The Spaces of Political Action in the Many Lives of Maria von Born, ca. 1780–1830[1]

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Political action is often conceived as an outward expression aimed at securing a larger goal or wider social effect. In a seminal work, for instance, Charles Tilly spoke of the language of "mobilisation" in the effort of forming "coalitions" to effect changes as part of a "popular collective action."[2] Whether action originated from tightly-bonded elite groups or from popular masses, calls for participation in the political realm occurred from the innate desire for an alternative present.[3] Decades of good scholarship have drawn our attention to this fundamental element within historical reforms and revolutions. In a prescient work, Wayne te Brake advanced a "social history of politics" in order to reflect the broader dimensions of political change in the early modern period.[4] At the same time, rising adherence to the ideals of republicanism deemed both an individual element of political responsibility as well as a collective response necessary to protect civic liberty and virtue.[5] By the late eighteenth century, actions of the individual became manifested in the wider populace as contemporaries of that century – and the one preceding it – amply

1 The author wishes to thank Dr. Teodora Shek Brnardić for her helpful comments and insights.

2 Tilly, Charles: As Sociology Meets History, New York, NY 1981, pp. 146–159.

3 Koenigsberger, H. G.: Politicians and Virtuosi. Essays in Early Modern History, London 1986; George Steinmetz (ed.), State/Culture. State-Formation after the Cultural Turn, Ithaca, NY 1999; for an example of the Habsburg situation, see Stiebert, Gregor: Change and Improvement to Save the State. Administrative Reforms in Maria Theresian Austria, in: Susan Richter/Thomas Maissen/Manuela Albertone (eds.), Languages of Reform in the Eighteenth Century. When Europe Lost its Fear of Change, New York, NY 2020, pp. 127–152.

4 Te Brake, Wayne: Shaping History. Ordinary People in European Politics, 1500–1700, Berkley, CA 1998, p. 3.

5 Kramnick, Isaac: Republicanism and Bourgeois Radicalism. Political Ideology in Late Eighteenth-Century England and America, Ithaka, NY 1990; Pettit, Philip: Republicanism. A Theory of Freedom and Government, Oxford 1999; Grześkowiak-Krwawicz, Anna: Anti-Monarchism in Polish Republicanism in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries, in: Martin van Gelderen/Quentin Skinner (eds.), Republicanism. A Shared European Heritage, vol. 1, Cambridge 2002, pp. 43–60; Mosher, Michael: Democratic Crises, Revolutions, and Civil Resistance, in: Michael Mosher/Anna Plassart (eds.), A Cultural History of Democracy in the Age of Enlightenment, London 2021, pp. 175–200.

witnessed.[6] An emerging public sphere forever embedded this dilution of political power from the sole purview of elites to the growth of popular movements.

For many individuals, however, political action remained a small-scale act to obtain results limited to an interpersonal rather than societal level – all for one, and none for all. Such political action has often flown under the radar of historical enquiry, possibly as its narrower effects prove harder to trace than the great political upheavals of a national level. In highlighting the role of this "micro-political action," Wolfgang Reinhard exemplified the Borgia papacy that served its own interests through small political networks within the Roman Catholic curia rather than those of the laity.[7] Despite a period of intense micro-historical analysis, the idea of 'micropolitical action' has remained a predominantly mode of enquiry for political scientists as a counterweight to the macropolitical level of national administrations.[8] A historical counterpart seldom deigns to take into account the micropolitical nature of individual actions beyond a set of fixed parameters. Political science, by contrast, has developed an insightful conceptual framework for such micropolitical actions that places great emphasis on the particular environment of the individual, namely the corporation or institution – such as the papacy – where an individual finds themself striving for expressions of power.[9] Articulations of the micropolitical elements within ordinary life can be useful when considering female political action in the Habsburg lands as it opens up a further dimension of political activity.

Intrinsic to all acts of a political nature, however, are the spaces in which they occur. When considering the nature of female political action within the Habsburg lands, attention must be paid to particular environs. Historians have long been aware of the artificial societal deterrents and restrictions placed upon women's access to political spaces.[10] Recently, however, definitions and understandings of political space have become broader in a way that has aided a reconsideration for the role of women within political spheres.

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6 For examples within the Habsburg context, see Birgit Wagner/Ernst Wangermann (eds.), Die schwierige Geburt der Freiheit. Das Wiener Symposion zur Französischen Revolution, Wien 1991; Wangermann, Ernst: Die Waffen der Publizität. Zum Funktionswandel der politischen Literatur unter Joseph II, Wien 2004.

7 Reinhard, Wolfgang: Paul V. Borghese (1605–1621). Mikropolitische Papstgeschichte, Stuttgart 2009, pp. 4–5.

8 For the variety of applications, see Fred I. Greenstein/Nelson W. Polsby (eds.), Handbook of Political Science, vols. 2 and 3: Micropolitical Theory, Reading, MA 1975.

9 An exception would be the awareness of kinship networks as a larger 'micropolitical' entity where power is wielded by a densely clustered network of actors, see Pečar, Andreas: Dynastien – Träger der Staatsbildung? Überlegungen zu Herrschaft und Staatsbildung in kulturvergleichender Perspektive anlässlich einer prominenten Neuerscheinung, in: Zeitschrift für historische Forschung 44/1 (2017), pp. 51–67; Lanzinger, Margareth/Fertig, Christine: Perspektiven der Historischen Verwandtschaftsforschung. Einleitung, in: Christine Fertig/Margareth Lanzinger (eds.), Beziehungen – Vernetzungen – Konflikte. Perspektiven Historischer Verwandtschaftsforschung, Köln/Weimar/Wien 2016, pp. 7–22. This approach also corresponds to the study of transitions from decentralised to centralised states, see Monroe, J. Cameron: The Precolonial State in West Africa. Building Power in Dahomey, Cambridge 2014, pp. 3–6.

10 Zemon Davis, Natalie: Women in Politics, in: Natalie Zemon Davis/Arlette Farge (eds.), History of Women in the West, vol. 3: Renaissance and the Enlightenment Paradoxes, Cambridge, MA 1993, pp. 167–183.

The political realm is no longer a system in which power and sovereignty is expressed, usually on the level of a government or state.[11] Rather, taking advantage of the cultural turn, prevailing conceptions consist now of a broader understanding of political action spaces or *Handlungsräume*.[12] Although te Brake also noted that political space as a site of action can encompass "an arena, bounded both in terms of authority and territory, within which political bargaining can occur," spatial theorists such as Doreen Massey and Martina Löw have stressed the importance of 'space' as an element of coproduction that "enables in the first place" a political sphere to exist.[13] Politics is thus undergirded by spatial forces in all occurrences within a social-cultural context. As a final ingredient then, space becomes an important characteristic to acknowledge in the construction of political action.

In an effort to combine these elements, this chapter examines the space of political action within the different lived experiences of one woman who traversed multiple locales, political systems, and social categories. From her birth in Prague in 1766 to her death in southern France in 1830, Maria von Born embodied a variety of personas throughout her lifetime: a young wunderkind and bon vivant, a countess and royal lady-in-waiting, a fugitive and bigamous escapee, a military officer's wife, a schoolmistress and entrepreneur, and finally a nomadic governess who used three names simultaneously (Rivardi, Bassegli, and Bassegli-Rivardi). Born the eldest daughter of the polymath Ignaz von Born (1742–1791), she came of age in Vienna as a celebrated socialite famed for her intellect and beauty. Her tempestuous marriage to the Ragusan Count Tomo di Bassegli (1756–1806) ended with her eloping with Swiss military engineer John Jacob Ulrich Rivardi (c. 1765–1808), with whom she absconded to North America in the early 1790s. After two decades in the young republic, she returned to post-Napoleonic Vienna where she found little comfort or opportunity, preferring to find final refuge in northern Italy and southern France.[14]

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11 Rödder, Andreas: Klios neue Kleider. Theoriedebatten um eine Kulturgeschichte der Politik in der Moderne, in: Historische Zeitschrift 283 (2006), pp. 657–688.

12 Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger (ed.), Was heißt Kulturgeschichte des Politischen? Berlin 2005; Ute Frevert/Heinz-Gerhard Haupt (eds.), Neue Politikgeschichte. Perspektiven einer historischen Politikforschung, Frankfurt a.M. 2005.

13 Te Brake: Shaping History, p. 3; Massey, Doreen: For Space, London 2005, p. 9. Massey's ideas are shaped by critical urban theory and political geography perspectives, but for a historical application see also Löw, Martina: Vor Ort – im Raum. Ein Kommentar, in: Renate Dürr/Gerd Schwerhoff (eds.), Kirchen, Märkte und Tavernen. Erfahrungs- und Handlungsräume in der Frühen Neuzeit, Frankfurt a.M. 2005, pp. 445–449.

