslaved persons claimed that local practices conflicted with reformist protections of slaves’ rights.²⁷ It foreshadows the contest between these two powers over who should rightly rule Bosnia that would end with Austria’s 1878 occupation and 1908 annexation of the erstwhile Ottoman province. It occurs, moreover, in a period where failed revolutionaries were moving in large numbers from the Habsburg monarchy into the Ottoman Empire in search of some kind of asylum—a kind of temporary migration that led the Habsburgs to claim, strenuously but without immediate effect, that their jurisdiction over their own subjects did not end when they crossed the border.²⁸ Both Austria and the Ottomans were willing to extradite deserters but were eager to prevent one another from reaching into their territories with claims of jurisdictional responsibility over political asylum seekers, whether Muslims in Habsburg territory or

²⁵Neval Berber, “Unveiling Bosnia-Herzegovina in British Travel Literature (1844–1912),” *Spirit of Bosnia/Duh Bosne* 5, no. 4 (Oct. 2010), accessed 28 Aug. 2019, <http://www.spiritofbosnia.org/volume-5-no-4-2010-october/unveiling-bosnia-herzegovina-in-british-travel-literature-1844-1912/>. For a longer discussion of Austrian and Ottoman views on slavery, see Frank, “Children of the Desert.”

²⁶Deringil, *Conversion and Apostasy*, 24; Cengiz Kurlu, “Tyranny Illustrated: From Petition to Rebellion in Ottoman Vranje,” *New Perspectives on Turkey* 53 (Fall 2015): 4. According to Frederick Anscombe, with the 1839 decree, the Ottoman reformers furthermore “hoped to show Christian powers that it was sufficiently ‘civilized’ to be accorded the protections of international law.” Frederick Anscombe, *State, Faith, and Nation in Ottoman and Post-Ottoman Lands* (Cambridge, 2014), 99. For an extended discussion of the Tanzimat and international law beginning with 1856, see Barbara Haider-Wilson, “Tanzimat Revisited: Über den Einfluss des Verhältnisses von Orient und Okzident auf die völkerrechtliche Stellung des Osmanischen Reiches im 19. Jahrhundert,” in *Orient und Okzident: Begegnungen und Wahrnehmungen aus fünf Jahrhunderten*, eds. Barbara Haider-Wilson and Maximilian Graf (Vienna, 2016), 405–47.

²⁷Karamursel, “Transplanted Slavery.”

²⁸Most famously, Lajos Kossuth and the “remnants of the Hungarian army” fled to the Ottoman Empire and requested political asylum in Aug. 1849. The Austrians pressured the Ottomans to extradite the Hungarian rebels in negotiations that quickly became “heated.” Heléna Tóth, “The Historian’s Scales: Families in Exile in the Aftermath of the Revolutions of 1848,” *The Hungarian Historical Review* 1, nos. 3–4 (2012): 297, 299. As many as five thousand Hungarians crossed over to Ottoman territory. Tóth, “Émigrés,” 42. To claim protection from extradition, Hungarian revolutionaries had to convert. Most, unlike Kossuth, had returned by October. See also Deringil, *Conversion and Apostasy*, 156–96. For an analysis of similar conversion practices among Russian exiles, see Smiley, “The Burdens of Subjecthood: The Ottoman State, Russian Fugitives, and Interimperial Law, 1774–1869,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 46, no. 1 (2014): 81.

Christians in Ottoman territory. By evoking §16, Milan created a legal context for Austria's intervention that avoided the Scylla of political asylum and the Charybdis of religious persecution. If the allegations that Mara's conversion had been forced were true, then the conversion would have violated the laws of the Ottoman Empire and could have been addressed by the Ottoman bans on forced conversion that were already in place.²⁹ Rather, the Austrians argued, the forced conversion was evidence that Mara had, indeed, been enslaved. Milan needed Austria to orchestrate her "liberation" through laws that prevailed in Austria but not Serbia. But Belgrade, not Austria, should become her permanent home. It was Mara's (former) Orthodox Christianity that became the justification to claim her for Serbia—Milan's claim that his Bosnian sister should stay in Serbia relied on an argument about religious belonging that superseded any sense of nationality: the idea that for a Christian girl, Bosnia represented slavery but Serbia could—with Austrian support—guarantee freedom.

In the early modern period, Central Europeans were accustomed to stories of the enslavement of Christians by Muslim pirates (while paying less attention to the practice of enslaving Muslims that was common among maritime Christian societies along the Mediterranean).³⁰ On land, particularly infamous were stories of the *devşirme* system. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the *devşirme* had occurred regularly and had led to the forced "recruitment" of Bosnian boys into the ranks of the Janissaries. It had completely died out by the mid-seventeenth century but remained an infamous exemption from the prohibition on enslaving non-Muslims who belonged to tolerated and protected minority populations within the Ottoman Empire.³¹ By the nineteenth century, however, the enslavement of Bosnian children was clearly prohibited. For Ottomans, furthermore, a harem was a normal site of female labor, not an "Orientalized" space in which Christian girls were enslaved and sexualized by predatory "Turks." Like non-Muslim residents of other Islamic states, "tolerated minorities" within the Ottoman Empire "were 'covenanted people,' exempt from slavery by law" and so Mara could no more have been enslaved before than after her conversion.³² Nor was forced conversion tolerated, even if stories of individual forced conversions in other parts of the Ottoman Empire continued to circulate well into the late nineteenth century. Ottoman historian Selim Deringil has called "the process of conversion from Christianity to Islam . . . one of the most vexed issues in Ottoman Studies," concluding that "forced and arbitrary conversion was officially scorned, while it probably went on informally."³³

²⁹The strength of these protections should not be overstated. On the contrary, there may be some correlation between laxity regarding how sincerely a convert embraced conversion when *force* was in play and laxity regarding sincerity when occupational opportunism likely stood behind conversion. Deringil, *Conversion and Apostasy*, 13–15.

³⁰Joshua White challenges the dichotomy between "Christians" and "Muslims" in a book that details how, for example, Dutch privateers operated out of Algiers under a Muslim flag to continue to prey on Spanish ships after a Dutch-Spanish truce. Joshua M. White, *Piracy and Law in the Ottoman Mediterranean* (Stanford, 2017). See also Paula Sutter Fichtner, *Terror and Toleration: The Habsburg Empire Confronts Islam, 1526–1850* (London, 2008), 42; Robert Davis, *Christian Slaves, Muslim Masters: White Slavery in the Mediterranean, The Barbary Coast, and Italy, 1500–1800* (New York, 2003), 140; Molly Greene, *Catholic Pirates and Greek Merchants: A Maritime History of the Mediterranean* (Princeton, 2010), 2–4.

