

SNOW-WHITE, CURVY, AND VIRGIN: CONCUBINAGE AND THE ORIGINS OF WHITE SLAVE TRAFFIC IN OTTOMAN ISTANBUL (1850-1920)

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Abstract

At the end of the 19th century, Ottoman legal terminology met with an unfamiliar notion called “white slave traffic”. In fact, the authorities were not unfamiliar with the usual abuse of established concubinage and polygamy practices, as well as the use of slave women for prostitution. However, they held a closer interest in the issue, as the internationalization of it could pave the way for interference in the internal affairs of the state. The origins of the modern concept of white slave traffic in the Ottoman Empire dates back to early ages, and it was published in the foreign press and various sources. International press claimed that Istanbul became one headquarter of the white slave traffic. The addition of tension-rising white women trade to the discussions of slavery and polygamy would not have very positive results in terms of the international prestige of the Ottoman Empire, which was struggling to settle proper relations with Western powers. In this context, the Tanzimat administration gradually became more concerned with the issue starting from the middle of the century. The government’s worry about concubinage, polygamy and marriage was not in vain. The exploitation of such stereotyped social habits for criminal purposes led slave women to be dragged into prostitution, but the actual hazard was that this activity extended beyond the borders of the country. This study proposes to put a debate on the origins of the white slave traffic in Istanbul through concubinage, which has been on the rise especially since the second half of the 19th century and turned into an internationally organized crime.

Keywords: Ottoman empire, Concubinage, Prostitution, White slave traffic.

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In normal times the rich and powerful enjoy all sorts of protection and privileges which the disinherited lack. We are concerned here not with normal circumstances but with periods of crisis. A mere glance at world history will reveal that the odds of a violent death at the hands of a frenzied crowd are statistically greater for the privileged than for any other category. Extreme characteristics ultimately attract collective destruction at some time or other, extremes not just of wealth or poverty, but also of success and failure, beauty and ugliness, vice and virtue, the ability to please and to displease. The weakness of women, children, and old people, as well as the strength of the most powerful, becomes weakness in the face of the crowd. Crowds commonly turn on those who originally held exceptional power over them.²

1. Introduction

Slavery's past dates back to the ancient ages. The earliest slaves, as Bernard Lewis (1990: 3) argued, were the captivated enemies in battlefields. Most of the slaves belonged to kings, priests, temples, which shows us that just a small quantity of them under the private possession before the classical antiquity began. Their essential duty was to take care of the fields and look after the herds of their royal and priestly masters, but not any other economic activities. According to the knowledge provided by the related sources, slavery grew into a complete institution in Indian, Chinese, Mesopotamian, ancient Greek, Roman, Egyptian and Arab civilizations (Duman, 2011: 10). When the juridical structures of all archaic civilisations are considered, slavery rises out among the other institutions. Slavery was considered a legal status in these societies, no matter how their social and economic organizations were *sui generis*. Hence, the institution of slavery in these civilisations was arranged in similar ways (Bozkurt, 1981: 102).

In slavery, the person who is on the market for sale was more of a commodity than a human being. While male slaves were in demand for their physical strength and durability, women were rather being domestic servants or worse, they were exposed to sexual harassments by their masters. This tradition got through the ages over the different parts of the world under various disguise with minor changes. Slavery was also known of in Turkish societies during the pre-Islamic ages. Hun Turks, for instance, used their slaves mostly for household chores (Taşbaşı, 2018: 122).

Slavery had validly existed in Turkish societies after they had adopted Islam as their new religion. In this sense, Ottoman society has created a typical slave trading system. Slaves in Ottoman society did not form an exemption to the common practice. Female slaves, which were called either *câriyah* or *halâyıq*, were sold for a considerable price, particularly when they had a privilege as being a virgin. Virginity for a slave girl meant two functions to the owner. First, some owners accepted these girls with a good-will and treated them like their daughters, as well as their maids. Throughout the existence of the Ottoman Empire, female slaves were visible, accompanying their mistresses as they moved about in the public space. Wives and daughters of state officials thus set off for excursions with female slaves in tow, and women wandered through the streets escorted by them (Fleet, 2016: 129).

Second, though, these girls could be sexually abused as the objects of a satisfying commodity to the male lust, either by the slave traders or their masters. They often sold them for prostitution repeatedly with multifarious slynesses. Female slave trade in the Ottoman lands, therefore, has been made a clandestine instrument that paving the way for the modern white slave traffic as we know it,

² René Girard, *The Scapegoat* (trans: Yvonne Freccero). Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986, pp. 18-19.

which emerged in the second half of the 19th century. This paper shall elaborate on the conditions of *câriyâhs/halayıqs* and attempt to trace the origins of “white slave traffic” in Ottoman Istanbul between the years of 1850-1920.

2. Going Once, Going Twice, and Sold!: Slave Trade in the Ottoman Empire

When one attempts to put the subject of slavery into examination in the Ottoman Empire, s(he) must be realized that slavery is not “the slavery” as in any other country. First, unlike the North American system, the Ottoman slave trade was conducted by the regulations and rules of Islam. Under these principles slaves had specific rights which were usually, even if not universally, recognized. If you were a free-born Muslim, no one could enslave you. Therefore, slaves were mostly collected from outside the empire or from non-Muslim societies. Islam invited but did not order manumission, but it was a popular Ottoman practice to set slaves free after seven years. Most of the slaves would rather stay in their master’s service as free servants after the release (Lewis, 2004: 130). In short, the system of slavery in the Ottoman Empire was much gentler because slaves were not exploited on the hard labour of plantations, and they were well-treated, often manumitted with the fact that they could easily blend into the slave-owning society. And slave-owners, most of the time, manumitted the slaves under their command by the hope that the manumission would be a ransom for their souls (Toledano, 2009: 13).