14 The present author is currently finishing the first scholarly biography of Maria von Born. For previous studies of her life, see Johnson, Mary: Madame Rivardi's Seminary in the Gothic Mansion, in: The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography 104/1 (1980), pp. 3–38; Riley, Helen M. A.: Tale of Two Continents. Das merkwürdige Leben der Maria von Born, in: Germanic Notes and Reviews 41 (2010), pp. 67–85; Flügel, Helmut W.: Maria von Born (1766–1830). Biographie einer emanzipierten Österreicherin in einer Übergangszeit, Berlin 2013; Franić Tomić, Viktorija: Prilozi za Biografiju Mimi von Born, Supruge Hrvatskog Prosvjetitelja Toma Basseglija [Biography of Mimi von Born, Wife of the Croatian Enlightenment Thinker Toma Bassegli], in: Anali Dubrovnik 56/1 (2018), pp. 299–361; Singerton, Jonathan: Including Émigrés and Excluding Americans? The Philadelphia Female Seminary of Madame Marie Rivardi (aka Maria von Born), in: Daniel Gerster/Felicity Jensz

As a useful exercise, Maria von Born's biographical account can be an exploration of the spaces of political action available to a woman from the Habsburg lands. Examining the idea of political action on the scale of one life across multiple spaces provides insights into transnational dimensions of political activity during late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Moreover, Born's political actions are particularly instructive as she lived through an era of great political tumult, though one which largely left her unscathed for she was more prone to the disasters unfolded by her own choices. In three aspects of her life (freemasonry, schooling, and her role as a widow), it becomes clear that for Maria von Born political action always represented a simultaneous advancement of her own interests; nonetheless, her shaping of history occurred within this interpersonal dimension across different locales, in this case Vienna and Philadelphia, and within the varied social-cultural political particularities of those places.

1. Freemasonry as a Space for Female Political Action

As meetings between learned individuals, freemason organisations created a space for political action within eighteenth-century society. Ostensibly beginning as a medieval guild, freemason associations in Great Britain took on a new purpose as places of ritualised confraternities during the early eighteenth century. By the middle of that century, new masonic lodges following the Scottish and English rites flourished in many parts of mainland Europe. Maria von Born grew up during the highpoint of freemason popularity in the Habsburg lands when around twenty-six lodges existed across the Monarchy.[15] Following her family's relocation from Prague to Vienna in 1777, her father entered court service initially as the organiser of the imperial natural collections before becoming a privy councillor whilst labouring on a refined system of silver extraction that ultimately secured the family's wealth and cemented his position as one of Europe's premiere scientists.[16] A key part of her father's social rise among Viennese elites was his activity within freemasonry. Already a member of the lodge *Zu den drei gekrönten Säulen* (Three Crowned Pillars) in Prague, Ignaz von Born entered another, *Zur wahren Eintracht* (True Concord), in 1781 during its thirty-sixth meeting under the sponsorship of Angelo Soliman (c. 1721–1796).[17] For many years, Born had aimed to establish a formal institution

(eds.), Global Perspectives on Boarding Schools in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries, Cham 2022, pp. 37–57.

15 Chailley, Jacques: The Magic Flute. Masonic Opera – An Interpretation of the Libretto and the Music, New York, NY 1971, p. 60; Krivanec, Ernest: Die Anfänge der Freimaurerei in Österreich, in: Helmut Reinalter (ed.), Freimaurer und Geheimbünde im 18. Jahrhundert in Mitteleuropa, Frankfurt a.M. 1983.

16 Teich, Mikuláš: Born's amalgamation process and the international metallurgic gathering at Skleno in 1786, in: Annals of Science 32/4 (1975), pp. 305–340; Lindner, Dolf: Ignaz von Born. Meister der Wahren Eintracht. Wiener Freimaurerei im 18. Jahrhundert, Wien 1986, pp. 76–82; Helmut Reinalter (ed.), Freimaurerische Persönlichkeiten in Europa, Innsbruck 2014, pp. 27–29.

17 Lindner: Ignaz von Born, pp. 41–42; Wolf, Rüdiger: Die Protokolle der Prager Freimaurerloge „Zu den drei gekrönten Säulen" (1783–1785), Wien 2013; Kutnar, František: Život a dílo Ignáce Cornovy [část 1.], [část 2.] [The Life and Work of Ignaz Cornova, part 1 and 2], in: Český časopis historický 36/2, 3–4 (1930), pp. 327–350, 491–519.

dedicated to scientific enquiry and the dissemination of new knowledge in the Habsburg lands. In Prague, he championed the *Böhmische Gelehrte Privatgesellschaft* (Bohemian Private Learned Society) as a forum for learning and exchange.[18] In Vienna, Ignaz von Born came to view freemasonry as a vehicle for achieving these aims, especially once discussions of founding a national academy stalled.[19]

Upon joining *Zur wahren Eintracht*, Ignaz von Born quickly ascended, ousting the sitting Master of the Stool, Baron Ignaz Fischer, by denouncing him in a testy speech and winning the subsequent election in a vote which broke heavily – thirty-one to three – for Born. Once Fischer accepted an honorary position under duress, Born became the undisputed lodge leader by early 1782.[20] He immediately set about reforms, turning it into a bastion of the intelligentsia in Vienna. A leading jurist, and close ally of Born, Joseph von Sonnenfels (1732–1817) joined the ranks, becoming deputy grand master, and membership soon swelled with such folk, reaching twice the original amount within a year and quadrupling by the third year of Born's presidency.[21]

Born's transformation of the lodge was overtly political. He ensured the lodge followed the principles belonging to the Order of the Illuminati. Founded in Bavaria in 1776, the Illuminati represented a branch of freemasonry concerned above all with political change.[22] Whilst some freemason groups dabbled in occult pursuits through alchemical or arcane knowledge, members of *Zur wahren Eintracht* drew a complete contrast, especially against rival gnostic, cabalist, or hermetic lodges.[23] Of particular ire for the Illuminati were the Rosicrucian lodges that pursued the secrets of mysticism.[24] In more than one instance, Viennese Rosicrucians became obsessed with attempts to capture ghosts in consecrated jars sealed with ox-bladders and buried in the ground in order to analyse spirit murmurings as predictions of the future.[25] By contrast, Illuminati understood the pursuit of knowledge as having more practical and political applications. They supported

18 Haubelt, Josef: Born und Böhmen, in: Helmut Reinalter (ed.), Aufklärung in Österreich. Ignaz von Born und seine Zeit, Frankfurt a.M. 1991, pp. 99–116.

19 Teich, Mikuláš: Ignaz von Born und die „Royal Society", in: Helmut Reinalter (ed.), Aufklärung in Österreich. Ignaz von Born und seine Zeit, Frankfurt a.M. 1991, pp. 93–98.

20 For the speech itself, see Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv, Wien (HHStA), Kabinettsarchiv (KA), Vertrauliche Akten (VA) 66, fol. 621; HHStA, KA, VA 79, fols. 28 and 30; Irmen, Hans-Josef: Mozart's Masonry and the Magic Flute, Zülpich 1997, p. 5; Hans-Josef Irmen (ed.), Die Protokolle der Wiener Freimaurerloge „Zur Wahren Eintracht" (1781–1785), Frankfurt a.M. 1994, pp. 9–10.

21 Irmen: Mozart's Masonry, p. 32. For reforms, see HHStA, KA, VA 79, fols. 1–85. The lodge went from 46 members in 1782 to 83 and 7 in 1783 to 176 and 11 in 1785.

22 Dülmen, Richard van: Der Geheimbund der Illuminaten, Stuttgart 1975.

23 Otherwise known as the *Scottish Rite Asian Brethren* or *Ritter und Brüder Sankt Johannis des Evangelisten aus Asien in Europa*.

24 Sonnenfels ultimately betrayed Born in aiding the crackdown on the Illuminati in Vienna when Joseph II issued the *Freimaurerpatent* in 1785, which outlawed the Illuminati and restricted the practices of other lodges, see McIntosh, Christopher: The Rose Cross and the Age of Reason. Eighteenth-Century Rosicrucianism in Central Europe and its Relationship to the Enlightenment, New York, NY 2012, p. 111.