³¹V. L. Ménage, "Devşirme," *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (hereafter *EI*) 2nd ed., vol. 2 (Leiden, 1960), 210. See also Cl. Cahen, "DHimma," *EI*, 2nd ed., vol. 2, 227 for a description of the rights of the tolerated minorities, and Halil İnalçık, "GHulâm," part 4, "Ottoman Empire," *EI*, 2nd ed., vol. 2, 1085, for a description of the duties of young slaves who received special training to be eligible to serve the sultan.

³²Madeline C. Zilfi, *Women and Slavery in the Late Ottoman Empire: The Design of Difference* (Cambridge, 2010), 98.

³³Selim Deringil, *The Well-Protected Domains: Ideology and the Legitimation of Power in the Ottoman Empire, 1876–1909* (London, 1998), 84. See also Deringil, *Conversion and Apostasy*.

The best-documented cases occurred in Cyprus and other territories of the Greek Patriarchate, where even the Porte’s own legal advisers had to admit that Christian children, particularly girls, were being abducted, forced to convert, and used to entice other children to follow in their footsteps.³⁴ But this “Imperial Headache,” that is, fraught conflict over conversion that might, in the words of Deringil, cause “ill-feeling and mistrust between Muslim and Christian, and above all, between the subjects and the Tanzimat State,”³⁵ was something Ottoman reformist authorities were eager to avoid without any external pressure at all.

Mehmed Hurşid Paşa, briefly the Ottoman governor-general of Belgrade, and then of Bosnia, rejected Kräutner’s plea to turn Mara over to Milan. He insisted not only that there was no evidence that Mara *had* been “enslaved” but, on the contrary, there was even plentiful evidence that she had freely converted to Islam and was paid for her work.³⁶ Ironically, the very controversy over Milan’s status that had caused such a scandal in Sarajevo had created the opportunity to bring the girl before a judge (the German translation of Hurşid Paşa’s note, originally in Serbian, says “Meschlis (Richter),” presumably majlis, an Islamic Court), where she “avowed, that she converted to Islam of her own free will and was not forced; this girl is of sound mind and sensible.”³⁷ This was not, Hurşid Paşa argued, a case of enslavement at all, which would have contravened Ottoman law. Such allegations had already been investigated and disproved by an Islamic court. Anyone who feared the Islamic authorities were not capable of deciding to “liberate” someone falsely held only need look at the case of Milan, who *had* been released, he noted. Mara’s seizure, on the contrary, revealed gross disregard of the reigning tractates between the two empires, which had been amicably reached.³⁸

It only took a few hours after the arrival of Fadil Paşa’s harem in Belgrade before the “rumor circulated through the city” that the harem included a “young Christian girl” who was being taken from Bosnia to Istanbul to convert to Islam there.³⁹ A Viennese newspaper reporting on the incident two weeks later turned rumors based on rumors into facts: Milan’s discovery of his sister’s arrival was based on “a rumor that Fazli Paşa’s harem . . . would pass through here in a few days.” In the *Presse*’s account, Milan’s sister

had been violently abducted by the Turks five years ago as a seven-year-old child and, along with her mother, been enslaved, after the robbers had plundered her house and killed her father. He himself had been imprisoned and placed in chains, but he had managed to free himself from slavery and escape to Belgrade, where he later learned that his mother had meanwhile died of grief, but that his sister, in contrast, still resided with Fazli Paşa as a slave.

In this version, the Austrians restored peace to the violently severed family: “One can only imagine the joy of reunion on the part of the siblings after such a long separation!”⁴⁰ It was,

³⁴Deringil, *Well-Protected Domains*, 86.

³⁵Deringil, *Conversion and Apostasy*, 30.

³⁶Mehmed Hurşid Paşa was an Ottoman official, apparently of Albanian ancestry, who served as military general of the Kalemegdan fortress in Belgrade in Apr. 1852 and then became general of Bosnia in July. Sinan Kunalp, *Son Dönem Osmanlı Erkân ve Ricali (1839–1922): Proopografik Rehber* (Istanbul, 1999), 96. Thanks to Aimee Genell and Emily Greble for translation assistance from the Turkish.

³⁷“Abschrift,” From Mehmed Hurşid Pascha to the KK General Consulate, Belgrade (German translation from the Serbian), undated, sent to Ministry of War, Vienna, as an attachment on 29 Aug. 1852. F39/2.

³⁸*Ibid.*

³⁹Es “verbreitete sich in der Stadt die Runde.” Interim Chargé d’affaires Soretic, Belgrade, to MdA, Vienna, 20 Aug. 1852. F39/2.

⁴⁰Saturday, 4 Sept. 1852, “Journal Revue,” *Die Presse* vol. 5, no. 209, p. 4. Leslie Peirce has shown that, although abduction had been one method of publicly asserting “honor, power and valor,” the sultanate had begun a

apparently, a story that reporters could expect their readers to find reasonable. In explaining the generation of gendered stereotypes in the Ottoman Empire in particular, İrvin Cemil Schick refers to Marc Bloch's observation that "falsehood propagates itself, is amplified, indeed lives, on one condition only: that it finds, in the society into which it is spreading, a favorable cultural stew."⁴¹ But borderlands bureaucrats were not naïve enough to believe the hyperbolic story. In the early modern period, according to Maria Todorova, "high-ranking officials of the Habsburg Empire with excellent education" produced travel literature on the Ottoman Empire that include "the most numerous, detailed, and informed accounts of the Balkans."⁴² Extending from the expertise of diplomats to a broader familiarity, admittedly, would be going too far. Although Austrians and other German speakers "by the 1850s had become the most proficient, respected, and numerous orientalists in the world," as a rule, these "orientalists" studied the ancient world and ignored the modern period.⁴³ According to Suzanne Marchand, "[K]nowledge about the modern Orient had not been extensive in the German-speaking world before the 1820s, but after this time, it would grow even more scarce." Nevertheless, within the consular corps, there were plenty of Austrians who would have known that Mara's daily life in Fadı́l Paşa's harem would have most likely been characterized by drudgery, much like the daily lives of domestic servants throughout the Austrian Empire, not by sexual violence (although, in both societies, domestic servants were likely exposed to frequent sexual violence as well).

By the time that Milan Illić placed his sister's fate in the hand of Austrian officials, Austrian diplomats already had a good deal of experience managing their response to the complexities and vexations of Ottoman slavery. Based on what they believed to be their superior knowledge of Ottoman customs, society, and law, Austrian diplomatic, consular, and ministerial officials in the Foreign Service had a relatively sympathetic understanding of Ottoman slavery. This emerged from both Austria's own limited tradition of activist abolitionism and its conviction that Ottoman slavery was nothing like the plantation or chattel slavery of the Western Atlantic. When the Ottoman foreign minister, Fuad Paşa (Mehmed Fuad Paşa, who was called Fuad Effendi in internal Austrian correspondence), alleged that "the fate of slaves in the Orient should not be judged according to the measure of the hard treatment in the United States of North America," the Austrian diplomatic representative in Büyükdere, Baron Koller, called Fuad Paşa's assessment "very correct."⁴⁴ (Fuad Paşa's fluency in the customs and conventions of European diplomacy made him

crackdown on abduction as early as 1540 and by the modern period, only those already branded criminals or rebels would consider such a practice. Leslie Peirce, "Abduction with (Dis)honor: Sovereigns, Brigands, and Heroes in the Ottoman World," *Journal of Early Modern History* 15 (2011): 311-29.