Slaves were under the category of personal property in the Ottoman Empire, so the Islamic rules on property applied to an individual who had turned into a slave (Conermann ve Şen: 2020, 14). To be a slave in the Ottoman Empire, though, meant lots of distinct possibilities in terms of both the owner and his slaves. If you were a good-looking male, you could get lucky and be a servant to run for your master’s errands in his house. A *câriyâh* could achieve a goal, like having a home thanks to the living together with your master and his family, and she would serve them as a waitress. Or you would hope for the better and tried to get pregnant from your master to be his lawful wife. According to the *shari‘a*, a way of being set free for a female slave was to bear her master’s child, regardless of the child was dead or alive, which was called *müstevlide* or *istilâd*. Here, with the condition of the master’s admission, of course, *câriyâh* would be free after her master passed away (Akyılmaz, 2004: 229). It is crucial to state that, though, getting pregnant from the master and give him a child was not always the door to freedom. The alibi of bearing and bringing the master’s child into the world was one of the major problems that caused lots of work for the courts. Very few of these applications were concluded in favor of concubines. In such cases, the masters could deny all the claims, and the courts did not go over the allegations in the absence of solid proof (Araz, 2014: 238).

It should be noted that, however, these situations did not mean for a slave to have a great and comfortable life because you were eventually something to be sold or to be bought in the daily market. Some masters could be truly ruthless against their slaves. In one of gory incidents that occurred in 1853 in the province of Aydın, Esirci Mehmed (Mehmet the Slave Trader) was accused of cutting Selim’s arms from their wrists and his testicles with his penis, one of his male slaves. After the outrageous crime happened, Selim send a petition to the center for asking *ihkâk-ı hâk* (enforcement of a right). Apparently, Esirci Mehmed performed this violent act with the claim of Selim’s malicious intentions over his goods and honour, but Selim was in a total denial. He protested that he would have never thought such ill-wills against his master, and Mehmed had crippled him because of his hubris and grudge with no reason at all (*bî-gayr-ı hakkın nefsâniyyet edüp garaza binâen*) (B.O.A., A.}MKT.DV., 71/20).

Back at the conditions slaves in the market, we observe they were exposed and sold by bargaining in auctions regarding their gender, breed, age, physical characteristics, and personal abilities. Concubines from the Caucasus had relatively cheaper. Even the middle-class families in Istanbul could afford and buy them as wedding gifts. A slave’s price was increasing while s(he) was known how to

play musical instruments, to speak foreign languages, or to be predispositioned and skillful in household chores. What a customer would first want to see in a female slave were youth and beauty. Male slaves were worth much more if they had knowledge about blacksmithing, saddlery, animal keeping, maritime chores. The buyer had the right of checking his future slave. He used to look at the slave's teeth, examine the body of the slave, grab her breasts or legs. A final examination was carried out by a physician and midwife. (Sakaoğlu, 201). As it is predicted, this last check was realized on the genital parts of female slaves. After that, your fate, which was almost always sealed by your master, stepped in at this point and decided for you where you would end up as Kömürçiyân (1988: 56) puts it:

“The slaves are lined up in the inn of Esirpazarı like herds of animals, and those who come there choose the ones they like and pay for them. Young and well-proportioned virgin girls are detained if they are liked by the chief of custom officers (*başgümrikçü*). Because the ruthless Tatars defile these girls after capturing them and keep only the ones who are as pretty as a picture in order to sell them at high prices. They are taken to the Turkish bath to be washed, scented, and dressed with beautiful clothes after bought at the customs. The price of girls is seven hundred piastres (*kuruş*), but we have seen the ones who could be bought under five hundred”.

Slaves were attached to a specific master through a settlement called *mukâtaba*. It had a mandatory character on both sides, so that the master could not alter the terms against his slave. Since emancipation was regarded as a philanthropy, the master could lessen the process in favor of his slave, such as reducing the term of service or giving up the working conditions. Likewise, *mukâtaba* provided some benefits for the master. Lifelong slaves were usually willing to fleeing or having a laze, and the master guaranteed an acceptable and worthwhile employment for a certain period (İnalçık, 2008: 129). However, one might speculate that the masters freed at least some slaves in their later years to do charity. Indeed, qadi registers are full of such case records of manumission.

Slavery had an important share in the trade activities that took place in Istanbul. Slave traders were settled in the new and old bazaars (*bedestens*). Female slaves were sold in the New Bazaar (*Yeni Bedesten*), and others (mixed in gender) those who were to be sold by the Book of Inheritance (*Kassam Defteri*) could be found in the Old Bazaar (*Eski Bedesten*). There was also a great inn (*Esir Hanı*), where the slave sales happened (Altınay, 2011: 122). The African part of the slave trade realized through Baghdad, Medina and Aleppo; those of Circassian and Georgian were brought originally through Erzurum; Bosniak and Slavic people were reaching Istanbul by the bazaars in Cairo, Sofia and Belgrade (Özbilgen, 2011: 272).