25 Irmen: Mozart's Masonry, pp. 15–16. One ghostly apparition predicted that the banker Johann von Fries (1719–1785) would drown himself by drink but in fact after he faced ruin financially from costly alchemical experiments, he did drown himself in his pond in 1785.

the emperor's attempts at governmental reform towards a more enlightened and ordered design. Public writings on the subject came from freemason groups such as Born's set in Vienna and over half of them occupied prominent roles within the imperial court.[26] *Zur wahren Eintracht* therefore became a vehicle for mankind's improvement or, as Margaret C. Jacob has put it, one of the "schools for government" for experimental and utopian ideals to be discussed.[27]

As the *Princeps* or 'national consultor' for the Order of the Illuminati in Austria, Maria von Born's father upheld the core tenet of promoting useful knowledge. "Spreading the Enlightenment is our work," he proclaimed as his membership produced tracts to support state reforms and served at court to enact them.[28] He coordinated efforts through the publication of two important organs designed to reflect the primacy of learned activity within the lodge: first, the publication of the *Journal für Freymaurer*, which, though limited to lodge members, avoided censorship and reached well beyond Vienna; and secondly, the *Physikalische Arbeiten der einträchtigen Freunde in Wien*, another journal aimed at disseminating scientific discussions among lodge members.[29] Both publications – unique examples among the generally secretive European lodges – secured the lodge's position as a leading centre for enlightened political discourse. In time, the lodge represented "the most important forum of an emancipated public sphere" in Vienna.[30]

Although the lodge *Zur wahren Eintracht* became a politicised space dominated by male attendees, the role of women in the lodge as well as eighteenth-century freemasonry in general was not so clear cut.[31] Freemasonry existed overwhelmingly as an exclusively male preoccupation.[32] Members, referring to each other as brothers, denied initiation for women. In only a few instances could women enter freemasonry through so-called mixed lodges or a Lodge of Adoption, which allowed women members through rites such as the Conjugal Avowal.[33] Mixed membership may not have existed in Vienna as the question of allowing female initiates was highly divisive among continental freemasons.[34] Yet popular depictions of freemasonry activity in Vienna such as the famous opera

26 Wangermann: Waffen der Publizität, p. 127.

27 Jacob, Margaret C.: The Origins of Freemasonry. Facts and Fictions, Philadelphia 2006, p. 9, 15, 19, 25, 47, 52, 69; Irmen: Mozart's Masonry, p. 19.

28 Irmen: Mozart's Masonry, p. 32. Born's Illuminati name was Furius Camillus.

29 Weisberger, Richard William: Speculative Freemasonry and the Enlightenment. A Study of the Craft in London, Paris, Prague, and Vienna, New York, NY 1993, pp. 130–137.

30 Frimmel, Johannes: Literarisches Leben in Melk. Ein Kloster im 18. Jahrhundert im kulturellen Umbruch, Wien 2005, pp. 132–133; Dülmen, Richard van: Die Gesellschaft der Aufklärer. Zur bürgerlichen Emanzipation und aufklärerischen Kultur in Deutschland, Frankfurt a.M. 1986, p. 133.

31 Robertson, Ritchie: Mock-Epic Poetry from Pope to Heine, Oxford 2009, p. 263. Robertson believes that women attended the lodge yet no females appear in the official minutes of the lodge, see Irmen: Protokolle, passim.

32 Morrison, Heather: "Making Degenerates into Men" by Doing Shots, Breaking Plates, and Embracing Brothers in Eighteenth-Century Freemasonry, in: Journal of Social History 46/1 (2012), pp. 48–65.

33 Jacob, Margaret C.: Living the Enlightenment. Freemasonry and Politics in Eighteenth-Century Europe, New York, p. 135.

34 Landon, Howard C. Robbins: 1791. Mozart's Last Year, London 1988, pp. 127 and 136. The author states there were no female lodges in Vienna.

Die Zauberflöte by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–1791) – incidentally, a member of the *Zur gekrönten Hoffnung* lodge and frequent guest at *Zur wahren Eintracht* – suggests otherwise. Mozart's opera, heavily connotated with masonic symbolism, dramatises aspects of the Lodge of Adoption rituals in its opening act, implying Mozart and his contemporaries were familiar with the minute details of such initiation rites for women.[35] Moreover, Illuminati welcomed the inclusion of female members as a more rational humanitarian organisation than other freemason groups, further implying Born's lodge members not only knew of female initiation but were ideologically unopposed to it.

For Maria von Born, such arrangements enabled a certain permeability into the politicised circles of her father. Monthly seminar sessions on latest scientific works occurred at the Born family residence on the Wollzeile in Vienna where a teenage Maria came into contact with her father's freemason brethren who stayed after lodge meetings to dine and discuss matters further with his family present.[36] Two lodge members, the naturalist Georg Forster (1754–1794) and theologian Friedrich Münter (1761–1830), both recall Maria's participation at such informal gatherings and noted her captivating persona.[37] Their impressions reflected her upbringing by her father who treated her without prejudice towards her gender and supported her curiosity, stimulated her talents, and ingratiated her with his cosmopolitan world of intellectuals. Ignaz's parenting stemmed not only from his attachment to Maria but also from his greater aim of securing a prosperous marriage for his daughter – a wish that met with success in 1785 through her marriage into the Ragusan patrician family of Tomo di Bassegli. Regardless, his exposure of his daughter to their shared world of freemasonry meant her youth became intimately tied to her father's rise within Viennese masonic circles.

Encounters between Maria von Born and lodge members in close personal settings allowed her unfettered access to the political activities of freemasons in Vienna; none more so than Aloys Blumauer (1755–1798), the prominent author and stalwart participant of *Zur wahren Eintracht* where his prime responsibility lay in editing and publishing the lodge's journals.[38] She and Blumauer enjoyed a close working association, which, for Blumauer at least, turned into an unrequited romance for he hoped to marry the dazzling intellectual bon vivant, but both her coyness and her father's disapproval prevented any idea of union, forcing Blumauer instead to accept her only as his assistant in editing and publishing.[39] In this regard, however, she enjoyed direct involvement in producing some

35 Braunbehrens, Volkmar: Mozart in Vienna. 1781–1791, London 1991, chapter 6; Chailly: The Magic Flute, pp. 137–141.

36 Irmen: Mozart's Masonry, p. 33.

37 Paul Zincke/Albert Leitzmann (eds.), Georg Forsters Tagebücher, Berlin 1914, entry dated 1 September 1784; Rosenstrauch-Königsberg, Edith: Freimaurer, Illuminat, Weltbürger. Friedrich Münters Reise und Briefe in ihren europäischen Bezügen, Wien 1984, pp. 66–69.

38 Rosenstrauch-Königsberg, Edith: Freimaurerei im josephinischen Wien. Aloys Blumauers Weg vom Jesuiten zum Jakobiner, Wien 1975; Michler, Werner: Aloys Blumauer und Johann Baptist v. Axlinger. Zur Versepik des josephinischen Jahrzehnts, in: Franz M. Eybl/Wynfrid Kriegleder/Johannes Frimmel (eds.), Aloys Blumauer und seine Zeit, Bochum 2007, pp. 31–49.

39 Robert Keil (ed.), Wiener Freunde 1784–1808. Beiträge zur Jugendgeschichte der Deutsch-Österreichischen Literatur, Wien 1883, p. 38. A romance blossomed as Blumauer became smitten with her and in a letter to the poet Christoph Martin Wieland (1733–1813), Blumauer mentioned how

of the most enlightened scientific and political tracts produced by the Illuminati in Vienna. During his time at the lodge, Blumauer produced several political works, among them his translated travesty of Virgil's *Aeneid* that appeared in 1783.[40] Maria von Born worked with Blumauer on this version of Virgil's prose that served as a means to criticise the Roman Catholic Church and thereby lent public support for the severe anti-clerical reforms undertaken by Emperor Joseph II (1741–1790).[41] To attack the clergy doubtless expressed Blumauer's true opinions; but it was also prudent for a declared Josephinist to produce a literary manifestation of his beliefs. For Maria, following such anti-clerical action proved no difficulty as she inherited a healthy dose of religious scepticism from her father who published a satirical piece classifying monks as an inhumane species.[42] Following in his vein, Maria showed continual disregard for the Catholic Church throughout her lifetime, entering later into a bigamous second marriage with a Calvinist and allowing several of her children to become Protestants.

Collaboration with Blumauer on the *Aeneid* parody allowed Maria to enter the mainstream hostility expressed towards clergy by enlightened thinkers at an astonishingly young age. It must be remembered that when the first fragments of Blumauer's work appeared, Maria had just turned sixteen years old though she comprehended Latin from a young age by studying mineralogy with her father. By Blumauer's own admission, Maria played an outsized role in the creation and completion of his work and he referred to the travesty as "their child."[43] To honour Maria's input as part of the political agenda of the lodge, and in part to display his affections towards her, Blumauer composed several poems in her honour and dedicated several more to her. One of them makes a striking case for evidence of her inclusion within the lodge's proceedings as an honorary member. In his poem *An die Rosennähterin, Schwester M. v. B.*, Blumauer included the following lines:

> "Good people who love each other dearly,
> And practise brotherly harmony,
> Send this remembrance to thee.
> You sewed roses for your brothers,
> Roses they return to thee in thanks,
> Honour, girl, this thanksgiving!"[44]

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his infatuation had lasted over two years starting in 1784, at the time when he became Ignaz von Born's secretary and chaperon.

40 Blumauer, Aloys: Virgils Aeneis travestirt, vol. 1, Wien 1784; Kriegleder, Wynfrid: Aloys Blumauers *Travestirte Aeneis* und die Theorie des komischen Epos, in: Franz M. Eybl/Wynfrid Kriegleder/Johannes Frimmel (eds.), Aloys Blumauer und seine Zeit, Bochum 2007, pp. 51–63.

41 At least 731 monasteries were closed and hundreds forced into retirement, see Robertson: Mock-Epic Poetry, pp. 260–281.