⁴¹Marc Bloch, "Réflexions d'un historien sur les fausses nouvelles de la guerre," *Revue de synthèse historique* 33 (1921), as quoted by İrvin Cemil Schick, "Christian Maidens, Turkish Ravishers: The Sexualization of National Conflict in the Late Ottoman Period," *Women in the Ottoman Balkans: Gender, Culture, and History*, eds. Amila Buturović and İrvin Cemil Schick (London, 2007), 277.

⁴²Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (New York, 1997), 67.

⁴³Marchand, *German Orientalism*, 98, 100.

⁴⁴Koller to MđA Buol-Schauenstein, Bujukdere, 21 June 1855. Fuad Paşa would be appointed foreign minister no fewer than five separate times; his first term began only a few weeks before Milan showed up in Krautenberg's office (9 Aug. 1852). Along with Aali Paşa (Mehmed Emin Āli Paşa), he was one of the leaders of the Tanzimat movement in the mid-nineteenth century and was considered by contemporaries to be the most "Europeanized" of Ottoman statesmen. Deringil, *Conversion and Apostasy*, 77-78n44. R. H. Davison, "Fu'ad Pasha," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., eds. P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C. E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, and W. P. Heinrichs, accessed 16 Dec. 2019, http://dx.doi.org.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_2395; see also Carter Findley, *Bureaucratic Reform in the Ottoman Empire: The Sublime Porte 1789-1922* (Princeton, 1988), 138, 155-56.

extremely popular in the West, and famously effective, even after his death, in the Ottoman Empire.⁴⁵) Even if Kräutner and the Austrian consulate in Belgrade and officials at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs referred to Mara repeatedly as an enslaved Christian girl, they knew full well that their Ottoman counterparts would not recognize her lifestyle as in any way comparable to slavery in the West.⁴⁶

Over the course of the nineteenth century, Ottoman statesmen, intellectuals, and lawyers would have innumerable occasions to make the argument that slavery was essential to their society and not harmful to the enslaved. The role of slavery and of the slave trade was consistently discussed in popular and official literature in Great Britain, where long after abolition within the empire, the mission to eliminate the slave trade justified and motivated ongoing colonial activities. Austria, in contrast, generally lacked spirited debates about slavery. Austria within its post-1815 borders had neither any tradition of involvement in the Atlantic slave trade nor any tradition of domestic slavery, although there is evidence of some involvement, in particular through the Austrian Netherlands.⁴⁷ Of course, there was a long tradition of serfdom in the monarchy, but by 1852, even serfdom had been abolished.⁴⁸

In the nineteenth century, Austrian diplomats were proud to point to a developing tradition of antislavery legislation. The first explicit ban on slavery in the Austrian lands had been issued in 1811, only a few years after the declared end of the British and American slave trades, in 1807 and 1808, respectively. The ban on slavery, codified in §16 des allgemeinen bürgerlichen Gesetzes, had been reiterated in a *Hofjustizial-Verordnung* in 1826 und a *Hofkriegsrätlichen Cirkular Verordnung* on 3 June 1833. After centuries of uncertain status, during which Africans traveled to Austria in the retinues of visiting Europeans without anyone troubling to inquire if they were enslaved or employed, these laws, orders, and “circulars” were supposed to bring that ambiguity to an end.

Long experience had resulted in the solidification of several principles governing the relationship of Austrian laws to Ottoman slaves. In general, Austria recognized its duty to interfere in Ottoman slavery as determined by a combination of Austrian law and international treaty. The result was not always consistent. In some cases, the intersection of Austrian and Ottoman law was recognized by both sides to prevent any interference on the part of the Austrians at all. When, for example, in April 1855, the Austrian naval paddle-steamer SMS *Taurus* made the mistake of arresting the Ottoman mortar vessel *Seri Pervass* for transporting sixty-two slaves from Tripoli to Valona (Vlorë), the Austrian foreign minister had to instruct the head of the military central chancellery, Karl Ludwig von Grünne, that Austria had no legal or contractual right to interfere with the transportation of slaves on Ottoman ships. “In this case,” he explained, “no plausible legal ground can be found according to which the actions of the Austrian paddle-steamer *Taurus*—which arrested an Ottoman ship in an Ottoman port for transporting Negro slaves, and forced it to an Austrian port—could be justified to the Porte.”⁴⁹ But unlike the *Seri Pervass*, which was an Ottoman ship (subject to Ottoman laws) sailing in Mediterranean waters (excluded from

⁴⁵His “Francophilia” was admittedly not always well received. See Christine Philliou, *Biography of an Empire: Governing Ottomans in an Age of Revolution* (Berkeley, 2011), 159–63.

⁴⁶On debates about the similarities and differences between Ottoman and Western slavery, see Frank, “Children of the Desert.”

⁴⁷Seymour Drescher, *Abolition: A History of Slavery and Anti-Slavery* (Cambridge, 2009), 146–47; Seymour Drescher, *Capitalism and Antislavery* (Oxford, 1987), 170n24.

⁴⁸On comparisons between serfdom and slavery in the Austrian context, see Frank, “The Children of the Desert,” 427–28. On the tradition of slavery within Austria more broadly, see especially pp. 416–17 and 427–31.

⁴⁹MdA to Hr F.M.L. Gfen v Grünne, 7 May 1855.

international treaties banning the slave trade) off the coast of the Ottoman Empire (where slaving was tolerated and slaveholding was legal), Fadil Paşa's harem had voluntarily crossed the Sava River from Serbian Belgrade into the Austrian Military Border, and in so doing rendered itself subject, however temporarily, to Austrian law.⁵⁰