There was a keen interest in pretty boys and girls to be servants and maids in the mansions of the Ottoman senior bureaucrats, or in the sultan's palace. Slaves were purchased and traded at the notorious slave market near the Grand Bazaar (*Kapalıçarşı*), until it was concluded by Sultan Abdulmecid in 1846 (Badem, 2010: 349). We may presume that elegant women slaves were held as *câriyâhs* to the private harems, even to the palace. Along with this, there were also those who were regularly prostituted in the market. Women slaves with a proper physical presentation, like long and nice hair or colorful eyes, drew the spotlights to themselves, but male slaves should not be neglected in this respect, too. Ottoman free women also purchased slaves, but what women typically requested in their future-slaves was an aptitude for housework, physical toughness, and an accommodating personality. Beauty was also a fundamental factor for women masters. However, women may have hoped of having beautiful slaves as a kind of pride, and the slave himself as a “beautiful object” to show off (Ben-Naeh, 2006: 317).

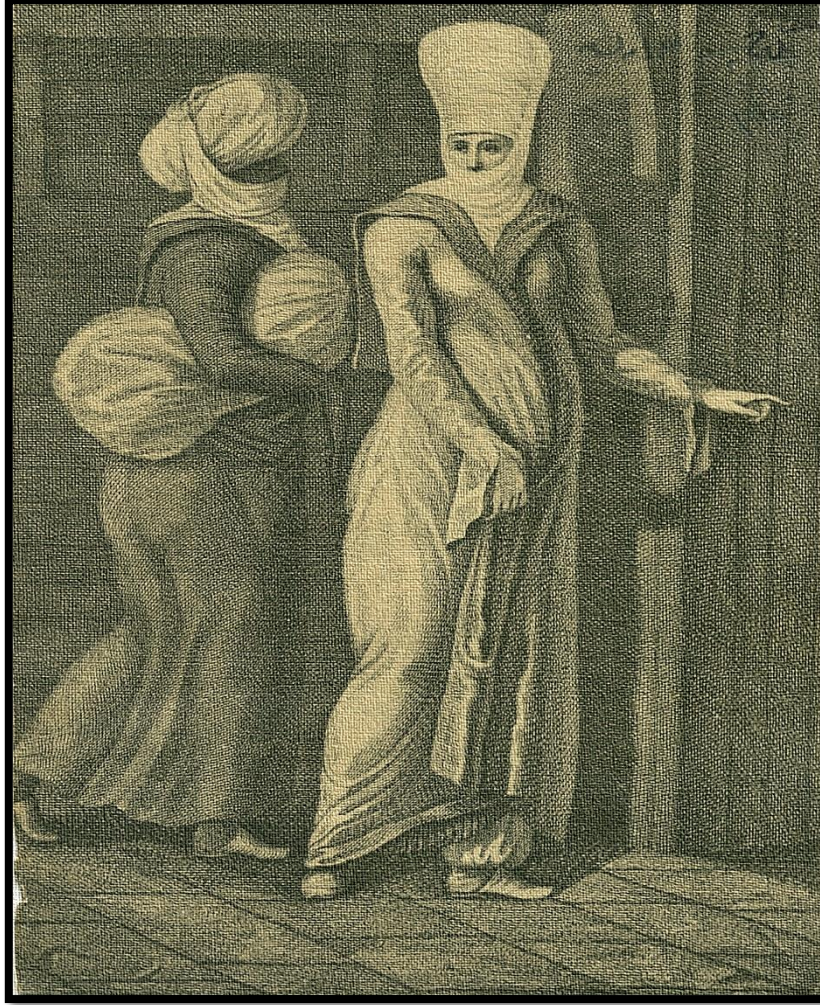


Figure 1: A câriyâh is going to bath with her mistress.
Source: İBB. *Atatürk Kitaplığı*, no: Krt_009274.

When considered in terms of Ottoman Istanbul, we observe it is impossible to measure the quantity of slaves who lived in the city. This was true for both the slaves that belonged to the sultan himself and to the city's staff. To say that there were thousands of slaves in Istanbul should not be an exaggeration, but an estimate in the dark. The impossibility of estimating the average number of slaves in Istanbul stems from the fact that the vast majority of slaves in the city during the second half of the 17th century lived completely familial spheres and occupied with domestic activities. Naturally, they were not included in any group that would attract the attention of the agents of the administration, and they did not constitute the subject of any census, as with tradespeople. The government has neither the power to look nor intervene inside the walls of a house, and the number of individuals within a house cannot be precisely known, particularly in a Muslim home where private life is mysterious to foreign eyes (Mantran, 1990: 104). According to the estimation of Jean du Mont in 1691 (Üçel-Aybet, 2010: 328), for example, each year 50.000 slaves entered Turkey.

Besides the statements above, we should underline that slaves did not represent a formal labor force as they were not the members of any guild (Faroqhi, 1994: 596). Since the Ottoman slavery system had an open structure, slaves in this system could integrate with the society as if they were free individuals. For this reason, the system constantly needed new slaves to maintain its existence. That Muslim elements and non-Muslims in the category of *dhimmi* were forbidden to be traded has led the system to look for external resources from which new slaves could be derived (Erdem, 1996: 19). Considering the continuity of the slave trade in the Ottoman lands and the circulation of slaves into the

country from different regions, it becomes impossible to estimate the total number of slaves in the markets and in the household.

