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## Female enslavers, refugee families, and imperial elites: Slavery and the power of the ordinariness in the late Ottoman Empire

As an essential institution of Ottoman social and economic life, slavery survived until the end of the Empire. However, in parallel with developments in the international arena, the Ottoman state also enacted laws prohibiting slavery. Despite all the prohibitions, the slave-trade could not be prevented, and different ethnic and religious groups resisted abolition until the end of the Empire. By using petitions, letters, court records, depositions, and graffiti by slaves, recent literature succeeded to recapture the voices of slaves in this era and showed that slaves were far from being silent tools in the hands of their enslavers. In contrast, very little is known about the enslavers who continued the slave-trade until the end of the Empire.

When we examine the current literature and European travel accounts of the period, we come across a general enslaver prototype that was an influential, greedy, ruthless male involved in corruption and performed this trade in secret private depots. This representation of enslavers leaves little room for other voices, particularly female voices. Because, contrary to this general prototype, there were also quite ordinary people among the enslavers. By focusing on a case in which the main subjects were women, this study shows that it was even possible to see a Circassian ex-concubine, an African ex-slave, or females from neighbourhood among these historical agents. These ordinary women were at the centre of a slave-trade network comprising immigrant families living in want on one side and imperial elites on the other. Despite the ordinariness of its founders, this network ranging from Istanbul to Egypt was so effective that it could threaten the image of the palace and force the state to ignore the existing legal rules. By analysing this network, this microhistory study aims to unveil the agency of female enslavers in the late Ottoman Empire.