From a diplomatic perspective, the harem chose, voluntarily and without outside pressure, to enter Austrian territory—but the circumstances of their trip to Istanbul were anything but happy for Fadil Paşa's family and retinue. They were leaving their Bosnian home to join him in internal exile in Bursa, south of Istanbul, in Anatolia. Mara's presence in the harem was evidence of an earlier period, in which Fadil Paşa had been one of the wealthiest and most prominent men in Bosnia.⁵¹ According to historian of Bosnia Hamdija Kreševljaković, Fadil Paşa's local power was almost limitless: "he decided when it would be sunny and when it would be cloudy."⁵² Already influential due to his appointment as kadi of Sarajevo and, from 1833 until 1835, mütesellim (a kind of local governor with tax-collecting authority), he inherited substantial landholdings from his mother in 1848. Kreševljaković's multiple volumes of histories of Bosnia contain numerous references to Fadil Paşa, and the historian's dislike of the Bosnian magnate is palpable at every mention. Fadil Paşa, along with Mustafa Paşa Babić, "had all the main state incomes in their hands" and "were true representatives of corruption."⁵³ Fadil Paşa's material greed was stronger than his piety: when he was entrusted with the funds to renovate and substantially enlarge a mosque in Rogatica, he made only minor alterations and pocketed the rest.⁵⁴ It is at least possible that some of Kreševljaković's aversion to Fadil Paşa stems from the magnate's later complicity in Austro-Hungarian retribution against leaders of the Bosnian insurrection of 1876. But if there is any truth to his discussion of Fadil Paşa's opportunistic use of alliances and prerogatives to maximize his material prosperity, then there is some plausible context for his alleged attempt to keep the Illić children in his custody. As a landed magnate in Bosnia, Fadil Paşa had certain privileges that included the collection of taxes from peasants in his *paşaluk*—taxes that the Illić family might have been hard-pressed to pay once the father had died. If Milan were old enough to be considered an adult, he would have been liable for the *cizye*—a regressive head tax due by non-Muslims in the Ottoman Empire.⁵⁵ Fadil Paşa might have justified Mara's work as a domestic servant in his harem as a method of paying back what her family owed him, according to his own sense of hereditary entitlement. This analysis, though speculative, is consistent with Cengiz Kırılı's argument that "changing forms of tax collection, along with the new penal code of 1840, were the *primary* means through which the Ottoman state

⁵⁰On the Mediterranean's exclusion from antislavery treaties, see Frank, "Children of the Desert."

⁵¹According to Hamdija Kreševljaković, Fadil was the name he used for publishing poetry and Muhamed was his "real" birth name. Kreševljaković also refers to him as Fadilbeg Šerifija. Hamdija Kreševljaković, *Izabrana djela* [Selected Works], 3 vols., ed. Milosav Popović (Sarajevo, 1991), 1:290. On his wealth, see p. 1:182.

⁵²"imao punu vlast: on je vedrio i oblačio." Hamdija Kreševljaković, *Izabrana djela*, 3:58. Translation by Sabrina Perić.

⁵³Hamdija Kreševljaković, *Izabrana djela*, 2:201. Translation by Sabrina Perić. On corruption in the Tanzimat era, see Cengiz Kırılı, *Yolsuzluğun İcadı: 1840 Ceza Kanunu, İktidar ve Bürokrasi* [The invention of corruption: The penal code of 1840, power and bureaucracy] (Istanbul, 2015). Thanks to Aimee Grenell for the reference and translation of the title.

⁵⁴Hamdija Kreševljaković, "Rogatica," *Izabrana djela*, 2:680–81.

⁵⁵Deringil, *Conversion and Apostasy*, 17. Children and women were exempted from the *cizye*, but widows "possessing the land of their deceased husbands were liable" for the tax. Hali İnalçık, "Djizya," part 2, "Ottoman," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., eds. P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C. E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, and W. P. Heinrichs, accessed 18 Dec. 2019, http://dx.doi.org.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0192.

aimed to . . . reshuffle the power structure in the provinces.”⁵⁶ Kırılı suggests that numerous power struggles, long interpreted as the “abuses” of “provincial notables acting independently from the fair and just Ottoman central government” were in fact hostile reactions to tax reform.⁵⁷ Whatever his motivation, in the turbulent 1840s, Fadil Paşa seemed to be able to act with impunity.

But shortly after Fadil Paşa took custody of Mara and Milan Illić, his luck began to change. Having tried to play both sides of the 1850 rebellion against the Ottoman sultan and his locally unwelcome reforms, Fadil Paşa was punished by the Ottoman general Omer Paşa Latas, who marched into Bosnia with twelve battalions of infantry, a regiment of dragoons, and two batteries of artillery.⁵⁸ In British diplomat James Henry Skene’s account of his tour through Bosnia in 1851, he reported on Fadil Paşa’s (temporary, as it turned out) fall from grace:

Near [the River Bosna’s] source stood a large palace, the property of Fazli Paşa; and at a little distance was another somewhat less extensive, which belonged to Mustapha Paşa. Both these grandees being now on their trial for sedition in the late insurrection, and neither of them having much chance of ever again seeing this province, as they will probably spend the remainder of their lives in exile, their residences had been neglected, and they looked desolate and forlorn.⁵⁹

Omer Paşa not only confiscated Fadil Paşa’s stately Sarajevo palace, the Konak, but also sent Fadil Paşa into exile in Bursa and ordered that the Illić children’s case be reviewed by the Sarajevo majlis (not necessarily in that order). It was to join Fadil Paşa in Bursa that his harem was traveling from Bosnia to Istanbul in the first place. In one sense, it was his insufficient display of loyalty to the regime (and his resistance to Omer Paşa) that ultimately cost Fadil Paşa both Milan (in 1850 or 1851) and Mara (in 1852).⁶⁰

Kräutner, whom one traveling Englishman described as “a most gentlemanly man, and an officer who is superior to the absurd prejudices and suspicions which pervade the administration of his country,” did not necessarily know anything about Fadil Paşa’s precarious position in Omer Paşa’s Bosnia.⁶¹ He did, however, know that there was only one circumstance under which he had any right to interfere with a girl’s transit through Austria

⁵⁶Kırılı, “Tyranny Illustrated,” 4 (emphasis added).

⁵⁷Ibid., 5. For an analysis of the role of local notables in the eighteenth century, that is, the period preceding the Tanzimat era, see Ali Yaycıoğlu, *Partners of the Empire: The Crisis of the Ottoman Order in the Age of Revolutions* (Stanford, 2016).

⁵⁸Skene, *The Frontier Lands of the Christian and the Turk*, 2:220. Bosnia has traditionally been described as one of the most “traditional” regions of the Balkans, hence staunchly opposed to Tanzimat reforms. See, e.g., Ferdinand Hauptmann, “Die Mohammedaner in Bosnien-Hercegovina,” *Die Habsburgermonarchie 1848–1918*, vol. 4, *Die Konfessionen*, eds. Adam Wandruszka and Peter Urbanitsch (Vienna, 1995), 671.

⁵⁹Skene, *The Frontier Lands of the Christian and the Turk*, 2:340. Given that the Konak became briefly Omer Paşa Latas’s residence and subsequently the residence of Bosnian governors, it cannot have been “forlorn” for long. Thanks to the anonymous reader of this article for this observation. The Old Konak was demolished in 1880. Hamdija Kreševljaković, *Sarajevo u Doba Okupacije in Izabrana Djela*, 4:216n12. Translation by Sabrina Perić.