3. Snow-White, Curvy, and Virgin: Being a Concubine in the Ottoman World

During the 19th century, Western societies turned against the slavery. This development led also the Ottoman authorities to restrict and forbid the slavery in the empire. But it was much easier to say than get it done because of the deep-rooted origins of slave trade (Martal, 1994: 15). In Kurnaz's claim, the first document on the subject is dated January 27, 1847 (9 Safer 1263). It was addressed to the governor of Baghdad for declaring that slave trade was prohibited in the Africa (Kurnaz, 1997: 53).

State leaders, who were attempting to shape a new legal order in the society, had to deal with the institution of slavery as well. Slaves and concubines were being sold like goods or belongings in front of people, a place called Esir Pazarı near Grand Bazaar (Çarşı-yı Kebîr). This market was closed in 1848 by an imperial order of the sultan. However slave trade continued clandestinely (Kartal, 2007: 275). The abolition of the slave markets in Istanbul was an act that was undertaken by the Ottoman Empire as an initiative within the framework of the Tanzimat reforms. Mustafa Reşit Pasha, who was appointed as the Grand Vizier in September 1846, implemented many projects that could be considered as the second pillar of the Tanzimat on education, criminal, commercial and justice law and local governments (Toledano, 1982: 108).

Balıkhane Nazırı Ali Rıza Bey, too, mentions about the closure of the slave market and said the slave trade in Istanbul was found against the basic rules of humanity. Ethiopian male slaves and *câriyâhs* were still for sale in some houses around Fatih. Circassians were also in the market around Tophane, Karabaş neighbourhood (Ali Rıza Bey, 2001: 295-296). Lucy Mary Jane Garnett (1893: 382-383), one of the female travellers in the late empire, also submitted some important observations on the female slave trade:

“Although the Porte, in deference to European opinion, has closed the slave-market at Constantinople, and formally prohibited the slave-trade, no material change, so far as slave women are concerned, has in reality taken place in this respect. For the institution of slavery being indispensable to the social system of the Osmanlis, its total abolition would also involve the abolition of the harem, a revolution for which they are as yet by no means prepared”.

“A servant girl” [*halâyıq*], says Şemseddin Sami [Fraşeri] in his *Kâmûs-ı Türkî* (1901), and carries on, “who is sold and bought by money”. In Şemseddin Sami's definition, which he used *câriyâh* as an alternative for *halâyıq*, the girl was captivated as a trophy after a battle, or she was sold by her first master to be a wife (Sami, 1901: 464). In the Ottoman Empire, slavery was strictly supervised by law, and the rights of the female slave, which was called *câriyah* or *halâyıq* (both mean “concubine”), and the liabilities of the owner were plainly described. Once a female slave bought, she could not go back to the streets. The owner had to either sell her, set her free, give her to someone, or use her in his own service. If a concubine gave birth to a child to her master, she would automatically gain a legal status under the name of *umm-ul walad* (mother of child). Even if her master had not released her before, when he died, she could no longer be sold or given to someone, and she would be free. When the father legitimized the child, which he always did, this infant was treated as a legal and free offspring of the master, and (s)he received a split of the inheritance like all other kids. Most of the time, the mother was married to the master or an outsider and took a dowry (*mahr*) (Sancar, 2011: 93).

The owners had the right to do whatever he wished on female slaves. He could, to exemplify, employ them in either his house or another, save them for himself as concubines, or practically sell them. After all, slave trade was a particular commercial business (Taşkıran, 1976: 31). Therefore, the customer would like to inspect her body. If the slave girl was to be an “odalisque” (*odalık*), an elaborative

inspection on her body was needed, like examining the chest, arms, and legs, and those who dared to oppose this process would have a great punishment (Parlatır, 1992: 13).

The abundance of female slaves was mostly seen in the aftermath of wars. Slaves as prisoners of war were later brought to the Ottoman lands and sold in slave markets. For the Ottoman military units, which did not have a decent salary and were not paid on time, female prisoners were as valuable as gold in sexual and economic terms. In the Wallachian expedition of 1650, 15,000 slaves were taken, when the number was 81,000 in 1683, and 50,000 in 1788. Most of them should have been women. During the time of the tulip crisis, the prices of slaves in the markets, especially female slaves, skyrocketed. Even a man or woman of normal beauty, not superiority, was like an investment in the bank. Female slaves in large mansions must have embellished the dreams of Western foreigners and Ottoman men living on the margins of society, whether their owners use them to satisfy their sexual desires or not (Zilfi, 2006: 237).

In the female slave trade, their outlooks, hand skills, health conditions and the existence of scars or other spots anywhere on their body, and their ages were highly effective factors in terms of the price. Especially in concubine sales, a female slave's beauty, age, and other skills such as singing and dancing mean a direct rise in the value. For this reason, the subject of sale in all slavery-related case records, including court records, provides detailed information about the external presence and bodily structure of the slaves (Akkaya, 2011: 208-209). The process that someone who wants to buy slaves has to follow is described in the memoirs of Melek Hanım (1875: 134-135):

“The purchasing transaction of a *câriyâh* takes place as follows: the client man or woman settles on the slave's cost after checking her from head to toe. When the bargain is sealed, the young girl is delivered to her new master with an old woman. The young girl stays with her master until it is confirmed that she has no physical defects. A midwife is called in order to control if the girl has had sexual intercourse before. After this examination, the money is transacted to the agent and the sale is completed with a receipt from the seller, called *the veil*”.