42 Debertol, Markus: Konjunkturen eines Feindbildes. Die Mönchssatire „Monachologia" und ihre Nachleben, in: Julian Lahner/Marion Romberg/Thomas Wallnig (eds.), Kirche und Klöster zwischen Aufklärung und administrativen Reformen, Wien 2021, pp. 103–128.

43 Rosenstrauch-Königsberg: Freimaurerei im josephinischen Wien; Rosenstrauch-Königsberg, Edith: Zirkel und Zentren. Aufsätze zur Aufklärung in Österreich am Ende des 18. Jahrhunderts, Wien 1992, pp. 157–158.

44 „Gute Menschen, die sich innig lieben, | Und in brüderlicher Eintracht üben, | Senden dieses Angedenken dir. | Rosen nähtest du für Deine Brüder, | Rosen geben sie zum Dank dir wieder, | Ehre,

Apart from equating Maria as an equal 'sister' to presumably her freemason brothers, this stanza contains several masonic overtones; the rose being a signifier of secrecy but also beauty and youth and the gift of roses denoting a laurel wreath bestowed upon her head for her literary talents and successes. Lodge members subsequently recognised Maria's abilities and her contribution to their enlightened political project in a way that reflected her involvement within a political space ostensibly reserved only for men. Indeed, Blumauer's paean suggests her participation within the politically active milieu of Viennese freemasons.

Masonic spaces, therefore, represented an early political outlet for Maria von Born. Introduced to freemason brethren of her father, the young teenager dazzled luminaries who attended ritual meetings at her own home. Intending to showcase his daughter's talents, Ignaz von Born's exposure of Maria among the Viennese freemason community produced a twofold effect. Firstly, the mixing of the private and the political engendered her among politically active folk who sought to support the enlightened reforms of the age. She became noted as a woman of sharp intellect and ability in ways unavailable to her other pubescent contemporaries. Secondly, her involvement within the production of political tracts, though hard to exactly pinpoint, do suggest that she developed a similar political nature to her masonic patrons who, in turn, came to relish her contributions in celebrative offerings loaded with freemason imagery. Maria's exploits as part of the Viennese masonic scene created by her father, allowed her to develop not only a political acuteness but also an awareness for her own political acumen that she would put into greater effect for her own ends later in life. The masonic space enabled her first unique foray into political life which helped to shape her course in Philadelphia too.

2. Schooling as a Political Activity in Philadelphia

Evidence suggests Maria von Born discontinued her editorial activities of Blumauer's political tracts after her marriage to Count Tomo di Bassegli, a young nobleman travelling through Vienna upon his return to Ragusa in 1785. Bassegli, a fellow lodge member, represented a significant social advancement for the Born family who now cemented their status among aristocratic ranks through the conjugal link with an ancient patrician house. For the rest of the 1780s, Maria von Born – now Countess Maria di Bassegli – engaged in few political spheres beyond her brief stint as a lady-in-waiting to the queen of Naples-Sicily. Destined perhaps for a conventional life as a noblewoman, at the beginning of the 1790s, Maria's personal world collapsed due to the sudden death of her father in July 1791 which preceded the breakdown of her marriage. By April 1792, Maria abandoned her first husband and their new-born infant for a life of uncertainty across the Atlantic. She arrived first in the Caribbean where she associated herself with a Swiss military officer, Johann Jacob Ulrich Rivardi, before the pair travelled to Philadelphia as Rivardi entered a promising career in the United States Army as an engineer. His good for-

Mädchen, diese Dankbegier!". [Blumauer, Aloys]: Freymaurergedichte von Blumauer, Wien 1786, pp. 47–48; [Blumauer, Aloys]: Gedichte und Lieder, verfaßt von den Brüdern der Loge zur Wahren Eintracht im O. v. W**, 1783, pp. 103–104.

tune proved difficult for them as it entailed years of hardship in the forts along the western borders of the United States around the Great Lakes region. Maria spent six years on the early American frontier where she gave birth to three children between West Point in New York and Detroit in Michigan Territory.[45] After a decline in Rivardi's prospects brought on by illness, conflict with other officers, and growing scepticism of foreigners within the army ranks, the family relocated back to Philadelphia where it largely fell to Maria as their best chance for renewed fortune. The series of reversals in her fortune and circumstances also created a new avenue for political action within a drastically different world from that of her upbringing among the radical circles of the Viennese masons.

Founded in 1802, *Madame Rivardi's Seminary for Young Women* represented Maria's efforts to rehabilitate her family's situation and to embark upon a new vocation in life. She drew upon her refined Viennese upbringing to offer pupils a superior curriculum of foreign languages, crafts, and science, and cultural activities. Soon "the establishment" (as she preferred to call it) became a byword for excellence up until her spectacular financial collapse in 1814.[46] Young girls were to become a model of genteel womanhood through a strict regime designed for their integration into a cultivated society. As the seminary's chaplain expressed in 1807 at the school's annual address, "The advantages which result to a female, whose education has been well secured, are incalculable. In society, she has other themes to engage the conversation than those which reptile scandal or protean fashion supply."[47] Multiple schooling institutions throughout the early republic answered the increasing demand for women's education.[48] Yet the Rivardi Seminary quickly outshone many of them to become one of the most prestigious institutions in the country.

In becoming a schoolmistress, Maria assumed a new role replete with political power. In the early United States of America, schooling formed an integral component in ensuring the longevity of the republican experiment. Republican governance required a strident commitment to morals that only sound educational practices could foster. American women assumed an integral role within society as 'republican mothers' who "guaranteed the steady infusion" of virtue through domestic nurture and primary education of future citizens.[49] As temperate moral characters, women appeared to be ideal educators for good-spirited republicans but could not otherwise participate fully in society as it would have been a demotion of their supposed natural inclinations.[50] Although early

45 University of Michigan, William L. Clements Library, James McHenry Papers, Box 1, J. J. U. Rivardi to James McHenry, 10 May 1796.

46 Johnson: Madame Rivardi's Seminary, pp. 3–38.

47 Staughton, William: An Address, Delivered October 1807 at Mrs Rivardi's Seminary, on the Occasion for the Examination of the First and Middle Classes, Philadelphia 1807, p. 8.

48 Blaufarb, Rafe: Bonapartists in the Borderlands. French Exiles and Refugees on the Gulf Coast, 1815–1835, Tascaloosa 2005.

49 Kerber, Linda K.: Women of the Republic. Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America, Chapel Hill 1980, p. 11; Robbins, Sarah: Managing Literacy, Mothering America. Women's Narratives on Reading and Writing in the Nineteenth Century, Pittsburgh 2004, pp. 16–21.

50 McMahon, Lucia: Mere Equals. The Paradox of Educated Women in the Early American Republic, Ithaca, NY 2012, pp. 2–3.

American society in the aftermath of the American Revolution denied women full political and social citizenship such as exercising suffrage, holding public office, and owning property rights, women were able to carve out a societal space.[51] Institutions such as finishing schools, academies, and literary associations sustained the entry of elite women into what has been called a 'civil society' composed of "a public inhabited by private persons."[52] Through the management of civil organisations such as schools, women in early America constructed a formidable cultural-political power based on education, martial, and social status.

Maria required political support in order for her school to flourish and survive. A fundamental aspect of these efforts was her cultivation of a powerful group of supporters. French émigrés who sought prestigious schooling for their children were naturally inclined to enrol them into a reputable establishment catering to their cultural sensitivities. Enticing American children into the establishment and ensuring its financial success with wealthy patrons, however, required recognisable American backers. To this end, Maria enlisted several prominent Philadelphians as members of her board of trustees. The most renowned figure was Benjamin Rush (O.S. 1745/N.S. 1746–1813), a celebrated physician and signer of the Declaration of American Independence who argued strongly for female education.[53] The board otherwise contained notables such as merchant Anthony Morris (1766–1860), Secretary of the Navy (and future Secretary of State) Robert Smith (1757–1842), Episcopalian Bishop of Pennsylvania William White (1748–1836), and Joseph Borden McKean (1764–1826), the Pennsylvanian governor's son and state attorney general. Added to this was the French-born member of the American Philosophical Society, Pierre-Étienne du Ponceau (1760–1844), who lent considerable intellectual gravitas to the school's mission. It also helped that many trustees sent their own relatives to the school such as Julia Rush (1792–1860) and Elizabeth McKean (1794–1861). Obtaining associations of distinguished persons afforded Maria's institution an air of legitimacy as the city's finest championed its purpose with their own names.

Yet metropolitan approval was not enough for Maria who sought to turn her establishment into *the* finest educational institution in the United States.[54] She appealed to national leaders in emulation of European royal patronage. She was fortunate to have close ties with many of the early American leaders. Her spouse's military background earned them many federalist friends under Presidents George Washington (1732–1799) and John Adams (1735–1826), but the new Jeffersonian administration interrupted their carefully cultivated allies. Maria chose a direct approach to the new President of the United States, pitching Thomas Jefferson (1743–1826) directly for his endorsement in 1807. In appealing to the "First Magistrate," she deliberately emphasised the American character of her school, downplaying the French or European elements within the school's composition.