⁶⁰Robert Donia notes that “Despite being exiled from Sarajevo for several years in the 1850s, Šerifović consistently sought accommodation with Ottoman central authorities.” I was not able to discover exactly how long he remained in exile, but he was certainly back in Sarajevo in a position of authority by the 1870s; an anonymous reviewer of this essay knows he was back by 1853. Šerifović and his two sons “became the most politically influential Sarajevans until the end of the nineteenth century, spanning the transition from Ottoman to Habsburg control.” Robert Donia, *Sarajevo: A Biography* (Ann Arbor, 2006), 31. Hamdija Kreševljaković, *Sarajevo u Doba Okupacije in Izabrana djela*, 1:216.

⁶¹Skene, *The Frontier Lands of the Christian and the Turk*, 1:121.

in a harem: if that girl were enslaved and wished to be free.⁶² Five days after Milan appeared in his office, Krätner reported his actions to the Austrian general consul in Belgrade. Krätner claimed to have asked the “leader” of Fadil Paşa’s harem to confirm that Milan and Mara had, indeed, been “taken captive” six years previously, as Milan claimed, and to have been answered in the affirmative. This was, in his estimation, enough to establish that Mara Illić’s case would be governed by the Imperial War Council’s Circular number 690 of 13 June 1833: “every slave becomes free in the instant in which he sets foot on Austrian territory.”⁶³ Krätner fit Mara’s case right into the procedures and precedents developed in relation to the shipboard slave trade: the moment of relative freedom was fleeting, and connected only to the slave’s presence on Austrian soil. To allow Mara to board the steamer that the harem was scheduled to take to Orşova on 21 August, Krätner reasoned, would be to permit her to be reenslaved when she recrossed the Austro-Ottoman border. This did not leave him much time. He sent Garrison-Captain Csoić and the garrison’s lawyer, Koska, to the military governor of the Kalemegdan fortress in Belgrade, Mehmed Hurşid Paşa Arnavud. Their task was to explain the relevant statutes to Hurşid Paşa and to secure the girl’s release. In the meantime, Krätner sent two unarmed military policemen to ensure that Mara would not be removed from Semlin.

What Krätner did not mention, perhaps because Milan did not tell him, was that this was not the first time that Hurşid Paşa had been asked to secure the girl’s release. A few days earlier, having heard rumor of the presence of a “Serbian Christian girl” in the harem, the minister of justice of the Serbian government, Alexander Simić, had unsuccessfully made the same request of Hurşid Paşa.⁶⁴ Hurşid Paşa had told Simić that “he would send a report to Istanbul” but promised no further action; with the harem headed into Austrian territory to board a ship down the Danube, “filing a report” would be too little, too late.⁶⁵ It may well have been Simić, himself a lawyer, who suggested that Milan make his case in the Austrian garrison based on §16. No more successful than Simić had been, the two Austrian emissaries sent by Krätner returned from Belgrade with the report that Hurşid Paşa was “absolutely not inclined to settle the matter by amicable agreement.” Krätner then, in accordance with “the law and my duty” sent the two delegates to report to the leader of the harem that he must either await Krätner’s receipt of further instructions from the Provincial Military Command—which would mean missing the steamer’s departure—or release the slave girl in question, at which point the leader of the harem turned Mara over and the entire harem was allowed to continue its voyage to Istanbul.

To say that Hurşid Paşa’s ire caused the Austrian authorities in Semlin, Istanbul, and Vienna no concern would be an exaggeration rather than a falsehood. The Austrian reaction to this incident and interpretation of its significance was surprisingly consistent. No one in Austria seems to have taken issue with Krätner’s initial behavior. Krätner’s reports, together with the depositions of Milan and Mara Illić, consular reports prepared in Belgrade and Istanbul, and ministerial documents originating from Ballhausplatz in Vienna, were unanimously appreciative of one another’s actions. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs considered the critical

⁶²On the ways Austrian law expected the enslaved to act as proper liberal subjects and advocate for their own liberation, see Frank, “Children of the Desert.”

⁶³Von Krätner, K.k. Grenz Truppen Divisions Kommando in Semlin Copia Div. Praes. No. 257 an das löbl. KK General Konsulat für Serbien in Belgrad, 25 Aug. 1852.

⁶⁴Franz Soretic, “Politischer Gegenstand” No. 41, Belgrade, 20 Aug. 1852 to Minister of Foreign Affairs Buol-Schauenstein, F39/2.

⁶⁵Ibid.

points to be as follows: first, the siblings had been pressured to convert “under the torments of prison”; second, Mara had been too young, her reason “too little developed” to understand the gravity of an act like conversion, even if she had agreed to it; and third, Mara had worked without pay and against her will, which constituted “slavish force.”⁶⁶ Fadi Paşa’s behavior toward the Illić siblings was “irreconcilable with the civilization to which the Porte strives.”⁶⁷ Indeed, Kräutner claimed that

if the Military Governor [Hurşid Paşa] prefers to bring this case to the attention of his government, I have no objection. . . . His report can only bring forth the best fruits for the Christian residents of the Ottoman Empire, since His Highness the Sultan—who, in his well-known clemency and magnanimity, does not wish to hear of any injustice or cruelty practiced on any of his subjects’ sects—will infer from the example of these two unfortunate children what hard treatment his Christian subjects must suffer under certain of his potentates.⁶⁸

Officials in the Austrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs were concerned that the Ottoman minister of foreign affairs would react badly to news of the affair only if he were misinformed. They were thus eager to ensure that the Austrian Internuntiatour present the story from Kräutner’s perspective. They were duly relieved when Fuad Paşa dropped the whole affair, but never did they suggest that Kräutner’s behavior had been rash or was in danger of involving them in a diplomatic dispute that would be difficult to resolve.

Initial Ottoman resistance to the Austrian action depended on a few points: first, the equal treatment of Austrian and Ottoman subjects seeking recourse to the laws of the other state; second, the girl’s status as a slave or a servant; and third, the conditions of her conversion. Fuad Paşa claimed that Austro-Ottoman friendly agreements entitled the Ottomans to reciprocity in the case of subjects requesting relief—the Ottomans had only just recently repatriated several deserters from the Austrian army, despite their conversion to Islam, “out of friendship to Austria.”⁶⁹ Because both Milan and Mara were subjects of the sultan, “their complaints—whatever their nature—fall solely under the authority of their legal suzerain [ihres gesetzlichen Oberherrn], the Sublime Porte, and the interference of imperial officials is permitted neither by treaty nor by law.”⁷⁰

⁶⁶MdA to Klezl, 1 Nov. 1852, Z 13899, F39/2; “dans un age où sa raison était trop peu développée pour comprendre la portée d’un pareil acte,” Abschrift einer Note des kais. Geschäftsträgers an den osmanischen Minister des Außern ddtto Bujukdere, 4 Oct. 1852, F39/2.