The remarkable fact here is that the virginity of the girl was checked by a midwife. From this point of view, it would be in point to suggest that if a slave girl was a virgin, her price increased itself to an exceptional amount. Although not directly marketed for prostitution, slave girls were presumably satisfied their masters' lust in his harem, and therefore, the virginity of her was likewise essential to the master. Besides, the possession of a merchant over his slaves granted him to quench his carnal desires from them, but if such an affair showed up, the slave would become the merchant's odalisque. If the woman refused to have a sexual intercourse with the merchant, the law did not seek the consent of the slave, even rape could be tolerated (Toledano, 1998: 72) no matter how the court results show otherwise.

Slaves practiced all kinds of unlawful conduct, such as being pushed into prostitution or being traded to the subjects, whether they were Muslim or non-Muslim (Conermann ve Şen: 2020, 22). Actually, the state strictly forbidden the slave trade among its non-Muslim subjects, but as it is understood, they rarely cared about what the official rules were. An imperial decree which commanded non-Muslims not to get involved in trading slaves was put into circulation in 1576. In the decree, the sultan expressed and ordered to prevent of that some traders had sold their slaves to Jews and Christians (Gedik, 1996: 93). Apparently, slave traders formed a habit of being deaf against the imperial orders because the authorities were still trying to deal with the trade of *câriyâhs* with the Jews and Christians that were brought from Sudan and Umman, even after almost three hundred years (B.O.A., A.)MKT.UM., 78/48, 1851).

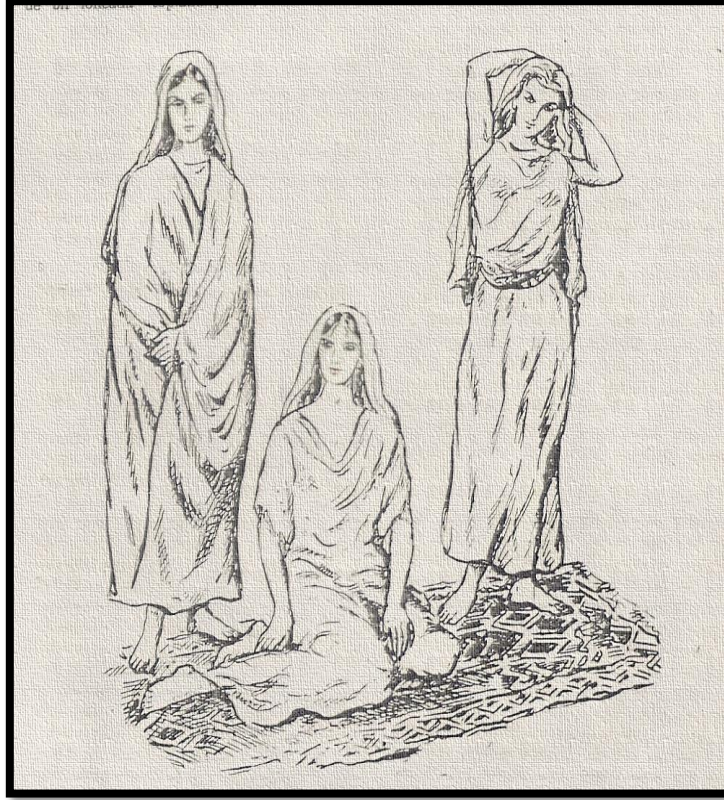


Figure 2: *Câriyâhs* in the bazaar.

Source: R. E. Koçu, *Istanbul Ansiklopedisi*, cilt: 10, s. 5272.

4. Concubinage and the Origins of White Slave Traffic in Istanbul

It was a common practice in the Ottoman market to sell the woman slaves as pseudo-concubines for hundred years. In fact, not just female ones were in jeopardy of being sexually harassed or raped. For some clients found a practical way to meet their concupiscences on both female and male slaves. They borrowed male or female slaves that were put up for auction from the merchants on the pretext of testing them, and then took them away until the sundown so that they using the slaves uglily and return them without buying (And, 2012: 278).

One disgrace which became abundant in Istanbul, especially during the time of Murat III, was the slave trade. Prohibited prostitution emerged and developed as concubine trading. Some people, except for the well-known slave-dealers who have been dealing with the slave and concubine trade for years, pretended to be slave traders, wandering around the bazaar and offered the prostitutes by declaring that they were concubines for sale (Sevengil, 1990: 29). In the sale for these slaves, clients were offered a test season composed of a few days. If the slave trader or somebody else had announced characteristics before the sale that turned out to be invalid, the client could return the woman within three days. Meantime, he had the chance of exploiting the woman for his primary aim, which obviously was prostitution (Yağcı, 2020: 336).

Ehud Toledano (2011: 25-26) points out that the essential motive that gave rise to the diminishing in the quantity of enslaved people in Ottoman society in the 18th and 19th centuries was explicitly the lack of war prisoners. Therefore, during the age of recession and declining of military achievements, the need for unfree work force had to be found through an expanding web of human trafficking. And thus, the ethnic formation of the enslaved populace in the empire changed conforming

with the switching roots, like from the Balkan regions and eastern Europe to central and eastern Africa and the Caucasus, chiefly Circassia and Georgia.