51 Clayton, Andrew: The "Rights of Women" and the Problem of Power, in: Journal of the Early Republic 35/2 (2015), pp. 295–301.

52 Kelley, Mary: Learning to Stand and Speak. Women, Education, and Public Life in America's Republic, Chapel Hill 2006, p. 7.

53 Straub, Jean S.: Benjamin Rush's Views on Women's Education, in: Pennsylvania History 34/2 (1967), pp. 147–157.

54 Hagley Library and Museum (HLM), WMSS 4A5, Marie Rivardi to Éleuthère Irénée du Pont, 24 February 1808.

The greatest number of students, she claimed, came from "different states of the Union" making her school "more as a national, than as a local establishment."[55] There was some grain of truth to this assertion: at one time or another, families from Delaware, Maryland, New England, and the Carolinas sent their young into her care. Five girls from two different Missouri families also attended the school.[56] Geographic outreach counted for little and appeals for presidential patronage did not translate well, however. Jefferson showed no signs of interest in the school, its headmistress, or her project. Undeterred, Maria persisted with the next administration under President James Madison (1751–1836). An indirect inroad with the Madison administration came via Anthony Morris and his daughter Phoebe Morris, one of Maria's pupils, who spoke highly of the move to the Gothic Mansion within the First Lady's circles.[57] Soon after the move, Maria invited the Madisons to attend a public examination and gala concert, but they declined though they expressed general admiration for the school.[58]

By searching for political patronage among American presidents, Maria encountered the differences between American and European styles of patronage. Sponsorship from metropolitan elites was not always enough. Even with the support of the governor's family, Maria stumbled when trying to convert her political connections into financial benefit. In early 1807, for instance, she petitioned the Pennsylvania state legislature for the right to hold a lottery amounting to $20,000 in order to further the expansion of her seminary. Although she again emphasised the support of the governor for her institution, the bill failed on the second reading without any appeal.[59] Simply courting eminences had failed her.

Maria, however, developed a carefully curated system of public promotion alongside her political efforts to advance the interests of her school and career. Promotion came primarily through local media as an effective tool in enhancing the standing of the seminary. Close affiliation with Philadelphia publishers such as Mathew Carey (1760–1839), Joseph Dennie (1768–1812), and William Bradford allowed Maria to disseminate her school's progress in printed form to a wide metropolitan and regional audience. Friendly articles in the *Port Folio*, the foremost intellectual magazine in the city, elevated the seminary to urban literati as an exemplar of educational standards.[60] The December 1805 edition carried a school prospectus which Dennie, the editor, described as "finely calculated to nourish the best qualities of the female mind."[61] Similarly, continual ad-

55 Library of Congress, Jefferson Papers, Series 1, Marie Rivardi to Thomas Jefferson, 6 January 1807.

56 Two Pratt girls came from Saint Guinevere, Missouri and the Mullphany family sent three sisters to Philadelphia, see Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Cooke Ms., "Reminiscences of Jane Mullanphy Chambers," by her granddaughter Margaret Larkin Cooke in typescript "Re: Madame Rivardi's Seminary of Philadelphia," fols. 1–2.

57 Johnson: Madame Rivardi's Seminary, p. 3; Clark, Allen C.: Life and Letters of Dolley Madison, Washington 1914, pp. 125–136.

58 HLM, WMSS 4A6, Marie Rivardi to Éleuthère Irénée du Pont, 25 May 1812.

59 [Anonymous]: Journal of the Senate of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, vol. 17, Lancaster 1807, pp. 68–69.

60 Lanzendörfer, Tim: From the Archives. Joseph Dennie, the Value of the Editor, and the Creation of the 'Port Folio', in: American Periodicals 22/1 (2012), pp. 94–106.

61 [Dennie, Joseph]: Education. *The Port Folio*, vol. 5, 14 December 1805.

vertisements in local newspapers refreshed the public's awareness of "Mrs. Rivardi's Academy" through repeated updates on the school's whereabouts and openness to new admissions. Within one three-year period, she took out over 160 notices in the widely circulated *Aurora General Advertiser* of Philadelphia. From 1802 to 1812, there were nearly 225 advertisements featured about her school.[62] Printed remembrances supplemented the school's academic activities within the city and Maria's marketing among influential supporters.

Finally, Maria's own personality became the paramount ingredient in her political campaigns to sustain her establishment. The institution itself bore an inextricable link to her through the name: Madame Rivardi's Seminary (or sometimes, Madame Rivardi's Academy). School stationary featured her name embellished with icons denoting fine arts perceived to be inherently feminine in nature and covered by the curriculum. Most of all, schoolchildren attending the establishment grew to understand that their education was fundamentally constructed by the personality of their eponymous headmistress. Successful pupils who displayed commendable efforts were invited to sit at high table with the headmistress at mealtimes where conversation, naturally in French, would explore their aptitude for genteel pursuits further.[63]

Close proximity to the school and its operations increased Maria's embodiment of the school's principles. She was an omnipresent figure in the school for both attendees and visitors. Maria and her family lived within the confines of the school and so much of her own daily life was also indissolubly mixed with her role as headmistress. Following her socialite upbringing in Vienna, Maria understood the importance of regular private gatherings for self-aggrandisement. In Philadelphia, she maintained an intellectual salon whereby leading denizens of the city would assemble. Here again, Maria mixed her persona with political influence. Guests included the Spanish ambassador Luis de Onís y González-Vara (1762–1827), for example, with whom pupils suspected her of an affair after the death of her husband.[64] Such rumour reflected her intense interest in cultivating political luminaries to advance her status and cause among the city's elites. In this regard, Maria confirmed to many other Philadelphia contemporaries who mixed their experiences of Europe with the new American scene to replicate a political space controlled by women and established primarily for their own gain.[65] Whereas in Vienna, Maria had benefitted from her father's crafting of a political space, in Philadelphia she constructed her own sphere of influence.

Political actions in Philadelphia allowed Maria to sustain her establishment through a system of cultivated patronage and outward appearance of a well-ordered schooling regime. Her political lobbying among municipal and national luminaries did not always succeed but it carried the hallmarks of a continued micropolitical campaign to propel her interests in raising the school's profile. Maria's direction of the school as well as her efforts to maintain its standing ultimately catapulted her into a political role, one as an

62 The first was in the *Aurora General Advertiser* (Philadelphia), 8 November 1802.

63 Singerton: Including Émigrés and Excluding Americans, p. 40.

64 Johnson: Madame Rivardi's Seminary, p. 32.

65 Branson, Susan: These Fiery Frenchified Dames. Women and Political Culture in Early National Philadelphia, Philadelphia 2001.

educator-entrepreneur whose contribution to American society came in the form of providing refined learning for elite young women. Conscious of the role she played, Maria upheld high standards at her establishment in an effort to both reflect the societal capital invested in her as well as the wider political milieu she cultivated. Maintaining this position became her prime preoccupation during her time in the United States.

In spite of her concerted efforts, Maria's establishment ultimately failed after a decade or so of successful management. An economic downturn brought about by the War of 1812 along with rising American wartime patriotism made French styles fall from grace and coincided with the return of French immigrants to France after the end of the Napoleonic Wars. In 1815, Maria declared bankruptcy, briefly entered a debtors' gaol, and handed over control of the school to a trustee. Faced with financial ruin, she vowed to quit the United States and determined to leave for Europe, where, for many years, she searched in vain to find stability once more in her life.

3. Legal Pursuits as a Political Activity

Maria von Born had no specific aim when she crossed the Atlantic in July 1815 with only her daughter at her side and leaving behind her two sons – one as an aspiring merchant in New Orleans and the other as a seventeen-year-old cadet at West Point.[66] Upon arrival in Hamburg, she dithered for a few months with a consideration to enter into a mercantile business, though these plans never materialised despite Hamburg then being an open place for women merchants.[67] Instead, Maria returned to Vienna in late autumn 1815; almost twenty-four years after her departure from the city of her youth. Her reasoning became clear over the months that followed: firstly, she lacked any viable means to support herself and her daughter financially; secondly, her mother still lived and had beckoned Maria to return to her before she grew too old; and thirdly, Vienna represented her best chances of securing a future income. Once arrived in the imperial capital, Maria's focus lay not so much on the reunion with her mother – whose senility became all too apparent – but instead on locating a means of living independently. Her mother allowed for Maria and her daughter to move in but, after becoming painfully aware of Maria's American escapes and second marriage, she ultimately forbade Maria to use the name Maria Rivardi and demanded that she continue using the Bassegli noble title in place as her surname.[68] It was likely through these difficult conversations and explanations with her mother, that Maria learned of the deaths of her son Jacobi Bassegli in 1792 and her first husband Tomo di Bassegli in 1806. Equipped with this vital information, Maria set about on a plan to recoup her financial losses by affirming her legal rights as a widow.

Entering into a contestation over her rights as a widow opened up a new realm of political activity for Maria von Born, a space which was inherently defined by terms of

66 Norwich University Archives, Alden Partridge Records, Correspondence, 1815, Maria Rivardi to Alden Partridge, 26 October 1816.