⁶⁷MdA to Klezl, 18 Oct. 1852, Z. 13555, F39/2. It is interesting to note the threat inherent in this statement, namely that the Ottoman Empire that *strives* toward civilization is not yet civilized. At the time this document was written, the Treaty of Paris, which welcomed the Ottoman Empire into the “Concert of Nations,” had not yet been signed. For more on opposition to the idea that the Ottoman Empire could possibly meet the expectations of civilization that underwrote Europeans’ understanding of the basis of international law, see Genell, “Autonomous Provinces,” especially pp. 533–37.

⁶⁸Kräutner, Semlin, 25 Aug. 1852 to General Consulate in Belgrade.

⁶⁹Klezl’s account of his conversation with Fuad Paşa on 10 Sept. 1852; reported 11 Sept. 1852 to MdA. F 39/3. Geschäfte No. LXIX A_C Bujukdere, 11 Sept. 1852. To compare with similar questions between the Ottoman and Russian empires, see Will Smiley, *From Slaves to Prisoners of War: The Ottoman Empire, Russia, and International Law* (Oxford, 2018) and Smiley, “The Burdens of Subjecthood,” 73–93. William Clarence-Smith mentions an eighteenth-century “convention that Muslim converts should never be given up, even if they had embraced Islam as children or under duress.” Interestingly, he notes it was the 1791 Treaty of Sistova that first abrogated this expectation through its requirement that “all Austrian slaves in Ottoman hands should be freed and returned.” William Gervase Clarence-Smith, *Islam and the Abolition of Slavery* (Oxford, 2006), 92.

⁷⁰Übersetzung einer Note Fuad Efendi’s osman. Ministers des Außern an den kais. Geschäftsträger dd 18 Silhidsche 1268 (1 Oct. 1852). The original from which H. von Haymerle (presumably Heinrich, Baron von Haymerle, who

Fuad Paşa went on to say that his government “never permitted the use of any kind of force when it comes to a religious conversion or change in faith,” and that the girl had, at the time of the 1850 review, “been given over to the family as a guest” because “she adhered to Islam.”⁷¹ In Mara’s own testimony, her conversion had made her a “Turk” (“Ich bin ungeru Türkin geworden,” she noted)—not in any ethnic or national sense, but in the sense of a true subject of the Ottoman sultan: a Muslim.⁷²

Furthermore, according to Fuad Paşa, Mara Illić had not been a slave, but a paid servant. A Bosnian girl was not even permitted to be enslaved according to the laws of Islam: “Christians in Bosnia cannot be enslaved.”⁷³ Hurşid Paşa called her “a Turkish [*sic*] girl, who worked as a servant in exchange for a contractually agreed upon monthly wage.”⁷⁴ Neither Hurşid Paşa nor his Austrian interlocutors seemed willing to acknowledge just how fluid the distinction between free and forced labor may have been not only in the Ottoman Empire but elsewhere in Europe. In many contexts in the nineteenth century, “the range of forms of labour expressed a continuity. There were subtle gradations, rather than an outright opposition, between free and forced labour.”⁷⁵ Ceydal Karamursel has argued that in the Ottoman context, the distinction between enslavement and freedom described not quality of life or freedom from constraint but rather a legal category regulated by *shari’a* law, that is, in the court system and not in the harem.⁷⁶ Elsewhere, she has evoked the phrase “uncertainties of freedom” to describe the way that in postslavery societies, slavery “simply dissolved into other forms of power and exploitation.”⁷⁷ Karamursel considers slippage between the two categories in a period of Ottoman history when a constitutional revolution had suggested, but not implemented, a commitment to emancipation. In Mara’s case, the argument about her condition of enslavement revolved around whether or not it was *possible* for a Christian in Bosnia to be enslaved, not what the conditions of her labor in the harem were.

would later have a distinguished career in the Austro-Hungarian foreign service) produced this translation is not included in the file.

⁷¹Ibid. Clarence-Smith enumerates the many different ways a person could be enslaved under Islamic law in *Islam and the Abolition of Slavery*.

⁷²As Selim Deringil has pointed out, the religious faith of illiterate peasants like Mara and her family was generally “practice oriented,” focused around “a series of prohibitions” as well as “demands for concrete objects of worship, especially graves and relics” rather than theological doctrine. Thanks to Deringil, I found H. T. Norris’s work on women’s “superficial conversion” to Islam; Mara might have fallen into the category of women and girls who received little indoctrination after their ceremonial conversion. Deringil, *Conversion and Apostasy*, 17; H. T. Norris, *Islam in the Balkans: Religion and Society between Europe and the Arab World* (Columbia, 1993), 264.

⁷³Klezi’s account of his conversation with Fuad Paşa on 10 Sept. 1852; reported 11 Sept. 1852 to MdA. F 39/3. Administrative Geschäfte No. LXIX A_C Bujukdere, 11 Sept. 1852.

⁷⁴The phrase “Turkish girl” appears in the German translation of the note from Hurşid Paşa to the General Consulate in Belgrade. It is worth noting that Ottomans would not be likely to use this word in internal documents because “until the late nineteenth century, the Ottoman elites did not identify themselves as Turks, which to them had the ring of uncultivated peasants and tribal people.” Zilfi, *Women and Slavery in the Late Ottoman Empire*, 136.

⁷⁵Alessandro Stanziani, “Serfs, Slaves, or Wage Earners? The Legal Status of Labour in Russia from a Comparative Perspective,” *Journal of Global History* 3 (2008): 202, as cited in Smiley, “The Burdens of Subjecthood,” 74.

⁷⁶Ceyda Karamursel, “Transplanted Slavery, Contested Freedom, and Vernacularization of Rights in the Reform Era Ottoman Empire,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 59, no. 3 (July 2017): 691.

⁷⁷Ceyda Karamursel, “The Uncertainties of Freedom: The Second Constitutional Era and the End of Slavery in the Late Ottoman Empire,” *Journal of Women’s History* 28, no. 3 (2016): 139. Karamursel cites Frederick Cooper, Thomas C. Holt, and Rebecca Scott, *Beyond Slavery: Explorations of Race, Labor, and Citizenship in Postemancipation Societies* (Chapel Hill, 2000), 3.

And as for the coerced conversion, Fuad Paşa suggested there was no reason to believe that Mara and Milan’s testimony about Mara’s extended imprisonment was true.⁷⁸ If the girl was not a slave (because, as a protected minority, she was not permitted to be enslaved), then her conversion was not forced (because the sultan did not permit the use of force in conversions). If her conversion was not coerced, then she could not be a slave because she stayed in the harem willingly, as a “guest.” Her legal status, her religion, and her nationality/subjecthood were all used to define one another; the permissible determined the possible. In spite of the seemingly tight circularity of this defense, and notwithstanding Hurşid Paşa’s ire, Fuad Paşa showed little inclination to dwell on the case. By 28 October 1852, Fuad Paşa let it be known that the Porte would not insist on the girl’s return.⁷⁹ Mara’s archival story ends in November 1853, with a few documents sent by the minister of foreign affairs confirming that she should be sent back to Belgrade, where an Orthodox merchant named Sima Jovanovics had agreed to adopt her. Lieutenant Colonel v. Radossavljevics of the Serbian Ministry of Foreign Affairs had guaranteed her safety. She had confirmed in October 1853 that, “notwithstanding that her brother had died in the meantime,” she still wished to return to Belgrade, the city he had worked so hard to make her home. And so Milan disappears, and we never had the chance to bid him farewell.