During the late 1850s and early 1860s Russian forces gradually occupied the Caucasus region, and the population living there had to migrate to the Ottoman Empire in mass. The Ottoman government accepted this population and distributed it to live in various parts of the empire. The emigrated Caucasians also brought with them some kind of land serfdom, which was regarded as slavery by the Empire because of the provisions of Shari'a (Toledano, 1984: 380). After the Crimean War in 1853, a major increase emerged in the purchase and sale of male and female slaves of Caucasian origins. After the slave trade was banned, traders became off the grid, and the increase in the number of people brought from the Caucasus region to the Ottoman country after the slave trade was banned. It shows that this prohibition was secretly broken. Another reason in explaining the overpopulated structure of harems in the Ottoman elite circles should be the Circassian Muslims who were expelled by Russians over the 19th century. Most of the Circassians fled into the Ottoman Empire but the empire was already having some serious financial difficulties by itself, when the Circassians were set aside. For this reason, Circassian families had to sell their daughters as *câriyâhs* to the wealthy Ottoman families (Brookes, 2008: 7). To give an instance, Leyla Hanım (1888: 291-292) mentions in her memories about the slave trade in 1888:

“White slaves were previously bought in Georgia and Circassia. Then Russia has banned the trade after the occupation of Circassia, but since many families emigrated to Turkey, and they brought several young girls with which to be sold as slaves. There are no more public markets now where slave trading is carried out as in the past. However, they are displayed for sale in some houses known by the authorities”.

It is crucial to see that the second half of the 19th century symbolized a breaking point not only in terms of the modernization in Ottoman bureaucracy and state affairs alike, but also in the network and trade relations through the empire. By the great convenience and self-reliance came up with the Tanzimat era, non-Muslim subjects in the empire became more interested, or rather plainly, involving in trading slaves. Then again, we ought not to miss the pinpoint that the Jews in the empire played the leading role in this business. It does not mean that the Jews had launched out the market before the Tanzimat. An observer narrated in 1792 that Jews were already in the trading business then:

“The Jews carry on this unfeeling and infamous traffic, and bring the women from Greece, Candia, Mingrilia, Georgia, Circassia, and still more remote provinces. A multitude of females, of various ages and descriptions, are in constant attendance at this grand emporium of legal prostitution, expecting every day to be transferred into other hands. Those, on whom nature has lavished her bounties, fetch considerable sums of money; but those, who are destitute of personal attractions, are sold at a very low rate, and are destined to fill the vilest domestic offices” (Hunter, 1803: 307).

Yet, they no more considered the slave trading business as risky as it was in the past, and slave trade changed its dimension ended up in becoming a whole new international and highly organized criminal web. Before the half of the 19th century, slave trade was a local market on a large scale, based primarily on the network in Istanbul, Cairo, Alexandria, and Galicia. The ancient and more usual white slave traffic was the first-hand women sales from Eastern Europe into the Orient, through the huge general storehouse of Constantinople. The principal recruiting-ground for this was the poor ghetto of Europe in the old kingdom of Poland, now occupied by Austria and Russia, where the Jews were herded out of the rest of Christendom by the oppressions of the Middle Ages (Law, 1909: 73).

The early female slave traffic was started by the trade of girls from Eastern Europe into the Orient through the major circulating center, Constantinople. The victims of this traffic were selected predominantly from the ghetto of Europe in the old kingdoms of Poland, which is now a part of Russia and Austria. The *kaftan*, as the procurer was formerly called, picked up the girls in Galicia and Russian Poland and traded them into Asia. Around the midst of the 19th century, the female slaves were began also to be sold in the West, and this was the rise of the white slavery in its modern sense (Roe, 1911:

97-98).³ Beautiful Caucasian girls either were to be kidnapped by whom waiting insidiously for them, or deceived with the false promise of marriage and culminated in the same fate. Sometimes, girls aspired to go with these men hoping to have a bright future in Istanbul (Pakalın, 1971: 554).

The new type of exploiting desperate women plainly separated from the slavery in old times. Merchants in the past, too, traded girls and women for prostitution, but they were not representing the whole of the traders community. The term “slave trade” gained an ill reputation as from the second half of the 19th century. Some examples show us that the meaning of slave trade and being a *câriyâh* in the empire was in transformation because of the acts of some irresponsible people. Kidnapped or deceived Circassian girls who had no one or relative to protect them, thence, were in a great jeopardy. In the April 1850, Marshall of Zaptiah submitted a petition to the Supreme Council (*Meclis-i Vâlâ*) about a disturbing case, in which a clerk (*kâtip*) sexually harassed a fugitive *câriyâh* of Hüseyin Pasha, former governor of Urfa district. The perpetrator, Aziz Efendi, was an official in the Department of Financial Affairs (*Evâmîr-i Mâliye Kalemî*). He bumped into a white-skinned *câriyâh* wandering in the street and took her to his home by convincing the girl that he would make her an odalisque (*odalık*) for himself, but he did not anything. They were both interrogated once the event was heard of and the officials returned the runaway girl to her master’s house. Yet the case was not closed because the officials also heard that Aziz Efendi took some household furniture from the Chief Clerk of the Department of Public Regularity (*İhtisâb Başkâtibi*) Sabit Efendi’s slaughterhouse, who dwelled in Üsküdar. Aziz Efendi had stolen the furnitures for his house and took the *câriyâh* there to leave an impression on her that he was serious what he mentioned before on making her an odalisque. Aziz Efendi revealed his actual intention and attempted to abuse the girl in his house (*itâle-i dest taaddî eylemiş*). Eventually, the authorities decided not only to fire him from the official duty but also shackle him for six months and banish him from Istanbul when he completed his sentence (B.O.A. MVL., 197/82, 1850).