67 Det Kongelige Bibliotek Danmarks (KBD), NKS 1698, Münter Arkiv (MA), Maria Bassegli to Friedrich Münter, 8 February 1816.

68 KBD, NKS 1698, MA, Maria Bassegli to Friedrich Münter, 9 June 1816.

authority, territoriality, and her own ability to secure allies and support. As a political act, Maria's quest to regain her recognised condition as Tomo di Bassegli's widow also concealed the right to rejoin the nobility as a sociopolitical move. Although her legal pursuits arose out of the desperation of her circumstances in Vienna, she was aware of the potential social and economic benefits at stake by such political gains. "I am obliged to chance everything now because I have no resources here," she confided to a friend, "and my mother is determined to do nothing – nothing at all for me."[69] Maria's resolve to pursue her legal rights not only opens up a view into the transnational jurisprudence between Austria and Dalmatia in the early nineteenth century but also spotlights the crucial differences between these two legal systems in terms of women's rights.

A key element of her legal pursuit was the marriage arrangement that she had entered into with her first husband back in 1787. In her matrimony to Tomo di Bassegli, Maria's father Ignaz von Born had promised a dowry of 6,000 Austrian Gulden which he provided over several installments to his son-in-law.[70] Under Roman and customary law of the times, Maria's dowry served as an entitlement within her husband's estate that, upon his death, would provide for her as a widow as a means of income or financial windfall. Typically known as the "widow's portion" (*Witwenanteil*), this sum often amounted to one-third of the matrilineal estate. The right of an Austrian widow to receive this sum became codified in the *Allgemeines Bürgerliches Gesetzbuch* (ABGB) of 1811, which formed the basis of civil law code of the Austrian Empire.[71] In launching her case against the Bassegli family, Maria must have been aware of these intrinsic marital and legal rights afforded to her, but overcoming the disparity between the then two systems – Austrian and Ragusan – turned out to be nearly insurmountable.

Maria faced an additional problem in the political position of her legal opposition. During Maria's absence, the title and estate of Bassegli family had passed to her husband's maternal nephews Paolo di Gozze (1778–1838) and Melchiorre di Gozze (1787–1853) who had adopted the name Bassegli in order to claim their uncle's inheritance in 1806. In May 1816, she made her demands known to the heirs of the Bassegli estate since her son's death had curtailed the direct patrician line that held its origins in the thirteenth century.[72] The Bassegli-Gozze brothers were shocked to discover that Maria had reappeared and claimed a share of the Bassegli legacy, a matter of deep political concern to the Ragusan nobility given the prestige of the family. In Dubrovnik (Ragusa), the Bassegli-Gozze family still retained an oversized role in political affairs, occupying a residence on the central square opposite the gubernatorial residence and as wealthy olive oil merchants in the region.[73] The status of the Bassegli-Gozze heirs contrasted almost entirely Maria's

69 KBD, NKS 1698, MA, Maria Bassegli to Friedrich Münter, 25 November 1816.

70 Državni arhiv u Dubrovniku (State Archives of Dubrovnik; DADU), Archiv Bassegli (AB) 253, K. 10, C2/1 'Lettere diverse di Ignazio Born', passim.

71 Machtemes, Ursula: Leben zwischen Trauer und Pathos. Bildungsbürgerliche Witwen im 19. Jahrhundert, Osnabrück 2001.

72 DADU, Archiv Bassegli-Gozze (ABG) 254, K. 121, Allegato D, fols. 63–65.

73 Dundović, Boris: The Bassegli-Gozze Palace in Dubrovnik. Spatial Genealogy and Architectural Features, in: Prostor: znanstveni časopis za arhitekturu i urbanizam [Space: a scientific journal for architecture and urban planning] 26/1 (2018), pp. 2–19.

impoverished position that constructed an asymmetric power relationship not uncommon to women who entered into legal proceedings during the early modern period.

In spite of the disparity in social status between claimant and defendant, Maria laid out three claims in a letter addressed to Paolo di Bassegli-Gozze: first, she invoked her right to the dowry paid by her father; second, she claimed to the bride price (sopradote) paid by the Bassegli at twice the rate of her dowry (12,000 Austrian Gulden); and third, a right for her to be officially recognized as a widow by the Ragusan senate, and thereby entitling her to an annuity to be paid either by the Bassegli-Gozze heirs or the state. On all these demands, she further requested to be furnished with the interest occurred since the start of her widowhood. The minimum total amount due to Maria, thus by her reckoning, was 18,000 Austrian Gulden.[74] Such a vast sum would have easily re-established her as a wealthy and independent woman, able to live out the rest of her years in comfort. To ensure the best chances of success for her claims against the Bassegli-Gozze brothers, Maria enlisted the help of others in the Habsburg lands.

In mobilising herself for a legal tussle over the Bassegli legacy, Maria displayed the same political qualities as before in the United States. Her political operations focused on the interpersonal realm of bargaining, social prestige, and the exchange of favours.[75] She spent her initial period in Vienna canvassing for supporters to help her case. She sought after the original witnesses of the marriage contract to aid her venture.[76] Her machinations did not go unnoticed, especially in the political spheres between Vienna and Dubrovnik. The elderly former ambassador of Ragusa, Count Sebastiano d'Ayala (1744–1817) later warned the Bassegli-Gozze heirs of the powerful coalition of individuals that Maria had assembled around herself in Vienna. "She has many protectors," he wrote, "all personages of first rank."[77] In addition, she reached out to extended members of the Bassegli family whom she recruited to aid her cause in Dubrovnik.[78] In doing so, her actions reflected the growing political reach and space of her operations, from Vienna directly to Dubrovnik. From her marshalling of advisors and supporters, Maria felt confident enough to hope for a "fortunate conclusion" that would allow her to escape her personal lamentations in Vienna and to live in Hamburg where she could reunite with her two sons still in North America.[79] In a final act, she hired the help of an attorney, Baron Carlo di Locella, to present her case formally as was commonplace for women of her time.[80]

The Bassegli-Gozze siblings reacted to these claims with astonishment. Initially, they distrusted the identity of a woman who had disappeared so abruptly and seemingly with-

74 DADU, ABG 254, K. 121, Allegato D, fols. 63–65.

75 In this case not too dissimilar to the micropolitics of courts, see Reinhard: Paul V. Borghese, pp. 4–5.

76 Leon to Münter 12 July 1817 as cited in Flügel: Maria von Born, pp. 129–130. The original marriage contract along with attestations are held in DADU, AB, K. 10, C2/1, Contratto in originale di matrimonio del Conte Tommaso di Bassegli con Maria Born fatto a Vienna.

77 DADU, ABG 254, K. 120, Cart 1., fols. 17–18, Sebastiano d'Ayala to Palo di Bassegli Gozze, 29 May 1816.

78 DADU, ABG 254, K. 120, Maria Bassegli to Conte di Pozze Gozze, 12 July 1817.

79 KBD, NKS 1698, MA, Maria Bassegli to Friedrich Münter, 8 June 1816.

80 DADU, ABG 254, K. 120, Cart 1., fols. 17–18, Sebastiano d'Ayala to Palo di Bassegli Gozze, 29 May 1816.

out a trace for over two decades. They briefly considered using the local Viennese police to investigate such spurious claims but, heeding d'Ayala's words, they recognized the futility of countering Maria on home turf and instead opted to entertain her case directly with her lawyer Locella.[81] Initial exchanges focused on establishing the cause for the separation between their uncle, Tomo di Bassegli, and Maria in 1792. The Bassegli-Gozze brothers relied upon the personal papers left behind from their uncle's estate to draw their conclusions. In April 1792, Maria abandoned her husband through treachery in close collaboration with Countess Maria Anna von Dietrichstein (1750–1833), the noblewoman in charge of the Savoyard Women's Foundation (*Savoysches' Damenstift*) in Vienna. Together, they concocted a plan for Maria to accompany a relative of Dietrichstein to Wiener Neustadt. The rouse allowed Maria to instead flee to the safety of the Women's Foundation before leaving Vienna entirely – all unbeknownst to Tomo di Bassegli who expected his wife back home after a few days. The ensuing conflict between Bassegli and Dietrichstein ended with him accepting that his wife had fled and abandoned the marriage.[82] From the basis of Bassegli's personalia, Maria's actions appeared as an act of malice. The Bassegli-Gozze brothers' view of Maria became clouded through the interpretation of the Bassegli materials left to them.