Few illiterate, eleven-year-old peasant girls have a file as thick as Mara’s. But I cannot help but wonder about what is not in it. Not only humanistic questions about Milan’s death and Mara’s life after 1853, which any historian knows the archive often refuses to answer, but also policy questions. Why were the Serbian authorities dependent on Austria to take Mara out of the harem in 1852 but perfectly capable of keeping her out of it from 1853 forward? Why did Fuad Paşa let the whole case go without more of a fight? After all, an Ottoman subject had been seized in transit and was being held in a foreign country. Why was it not more critical to insist, as Hurşid Paşa had initially done, that the merits of Mara Illić’s case should be properly evaluated by Ottoman law, and not Austrian law? Especially given that if Mara were to stay in Semlin (or Belgrade), she would surely reconvert to Christianity, why was it not more critical to act on the sultan’s declaration (expressed in this form only later, in 1898) that “Although the Sublime State cannot force anyone to accept Islam, we can never tolerate the conversion of Muslims to Christianity”?⁸⁰

The most obvious, but not terribly satisfying, answer has to do with Fadil Paşa and the historical context in which this incident took place. Fadil Paşa’s own status as a Bosnian magnate and an Ottoman subject was complicated enough at the moment his harem crossed into Austria that any ambiguities in the status of the members of his household—slaves, servants, or otherwise—might not have seemed worth arguing about. In some ways, Fuad Paşa’s response here foreshadows a career dedicated to demonstrating the “European” values of Ottoman reform, what Ussama Makdisi has called Fuad Paşa’s self-understood “duty to represent the ‘true’ Empire—i.e., its center, its reformers, and its sultan—by excoriating the

⁷⁸“One cannot, after all, lend credence to everything these people say.” Klezl’s account of his conversation with Fuad Paşa on 10 Sept. 1852; reported 11 Sept. 1852 to MdA. F 39/3. Administrative Geschäfte No. LXIX A_C Bujukdere, 11 Sept. 1852.

⁷⁹Ed. v. Klezl (Büyükdere) to MdA (Vienna), 28 Oct. 1852, No. LXXXB.

⁸⁰As cited in Deringil, *The Well-Protected Domains*, 92; see also Deringil, *Conversion and Apostasy*.

‘cowardly’ local governors” and their barbarism.⁸¹ Just as Mara had become vulnerable to Fadil Paşa’s authority in the moment her biological patriarch, her father, had died, she became exposed to the Austrians’ authority at the moment Fadil Paşa was disgraced, sent into exile, physically absent. From this perspective, the *New York Times*’s erroneous claim that the precondition for Milan’s petition to the Austrian authorities was that her “father and mother, Catholic Slavonians and subjects of the Porte, had died not long before, and the brother had become her legal guardian” is, though inaccurate, still suggestive. Who could, *in loco parentis*, speak to the voluntary or involuntary nature of Mara’s conversion? Her “host,” Fadil Paşa, who may also have illegally enslaved her? Or her brother, Milan, a child himself at the moment of their separation and meanwhile grown into manhood, but a brother with whom she had not spoken in five years or more?

The disagreement between Austrian and Ottoman perspectives on what the reigning laws according to which Mara’s case should be adjudicated were created an opening for Milan and his protectors in Belgrade to take action. With multiple potential jurisdictions available, Milan could choose the one most favorable to Mara’s case—to do so, he only had to move, physically, to the appropriate jurisdiction within the short span of time that Mara would also be there. Austria’s dominance of passenger shipping along the Danube, which necessitated the harem’s journey outside of Ottoman territory (across the Sava, into Austria) to complete a journey from one Ottoman town to another (from Sarajevo, via Belgrade, to Bursa) created this possibility.⁸² By drawing his sister’s case to Krätuner’s attention, Milan’s petition set off a chain of events that obliged the Austrian and Ottoman foreign ministries to express their understanding of the connections between slavery and servitude, conversion and coercion, and paternalist state obligations to citizen-subjects and transitory visitors. But, if the circumstantial evidence that Milan was coached in Belgrade is to be believed, the chain reaction began not in Austrian Semlin but in Serbian Belgrade. Milan’s plea to Alexander Simić was also a way for the Principality of Serbia to peacefully defend the personal and confessional integrity of its “nationals” (from its own perspective) against the much more powerful Ottoman Empire. What if this was a case where “jurisdictional disorder emerged as an element of interregional order,” that is, a way for Serbia to “correct” national mischaracterizations by shopping for the appropriate set of laws, to enhance its own power by taking full advantage of its study of neighboring legal regimes?⁸³

It was not until the last quarter of the nineteenth century that the Ottomans and Austrians each developed a formal “conversion policy”—that is, long after Mara had grown to adulthood, and after Bosnia had been transferred to Austrian control. But the policies adopted in the last quarter of the nineteenth century show that, in Mara’s case, the Ottoman approach to the conversion of Christians to Muslims had been violated in several respects.⁸⁴ If, as Selim Deringil concludes, the “central idea informing decision-making” on the issue of this type of

⁸¹Ussama Makdisi, *The Culture of Sectarianism: Community, History, and Violence in Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Lebanon* (Berkeley, 2000), 148.

⁸²Emil Palotás, “Die Aussenwirtschaftlichen Beziehungen zum Balkan und zu Russland,” *Die Habsburgermonarchie 1848–1918*, vol. 4, *Die Habsburgermonarchie im System der internationalen Beziehungen*, part 1 (Vienna, 1989), 588–92.

⁸³Lauren Benton, *Law and Colonial Cultures: Legal Regimes in World History, 1400–1900* (Cambridge, 2002), 81.

⁸⁴It is interesting to note that Deringil cites a report written by the Porte’s legal advisers in Oct. 1903 in which they assert that in the case where parents convert to Islam, “children would be free to choose which religion they were to belong to after the age of fifteen, ‘according to the usage of the past forty years,’” which leaves open the question of what the usage before 1863 had been. Deringil, *Well-Protected Domains*, 86.

conversion “was to show that the conversions had been voluntary,” then Fadil Paşa had been woefully lax. The accepted practice, as it appeared in its later bureaucratized form, was that “the highest ranking local [Christian] priest” as well as the putative convert’s “parents or next of kin” should be present. Both Muslim and Christian officials should sign “documents testifying to the act of legitimate conversion.” Also, significantly, “only those children who had reached the age of puberty were allowed to convert.”⁸⁵ In Mara’s case, no evidence that Fadil Paşa had taken any of these steps could be procured. He had violated the due-process norms of the Tanzimat-era Ottoman Empire as much as the sensibilities of Austria.