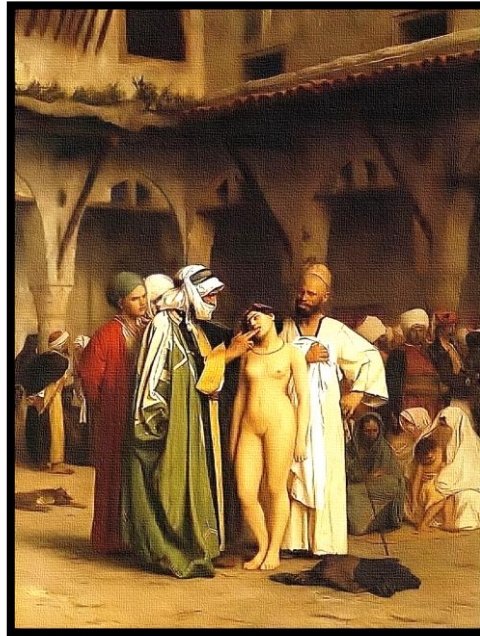


Figure 3: Jean-Léon Gérôme, Pre-control of a *câriyâh* in the bazaar.

Source: <http://www.jeanleongerome.org/The-Slave-Market.html>

³ An American newspaper mentions that the modern white slave traffic emerged in Istanbul like a syndicate, in the year of 1857. Then traders moved their headquarter to Paris and sent sixteen thousand girls in a year with 16.50 \$ as the average price for each girl. “White Slave Lecturer Charges Neglect by Girls’ Mothers”, *The Log Cabin Democrat*, 6 (139), 6 Mart 1914, s. 1.

By the late 19th century, white slave traffic laid its hands over from European countries to the Middle East, including the Ottoman Empire. Several cities, however, were a notorious with the dangerous networks of this business of slavery. Buenos Aires in Argentina, Marseille in France, Cairo, Alexandria, and Port Said in Egypt, Valparaíso in the Republic of Chile, and obviously Istanbul in the Ottoman Empire were the main headquarters of the international white slave traders (Doğan, 2019: 311). An official report, dated to December 12th, 1896, mentioned that the further embarkation of female victims under such circumstances was made impossible. Yet the cases of voluntary consent evaded the supervision of the law enforcement, as well cases where the parties were provided with a marriage testimonial; for several instances indeed have been recorded of men of Jewish extraction having traded their spouses into enslavement. After leaving Odessa with their wives, they came back within a precise term with their passport bearing the remark in the hand of the Russian Consul in Constantinople: “wife remained abroad” or “divorced” (Sabouhoff, 1899: 26).

Baroness von Langenau (1899: 83) reported in the International Congress on the White Slave Trade of 1899 that the girls were decoyed chiefly from Bohemia, Galicia and Hungary. They were employed as governesses, servants, and helps of commissioners to the prime cities of Hungary. The agents themselves were invariably Jews. The victims were not addressed directly to Constantinople because it would produce suspicions. But they at length reached in that city. From then, some were delivered to Cairo, some to Trebizond. None of them ever could grasp the chance of going back to their native countries. They fall deeper and deeper into debt. Only stoutly built girls gained the privilege of being elected by the commissioners. The Black Sea region was one of the major routes in the white slave traffic, with its strategically situated ports. We should not turn a blind eye to the fact that the traders did not realize their work single-sided. They would abduct as many women as they could from and to overseas, either by their consent or forcefully.

There are two striking factors here. One of them is that traders created a steady circulation of slaves, which is not too much to think that they were mostly women. And the other one is the fact that this international sector had a way more spread network compared to the past. Women who had no family or relatives were the essential prey for the slavers. In such an example in 1853, a woman called Emine was reverse-kidnapped, she was taken within the empire and sold overseas. Emine was a resident of Samsun. She was sent to Egypt seven years ago under the allegation of her being a *câriyâh*, just after her father Hacı Osman Bey had passed away. Emine was sold in Egypt at an auction, but she was not a slave. Then the authorities sent her back to Samsun through Istanbul with a meticulous hospitality (B.O.A., A.}MKT.UM., 123/62, 1853).⁴

In the 1870s and 1880s, the white slave traders had already organized in large-scale groups and conducted international transactions from Istanbul. In 1872, for example, a group of Jews from Istanbul and Odessa formed a network of white slave traffic between these two cities (B.O.A., HR.SFR.1..., 34/24, 1872). In the same year, the Russian embassy in Beyoğlu requested from the Ottoman authorities to deal with white slave traders who kidnapped or deluded the young girls and pushed them into an unknown. The embassy failed to pull these girls out of their messy lives, but that was impossible matter how it stubbornly tried. When the families heard about their girls, they frequently visited the embassy

⁴ There are some similar expressions in an archival correspondance in 1866. According to the document, some people were kidnapping others as “gulâm” or “câriyâh” from Samsun to Istanbul. However, it was found out that most of them were free individuals. Authorities had to confirm the free ones and hand them over their relatives, and adviced that the government should have punished these criminals with some great fines to dissuade them from what they were doing. Finally, the government decided to put them in jail for five days, fine them with a great sum of money, and release them on bail. B.O.A., MVL., 720/4, 2 Zilhicce 1282 (18 Nisan 1866).

and complained of their despair to the Russian authorities because their hands were tied up as well. Before this inappropriate scene, Ottoman officials suggested reinforcing the helpless parents with police forces (B.O.A., HR.MKT., 737/27, 1872).