In justifying her claims, Maria's own version of events rested on her argument that the breakdown of the marriage with Bassegli had not come as a surprise. She alleged that her abandonment came about due to the political activities of her husband. Maria's allegation reflected Bassegli's political persuasions that had begun whilst he was a student, first in Bern and then – following an affair with a married woman that forced his flight – in Göttingen.[83] In Vienna, Bassegli became acquainted with the masonic circles of Maria's father, becoming a member of the True Harmony lodge. He shared a cosmopolitan outlook that chimed with both Maria and her father but, following the events of the French Revolution in 1789, Bassegli became increasingly attracted to French political principles at a time when the revolution turned violent and unacceptable to the Habsburg regime. Bassegli's emerging liberal political thought of the 1780s culminated in his later pro-French sympathies expressed during his time in Dubrovnik after the abandonment and death of his son.[84] There he argued for the creation of an Illyrian Republic modelled on France and was among a delegation to welcome the Napoleonic forces that occupied the region in 1806.[85] Bassegli's political leanings certainly diverged from Maria's views which viewed the French Revolution as an anathema and more closely resembled the limited enthusiasm among other Viennese intellectuals. Amid the persecution of suspected sympathisers – including Maria's former collaborator and lover Blumauer – in the

81 DADU, ABG 254, K. 120, Paolo di Bassegli-Gozze to Baron Carlo di Locella, 26 June 1816.

82 DADU, AB 253, K. 10, C2/1, Lettere originale della Canonichessa di Dietrichstein.

83 Muljačić, Žarko: Tomo Baseljic u Göttingenu, in: Anali Dubrovnik 36 (1998), pp. 227–247.

84 Muljačić, Žarko: Томо Басиљевић-Басељи, претставник просвјећења у Дубровнику [Tomo Basiljević-Baselji, a Representative of the Enlightenment in Dubrovnik], Belgrade 1958, pp. 18–29.

85 Muljačić, Žarko: Dubrovački dissident i jeho "istražitelj" [The Dubrovnik dissident and his 'enforcer'], in: Vinko Fortić (ed.), Dubrovnik and the French Revolution, Dubrovnik 1996, pp. 73–82; Shek Brnardić, Teodora: Tomo Bassegli: Patriotic musings, in: Balázs Trencsényi/Michal Kopeček (eds.), Discourses of Collective Identity in Central and Southeast Europe, vol. 1: Late Enlightenment – Emergence of the Modern 'National Idea', Budapest 2006, pp. 312–318.

early 1790s, Bassegli's tendencies may well have marked him out and caused Maria to fear for their safety as a family.[86]

Excusing her abandonment by testifying that Bassegli's radical inclinations were to blame was a shrewd political move as Maria's true intentions for the abandonment were somewhat rather more complicated. Whether or not she truly feared political persecution, a greater reason for her escape came from her aversion to return to Dubrovnik. Following their marriage in Vienna, the newlyweds travelled to Dubrovnik where patrician senators expressed hostility over the fact that Bassegli, as the main male heir to a prestigious patrician bloodline, had married a woman whose noble lineage had only recently been founded with her father's ennoblement. Among a nobility who often married among close-knit social circles, Maria's marital condition became debatable as a result of her lesser political status. For one period of three hundred years, no outsiders had married into the patrician families within Dubrovnik and endogamy among the most prominent agnates had entrenched political power.[87] The vote to approve the marriage in the Senate subsequently passed by only a small margin.[88] The misery inflicted upon Maria as an outsider among a closed society eventually forced the couple to relocate further, initially to Naples followed by a return to Vienna where they lived with support from Maria's father Ignaz von Born. His sudden death in July 1791 prompted a reversal of fortunes with the family facing ruinous debts before Born's income from his metallurgical work had matured enough to pay them off. Born's passing thus also removed the financial security for his daughter and son-in-law. Upon learning the news, Bassegli's father in Dubrovnik summoned his son and family back to the republic.[89] Left with the prospect of living in a place she detested, Maria instead chose to flee for the unknown that led to her life in the United States with Rivardi.

Such circumstances and reasonings for the abandonment became crucial in determining Maria's legal rights as a widow in her case against the Gozze-Bassegli brothers. The conditions under which the marriage took place became an early sticking point between both sides. Given the international character at the time of their union between a subject of the Habsburg monarch and a patrician of the Republic of Ragusa, the exact legal status of their wedding affected the potential benefits Maria could expect and claim. Whereas under the *ABGB* Maria's dowry remained her entitlement without contestation within her husband's estate, under the terms of Ragusan law her dowry constituted a contribution to a joint fund between husband and wife composed of the uxorial dowry

86 Wangermann, Ernst: From Joseph II to the Jacobin Trials. Government Policy and Public Opinion in the Habsburg Dominions in the Period of the French Revolution, Oxford 1959.

87 Batagelj, Vladimir: Ragusan Families Marriage Networks, in: Anuska Ferligoj/Anton Kramberger (eds.), Developments in Data Analysis. Proceedings of the International Conference on Statistical Data Analysis and Data Collection, Bled, Slovenia, September 19–21, 1994, Ljubljana 1996, p. 223; Marinković, Ana: Social and Territorial Endogamy in the Ragusan Republic. Matrimonial Dispenses during the Pontificates of Paul II and Sixtus IV (1464–1484), in: Gerhard Jaritz (ed.), The Long Arm of Papal Authority: Late Medieval Christian Peripheries and Their Communications with the Holy See, Budapest 2005, pp. 135–156.

88 Franić Tomić: Prilozi, pp. 316–320.

89 Lindner: Ignaz von Born, pp. 205–217.

and a martial increase given by the husband's family.[90] Within this Ragusan system – a combination of Roman law and Ragusan statutes – Maria's entitlement could be contested rather than claimed by her outright.

Aware of the plausible countersuit against Maria, the Gozze-Bassegli brothers employed a Roman legal scholar to determine specific aspects of the marriage.[91] Composed in Rome, the resulting legal opinion spanned sixty-one pages, nearly 14,000 words, and included a thorough examination of the legal status of the wedding, the justification behind the abandonment, and the overall character of Maria von Born herself – this last element evidently formed out of a mix of misogyny and the impressions formulated from Bassegli's biased personalia.[92] The legal opinion provided for the Bassegli-Gozze brothers offers an interesting insight into the condition of women as legal agents across transnational boundaries. It shows the unequal consideration given to the female party by the author of the opinion, an unidentifiable male jurist, who directed much of his attention in the first sections of the work to evaluating the temperament of Maria von Born. In his opening section, he narrates her abandonment based largely upon the writings of her husband but also refers to the Bible for guidance. Indeed, the first sentence offered a stinging rebuke to Maria von Born's case through a quotation from the Book of Proverbs: "There are three things too wonderful [mysterious] for me, four that I cannot understand: the way of an eagle in the sky, the way of a snake on a rock, the way of a ship at sea, and the way of a man with a maiden. This is the way of an adulteress: She eats and wipes her mouth and says, 'I have done nothing wrong.'"[93] As opening salvo, the author made plain the verdict to be rendered, that Maria von Born had not to put herself in an unprotected state and, as according to this passage, had not understood her husband just as he had not been able to comprehend her actions.

The ensuing passages relied upon a quixotic blend of biblical scripture combined with older juridical commentaries to support the Bassegli-Gozze case against Maria von Born. In one particular section, focused on the reason for the abandonment, the author chose not to accept the interpretation of Maria von Born herself but instead posited that "a woman who runs away from her husband is to be suspected of adultery" instead.[94] His affirmation rested upon the descriptions of possible routes taken by Maria von Born following her flight from Vienna. "This very wandering would be enough to presume all in-

90 Saurer, Edith: Gender Relations, Marriage, and Illegitimacy in the Habsburg Monarchy: Venice, Lower Austria, and Bohemia in the Early Nineteenth Century, in: Richard Wall/Tamara K. Hareven/Josef Ehmer (eds.), Family History Revisited. Comparative Perspectives, Newark 2001, pp. 93–121; Lanzinger, Margareth/Barth-Scalmani, Gunda/Forster, Ellinor/Langer-Ostrawsky, Gertrude: Aushandeln von Ehe. Heiratsverträge der Neuzeit im europäischen Vergleich, Köln/Weimar/Wien 2010, pp. 19–24, 52–54, 398–404, 469–492.

91 DADU, ABG 254, K. 120, Invoice dated 24 November 1817.

92 Bassegli left an emotional account of the days after the abandonment within his personal papers, see DADU, AB 253, K. 10, C2/1, Giornale [1792]. The legal opinion is contained with the same archival division.

93 DADU, AB 253, K. 10, C2/1, Consultazione nella causa di pretessa ripestizione di dote, e suo aumento, e di vedoville per Conti Paolo e Melciorre Gozze di Bassegli a Maria di Bassegli nata Born (1817), fol. 1, quoting Proverbs, 30:18–20.

94 DADU, AB 253, K. 10, C2/1, Consultazione, Article IV.

iquities," he surmised and referred to biblical and Roman accounts which viewed wandering women as promiscuous prostitutes.[95] Again invoking the lessons of Proverbs, this time on immorality, the author alluded to the biblical lines "Though the lips of the forbidden woman a drip honey, and her speech is smoother than oil, in the end she is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a double-edged sword. […] She does not consider the path of life; she does not know that her ways are unstable."[96] Such references helped to distort the actions of Maria von Born in painting the case against her of an adulterous woman who maliciously abandoned her husband and child, but it failed to tackle the central question at the heart of the legal opinion, whether or not the case could be argued under Austrian or Ragusan law – despite the fact that Dubrovnik became part of the Habsburg kingdom of Dalmatia in 1815.