Both the Ottoman and Austrian officials gave more credence to statements made on their own territory. According to the Ottoman ambassador to Vienna, Arif Efendi, the testimony that Mara gave to the majlis in Sarajevo proved that her work in the harem was voluntary. According to the minister of foreign affairs with whom he spoke, Milan’s statement and Mara’s confirmation of it, both given “on our soil,” were more reliable.⁸⁶ Even more essential to the Austrian position was that Mara Illić’s “relationship with the harem, from the moment she set foot on Austrian territory, could only be judged according to our laws.” Her religion, the minister continued, was irrelevant: Kräutner would rightly “do exactly the same thing and nothing else in any similar case, even if the individual appearing in the condition of slavish force adhered to the Muslim faith.”⁸⁷

For the Austrians, even if Mara claimed before the majlis to have converted to Islam voluntarily, she had clearly been “intimidated in the harem.”⁸⁸ Although the Austrian objection to Maria’s conversion was to its coerced character, that is, to the fact that she was a slave at the time of conversion and thus theoretically incapable of choosing to convert, their real concern seems to have been with the conversion. The question of slavery was a veil for their discomfort that a little Christian girl would choose to become a “Turk”: for questions that had less to do with slavery than they did with religious belonging.

After all, when slavery alone was at issue (without any element of Christianity), Austria regularly did not act.⁸⁹ The incident involving Mara and Milan Illić occurred at the very moment in which tension between abolitionism and conversion was being tested in Austrian diplomatic logic in another context: missionary activity in Central Africa. In the early 1850s, before he was replaced by another Austrian diplomat who found his activities “unworthy of an imperial consulate on foreign territory,” Imperial Consulate Chancellor Walcher had proactively assisted the work of two priests, Biagio Verri (1819–84) and Niccolo Olivieri (1792–1864), whose missionary activity in Africa involved buying children in the slave markets of Cairo, smuggling them out of Africa on Austrian ships, and raising them in convents and monasteries in Europe where they would be converted to Catholicism. According to the consul general, Gustav Franz Freiherr von Schreiner, who put a stop to this activity after taking office in 1858/59, his predecessors had bribed Egyptian officials, helped disguise African children as the offspring of captains of the Austrian Lloyd (Austria’s largest

⁸⁵Ibid., 85.

⁸⁶“Meinerseits wies ich dagegen einfach auf die von Milan Illic u. seiner Schwester auf unserem Boden gemachten Auslagen.”

⁸⁷MdA to Klezl, 18 Oct. 1852.

⁸⁸Vice Consul Soretic, Belgrade, to MdA, 24 Aug. 1852.

⁸⁹Of course, in those cases, the people in question were generally African, whereas European antislavery outrage was at its highest when the victims were, as Hiram Powers’s *Greek Slave*, white. The statue, according to Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s famous poem, would “strike and shame the strong, / By thunders of white silence.”

shipping company), and brought the children under cover of darkness to Lloyd ships waiting to transport them, illegally and against their own will, to Europe. Schreiner was skeptical about every aspect of the project—both its Christianizing mission and its purportedly antislavery purpose. On the religious aspect, he wrote,

Father Verri does not by any means belong to that category of people who strive to achieve a noble goal with self-sacrifice and the use of all their intellectual abilities; he is a common speculator, who likes to carry on his trade as comfortably and inexpensively as he possibly can, and is completely incapable of even understanding the dilemmas that he is in the midst of causing the imperial government—not to even mention avoiding them. His goal is only to provide the nunneries of Germany and, above all, Italy—where it has become fashionable to possess [African] girls, with such, and to acquire prestige or even pecuniary advantage from so doing. His professed goal of winning souls for heaven could be achieved more easily and more simply by having the children educated in Christian religious institutions here in Egypt—against which the local officials, given their great tolerance, would not raise any objection at all.⁹⁰

On the antislavery element, his criticism was, if anything, even more devastating:

You can view the affair as you will, but the Negro children are bought as slaves and kidnapped as slaves, and the English government would not hesitate to see the whole procedure as true slave trading. I justify my above claim that the Negro children in question are handled as slaves, and are, in truth, not free at all at the moment they set foot on an Austrian ship, as should be the case according to the laws of the Empire, by the fact that if they were enlightened on the point of their freedom and that they are no longer slaves, not a single one of them would board the ship, but rather all of them would prefer to stay in the country [Egypt].⁹¹

It is not by accident that Milan and Mara were both directed to emphasize the issue of enslavement over that of conversion.⁹² By keeping the conversation on the topic of her payment, or nonpayment, of a wage and her ability to sign a contract stipulating the conditions of her employment, Austria was able to steer the diplomatic conversation onto safer territory—territory that emphasized what both empires could agree on: not the relative merits of Islam and Christianity, nor even the condition of slaves within Turkey, but the incontrovertible fact that the harem had entered Austrian territory, where Austrian laws reigned supreme. The fact that the opposite was not true—that Habsburg subjects could expect (and demand) to be treated according to Habsburg law even when they were on Ottoman territory did not cause the Austrians one moment of disquiet.⁹³ These contradictions reveal the hypocrisy of nineteenth-century international relations and challenge claims that purported Ottoman civilizational deficits rather than European racism explained them. But more importantly for Milan and Mara, they opened possibilities for

⁹⁰G. Schreiner (Kais. General-Consul für Egypten), Alexandria, 5 Sept. 1859, to MdA Rechberg-Rothenlöwen in Vienna, no. LVIII/2163

⁹¹G. Schreiner, To MdA [Buol-Schauenstein] in Vienna, from Alexandria, 31 Mar. 1859, No. XVII/716. After conducting this archival research, I learned that the case in question has been thoroughly discussed by Katja Knaus in her Magister's thesis, "Afrika missioniert Afrika? Sklavenkinder in österreichischen Klöstern," submitted to the University of Vienna in May 2010, pp. 75–89.

⁹²I base my presumption that both youths were coached on the specific nature of Milan's reference to Austrian law, and on the fact that the formal interview of Mara was not conducted until she had spent three weeks in Austrian custody—before which time, she was "in too wild a condition" to give coherent answers, they explained. F39/2.

⁹³On capitulations in comparative context, see Benton, *Law and Colonial Cultures*, 108.

some lucky few to choose the legal jurisdictions that most favored their own goals. Mara settled not in Bosnia, not in Bursa, not in Semlin, but in Belgrade. It was a home her brother chose for her and I hope against hope that she was happy there.

ALISON FRANK JOHNSON is Professor of History and Chair of the Department of Germanic Languages and Literatures at Harvard University.