During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the members of white slave traffic conducted their business under a more contemporary disguise. As well as the old plot about the blessings of concubinage was still on the table, lady-killers now adopted a few more up-to-date methods in order to realize their aims. They used to pick up economically desperate families who would sell their daughters and promised the families that their daughters would be a servant who was to be living in a very prosperous family in Istanbul or some place else. But, after they convinced them with this false pledge, they took the girls from their families to distribute them all over the world through Istanbul as usual.

A correspondance dated to 1904 between the authorities of Cezayir-i Bahr-i Sefid province, which was composed of four sanjacks principally based around Rodos and the state officials at the center shows us that some evil-minded people called “custodians” (*emanetçiler*) tricked poor families to sell their daughters in Limni. These men did not hesitate to lie to the parents that their daughters would be maids in some wealthy houses and get a considerable salary. Thus, they gave these poor families a false hope that these girls would send their parents 10-15 liras per annum. Yet they took the girls from the families and immediately sold them for prostitution. Also, they demanded a certain amount of money because they put their daughters at work, and also burdened the girls with debt to tie them into their business (B.O.A., DH.MKT., 831/45, 1904). We also ought to emphasize that the plea of making the white slaves maids was not the only excuse of *emanetçiler*. They had some more promising strategies, such as the pipe-dreams of marrying the girls with wealthy men (B.O.A., ZB.,603/84, 1909).

Russia was one of the leading countries exporting white women to foreign territories. Having benefited from the chaotic atmosphere in the country at the beginning of the 20th century, white women traders abducted many young girls and exported many from Russia to various countries with various promises. They sold these girls and women to brothels or ill-reputed houses. (Doğan, 2019: 316). Istanbul had a influencing role in the international business of white slave traffic as well. A. R. Moro, who spoke at the anti-trafficking conference organized by the Jewish community in 1910, mentioned that there were some insidious people and they deceived young girls to sell them to brothels in big cities. According to his knowledge, the traffic of white women and prostitution in Istanbul performed overtly, with no shame (Moro, 1910: 36). In the Second Constitutionalist period, Young Turks gave the white slave traders no quarter, and either made some of them flee overseas, or arrested the rest.

Henry Morgenthau (1856-1946), an American businessperson, lawyer, and the USA ambassador in Istanbul between the years of 1913-1916 witnessed and helped the police department in Istanbul to start a war against the traders. According to his statements, İstanbul had been a center for white slave trade for many years and the Jews had a leading role in it under the cover of a fake synagogue. A commission, established to oppose this gang, had elected him as the chairperson. He told Bedri Bey who was the Prefect of Police in Istanbul with a great power because of the World War I, that he could sweep the gang away from the city, from this disgrace. With the help of Morgenthau, Bedri Bey expelled or got the traders arrested in a few days (Morgenthau, 1919: 156).

5. Conclusions

Slavery is one of the most ancient and tyrannical practice, which has always been a proof Hobbes' argument, *homo homini lupus*. Either it was motivated by economic conditions, and it was almost always so, or religio-social necessities. Human tortured, humiliated, raped, and benefited of his same kind through it over history. In almost all cultures, slaves were accepted as commodities to sell or to buy, and masters used their slaves regarding their gender. Male slaves were preferred in terms of their

physical force, when female ones were chosen for domestic chores but often for their capacity to ease the sexual hungers, too. For this very reason, female slavery and prostitution have been almost always intertwined in societies, because it was very laborless to sell girls or women as if they were just domestic servants, but not sexual commodities.

Slaves were a crucial part of the society, both in pre-Islamic and Islamic Turkish societies as well. Yet, Ottomans established an original and complex slavery system and circulated slaves throughout the continents. It was like a huge absorbing mechanism that functioned in integrating slaves into the society from all over the world. Ottoman slavery system worked for the good of slaves, at least female ones. This might look an awkward argument at the first glance, though it was true regarding an imperial world had been arisen considerably upon the slave labour. Even if female slaves were usually the objects of sexual desire, some of them at the very least escaped slavery by marrying their masters and giving birth to his child. It meant a way out for them in what situation they were, because they could get a cut off from their master's inheritance.

But we should also point out that no matter how female slaves had relatively better living standards because of being serving girls, they were also defenseless for inside or outside attacks. A lonely female was highly dangerous in a patriarchal society on its own. As it is mentioned above, some masters saw these unfortunate girls as their own and educated, married them, and manumitted them as well as hiring them to be maids. But some of them was not lucky as others. They were exposed to sexual abuse, or their masters sold them into prostitution. Even though the Ottoman slavery system had a milder side, ultimately it was a system of slavery and there were some major problems for the slaves who somehow got involved in it.

During the second half of the 19th century, Ottoman slavery system focused mainly on Circassia as a source of population. The constant turmoil and the pressure by the Russian authorities in that area caused a great number of people to flee to the Ottoman lands. Istanbul, day by day, became a centre of attraction for the immigrants with its great opportunities. In addition, the age of Ottoman conquest was long gone and, thus, spoils of war became rare in trading. Most, if not all, slave traders were drawn to the region and tried to take advantage of the situation. They hired a few special agents so that they could collect the Circassian treasures but with a minor change. Slaves in the past came under their possession after a successful war or campaign cheaply, whereas they had to be bought now. Prostitution has always been a disturbing issue in the market, but now slave merchants more organized than ever, and so, white women trafficking emerge as a new and international problem of prostitution.

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