In this line of enquiry, the intricacies of the case centred on the crucial distinctions between Austrian and Ragusan (Roman) legal traditions. The author sought to establish that the marriage between Maria von Born and Tomo di Bassegli had occurred under Ragusan laws even though it had taken place in Vienna. His argument here rested upon the situation of Tomo di Bassegli as he entered the marriage agreement, being someone who had not yet received emancipation from his father and so still fell under his father's patrimony, and therefore laws as well.[97] In order to nullify the Born family's political rights as imperial subjects who entered into the marriage contract as equals, he argued for a strict interpretation of Roman law that the domicile of the husband is also the domicile of the woman, something again made clear in biblical passages. Furthermore, he pointed out that the intention had always been for Tomo di Bassegli to return to his homeland and so the marital domicile would have fallen under Ragusan law. The author even claimed to prove the invalidity of the Viennese domicile in the years leading up to the abandonment in 1792 as even this period, he concluded, had only been intended as a temporary stay due to the failed opportunities in Naples rather than the permanent intended residence of the couple. Such arguments allowed for a contestation of the rights of Maria von Born under Ragusan law that followed more strictly the tenets of Roman law than the Austrian legal codices.

In an ultimate proposition, the author concluded that Maria's abandonment had recused her from all rightful claims to her inheritance from the Bassegli estate and even the benefits of widowhood in Ragusa. As Maria had chosen to desert her husband without warning in an act of spite towards him, she had not obtained any legal permission to take her leave from the marriage. The unilateral abandonment entailed a loss marital benefit according to canon law. In demonstrating this fact, the author referred to several seventeenth-century Jesuit commentaries by Manuel González Téllez (1626–1678), Ernricus Pirhing (1606–1679/90), and Franz Xaver Schmalzgrueber (1663–1735).[98] These works bolstered the harsh opinion of the Church on runaway wives who had no recourse to law

95 DADU, AB 253, K. 10, C2/1, Consultazione, Article IV.

96 DADU, AB 253, K. 10, C2/1, Consultazione, Article IV, paraphrasing Proverbs, 5:3–4, 5:6.

97 DADU, AB 253, K. 10, C2/1, Consultazione, Articolo V.

98 González Téllez, M.: Commentaria perpetua in singulos, 1673; Pirhing, E.: Universum jus canonicum, Dillingen 1645; Schmalzgrueber, F. X.: Jus ecclesiasticum universum, Dillingen 1717.

for breakdowns in their marital condition. Moreover, the author agreed with the persecution of such women by the Church following Augustine of Hippo about how a woman should follow her husband.[99] Viewed dogmatically, Maria von Born had sinfully breached not only canon law but also natural law in the escape from Bassegli as marriage is a sacrament that cannot be broken without the judgement of the Church. There had been just cause for this action, the author ruled, brushing away the reasoning provided by Maria von Born that her poor treatment in Dubrovnik and the contagion of her husband's political activities had tainted their union. "Can this offending selfishness and vanity," pondered the opinion's author, "ever be a motive for trampling upon all the divine laws and the very laws of nature by abandoning one's husband and son?"[100]

The outright conclusion of the legal advice from Rome left no doubt in the minds of the Bassegli-Gozze brothers that the claims by Maria von Born for a total of 18,000 Austrian Gulden could be discounted. Yet in the negotiations that followed they felt some amount of deferral over the original dowery paid by her father. Preferring to have no lengthy legal case brought to court either in Dubrovnik or Vienna, they charged an intermediary in Venice, Count Antonio Sorgo (1775–1841), to handle the discussions directly with her. Sorgo, son of the famous composer Luca Sorgo (1734–1789), was a relative of the Bassegli family through his aunt Katarina di Bassegli (nee Sorgo) (1729–1792), Tomo di Bassegli's mother and Maria's mother-in-law. Maria accepted his intercession and met with him in person in Venice on several occasions.[101] His intermediation proved useful as he avoided a protracted legal battle between the two sides. "Count Sorgo has included me to give up any idea of a costly trial," she informed a friend but coyly explained that she had never intended to suit the Bassegli-Gozze family in court.[102] Rather Maria's strategy revolved around applying maximum pressure with the hope that the brothers would capitulate. Her political manoeuvrings in Vienna to give the impression of her bedrock of supporters as well as her hiring of her own lawyer enabled the perception of this rouse. It worked somewhat. "The *nec plus ultra* now, of all that I can expect, consists of about 7000 silver florins [Austrian Gulden]," which she accepted from the brothers mainly because "in my situation, I have to say yes to everything!"[103] From financial desperation after her success in the United States, Maria employed cunning to recoup some amount of her assets from the Bassegli-Gozze family.

The sizeable sum of 7,000 Austrian Gulden allowed Maria von Born a period of relative financial stability. Following the death of her mother and the meagre inheritance afforded to her, she left Vienna in 1819. Much as she had been accused of wandering in the past, she wandered across the Italian peninsula, finding employment as a governess for English-speaking families around Livorno, and then later in southern France. She may have invested some of her legal winnings from Dubrovnik into the mercantile exploits of her eldest American son, Ulrich Rivardi, who joined his mother in Livorno for

99 Power, Kin: Veiled Desire. Augustine on Women, New York 1996; Chadwick, Henry: The Early Church, vol. 1, New York 1967, pp. 216–218.

100 DADU, AB 253, K. 10, C2/1, Consultazione, Articolo V.

101 KBD, NKS 1698, MA, Maria Bassegli to Friedrich Münter, 15 December 1819.

102 KBD, NKS 1698, MA, Maria Bassegli to Friedrich Münter, 4 August 1817.

103 Ibid.

some time before his untimely death.[104] Regardless, Maria von Born was able to fashion a new life for herself in the Europe she had once abandoned, but she never again obtained the glamourous times of her youth nor the splendour of her American business. Her politicking throughout life had served her well but, ultimately, she died in modest means around 1830.[105]

The legal challenge launched by Maria von Born testified to her tenaciousness. In Vienna, she wrangled and arranged for support in her petition to the Bassegli-Gozze brothers and, though much demeaned in the process, she procured a sliver of her share within Tomo di Bassegli's estate. She found political agency in organising her case and later in representing herself directly with Sorgo in Venice. In a time when women did not possess full legal rights, contesting an international dispute demonstrated not only her resolve but also her social, intellectual, and political abilities too.[106] In her legal pursuit, Maria's actions reflected another space open to her as a woman of ability, able to exact a fortune from a difficult situation for her own salvation.

* * *

The examples of three political spaces within the life of Maria von Born demonstrates the wider arena for political action available to a woman of her background and period in Central Europe and North America. In all three cases, the particular social space enabled Maria von Born a degree of political activity either as a co-producer of masonic literature as part of a wider political programme, as republican matron who as a businesswoman not only educated the next generation of elite young women in the United States but also managed an institution heavily reliant upon political patronage and public support, and finally as a widow intent on vindicating her legal rights across political boundaries. Maria von Born proved able to adapt to circumstances and adept in expressing a political message whether through published prose or political solicitation or legal arguments. In doing so, she supported the reformist zeal of her masonic father and his brethren, manipulated the American elites into backing her educational endeavours, and pursued her legal rights as a widowed woman.

Although never achieving any higher office or public leadership, Maria von Born's political dimensions occurred on a more micropolitical level that occasionally reached into a wider sphere of political activity – as a renowned educator, as an unnamed co-author of a popular political tract, and as a claimant to a vast dynastic fortune. Such activities indicate the blurred boundary between the micro and the macro worlds of political

104 Flügel: Maria von Born, p. 177.

105 Flügel: Maria von Born, p. 178. The circumstances of her death and burial are unknown.

106 Palatová, Kateřina/Krausová, Vendula/Havelková, Tereza: Žena pohledem právních norem habsburské říše druhé poloviny 19. století [Woman Through the Perspective of the Legal Norms of the Habsburg Empire in the Second Half of the 19th Century], in: Kateřina Čadková/Milena Lenderová/Jana Stráníková (eds.), Dějiny žen aneb Evropská žena od středověku do poloviny 20. století v zajetí historiografie (Sborník příspěvků z IV. pardubického bienále 27.–28. dubna 2006) [History of Women or European Woman from the Middle Ages to the Mid-Twentieth Century within the Bounds of Historiography (Proceedings of the Fourth Pardubice Biennial, 27–28 April 2006)], Pardubice 2006, pp. 501–514.

action, revealing perhaps how one could lead to the other and, moreover, how both examples of interplay between these spheres were possible in three distinct geographic locales – North America, the Habsburg lands, and Dubrovnik. Finally, for Maria von Born all political action became malleable for her own individual aims. On the micropolitical scale of her networking in Philadelphia, in the co-production of masonic texts, and in the transnational legal dispute with the Bassegli-Gozze family, Maria von Born benefitted from political activities by raising her intellectual or reputational profile. For her, political action always carried great importance wherever she found herself, though it was ultimately these spaces and their intrinsic constellations of individuals, opportunities, and proximities that allowed her to define herself in a place of political accessibility and activity.