



Making Sense of Archives

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Understanding Colonial Archives: Reflections on Records from Habsburg Times in the Archives of Bosnia and Herzegovina

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Abstract: The most important records of the Austro-Hungarian administrative history of Bosnia and Herzegovina are kept in the *fonds* of the Provincial Government in Sarajevo and of the Joint Ministry of Finance, Department for Bosnia and Herzegovina, in Vienna, both forming part of the collection of the Archives of Bosnia and Herzegovina in Sarajevo and together amounting to approximately 2000 shelf metres. The author looks here through the lens of “colonial archives” to assess the missed potential of the two *fonds* for writing the history of Bosnia and Herzegovina, pointing out that historians have hitherto used them primarily to study political history and a few segments of socio-economic history, neglecting recent approaches to re-establishing archives’ value for research. Yet, as the author shows, the so-called “archival turn” would prove to be an asset in deepening the understanding not only of Bosnia and Herzegovina’s Austro-Hungarian imperial history, but its history more generally.

Keywords: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Austro-Hungary, archival turn, colonial archives

Introduction

Although Jacques Derrida never worked in archives, especially not colonial ones, and was discussing only the *approach* to them in his well-known work “Archive Fever” (1995), Ann Laura Stoler argues that his lessons today are very important:

to approach the archive as a seat of command; its guardian archons endowed with the sole authority of interpretation. What so deeply affected historical work was the force he gave to

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the art of layered, palimpsest reading and the provocative figuring he did of the archive's work against itself. (Stoler 2022, 579)

With that in mind, it is important to emphasize that from the very beginning historical archives were linked to the centres of the powers that created them, but also those who were able to channel their interpretation, a practice continuing through the middle and into the early modern period, when archives could be used in systemic investigations into feudal possessions and so became a means to blackmail and control local elites. Certain state strategies regarding the organisation and management of archives were developed at the same time (Silvestri 2016, 435, 438), but archives have always represented places, or symbols, of the power of the dominant culture. It was the dominant culture which decided who should be allowed to speak and who was required to remain silent, whether on any public platform or in “documented” repositories. So it was that many contributions were never admitted to archives, remaining excluded from social memory. It is therefore wrong to claim that archives are exclusively emblematic of a culture of remembering, because they also “preserve” the forgetting of history (Cook 1997, 18). In this study I refer to the archival records created by the Austro-Hungarian administration in Bosnia and Herzegovina between 1878 and 1918 as “colonial archives”, by which term I mean historical sources fabricated and stored by a colonial power, as the Habsburg Monarchy was in Bosnia and Herzegovina. To be sure, the relationship between Austria-Hungary and Bosnia and Herzegovina was not one of “classic colonialism”, because Bosnia and Herzegovina was Austria's “colony in the immediate vicinity”.¹

I began my search for the silenced voices of history by researching prostitution in Bosnia and Herzegovina at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, working on records of the Austro-Hungarian period kept in the Archives of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Those archives were founded in 1947 and are the country's top archival institution, its 343 *fonds* and three collections, amounting to 8000 m of material making it Bosnia and Herzegovina's most important historical archive repository (Vodič Arhiva Bosne i Hercegovine 1987, 17). I later expanded my research to include various marginal groups like Roma people, or women prisoners, among others, for studies of marginal groups are extremely rare in the historiography on Bosnia–Herzegovina despite archivists' emphasis of the importance of the material in the Archives, especially that relating to the Austro-Hungarian period. In addition, most historians who have surveyed Bosnian historiography have found the Austro-Hungarian period to have been studied more extensively than others,

¹ Donia 2007, 1. For more on Austro-Hungarian colonialism in Bosnia and Herzegovina, see Ruthner 2006.

and have emphasized the importance of those particular archives (Šehić 2000, 117). I agree with both the archivists and the historians;² but I believe too that the records of Bosnia under the Habsburg monarchy hold a great deal of potential for new research initiatives to expand on what has already been explored.³

The aim of this study is twofold. On the one hand I wanted to share some information about those who created the records currently stored in the depositories of the Provincial Government and the Joint Ministry of Finance, clarify their history and say something about their state of preservation, all while offering a few basic guidelines on the tools a researcher in search of material of interest could use to “navigate” the *fonds*. On the other hand, I shall point out the still untapped possibilities of reading the documents “outside the box”, by which I mean adopting new research strategies to shed light on unacknowledged topics in Bosnia and Herzegovina’s history, such as the history of marginal groups, of the “Other”; and more generally, approaches “from below”.

The *Fonds* of the Joint Ministry of Finance, Department for the Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina

The Treaty of Berlin was signed by Austria-Hungary, France, Germany, Great Britain and Ireland, Italy, Russia and the Ottoman Empire on 13 July 1878 with as one of its goals the redrawing of the map of Southeastern Europe. Article 25 of the Treaty granted Austria-Hungary a mandate to occupy, secure the military defence, and administer the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina, although it was to remain under the formal sovereignty of the Ottoman Empire. In the autumn of 1878 after it became clear that the occupation would be completed successfully, a decision had to be made as to which body would manage the occupied territory. The Acts dated 16 September and 29 October 1878 entrusted the administration of Bosnia and Herzegovina to a joint supreme council of ministers, absolutely, with established within it a Commission for the Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina (*Komisija za poslove Bosne i Hercegovine*) (Izveštaj o upravi Bosne i Hercegovine 1906, 17).

However, it soon became apparent that the Commission for the Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina was unable to discuss effectively all matters related to the occupied territory, holding only 35 sessions between 25 September 1878 and 27 May 1879 (Isović 2007, 312). In February 1879 the administration was transferred to the

² On the relationship between archivists and historians see Cook 2011 and Geary 2006, esp. 106.

³ A similar view can be found in Donia 2008, 139.

joint Ministry of Finance that had been established in 1867 when Austria and Hungary had formed the Dual Monarchy, and within that Ministry a Department for the Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina (*Odjeljenje za poslove Bosne i Hercegovine*) was established. Ever afterwards, the Joint Ministry of Finance was referred to as the Bosnian Ministry also (Goreczky 2007, 77). With the establishment of the Department for the Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina the Ministry was effectively given a new field of work, its authority over Bosnia and Herzegovina now defined by the Law on Administration, dated 22 February 1880 (Hauptmann 1963, 15; Juzbašić 2002, 11–49).

The records of the work of the initial Commission for the Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina—including the minutes of all those 35 sessions of the Commission—became also part of the archive of the Joint Ministry of Finance, accessible through both a chronological index and an alphabetical register of subjects. The Commission issued 706 documents, 629 of which have been preserved, and they too have been catalogued alphabetically by subject in a register (Isović 2007, 312–14). Both sets of records are valuable tools for researchers interested in the early history of the occupation of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Beyond that, the records now in the *fonds* of the Joint Ministry of Finance, Department for Bosnia and Herzegovina, are threefold. The files created by the Department during its work are known as the general files; those created by the *Präsidium*, the Department's managing body, are called the "Präsidium files" and bear the special designation *Präs.* Most *Präsidium* documents were confidential and concerned the political situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, whereas the general files were thematically much more diverse (Bogičević 1952, 49). Although there is no direct connection with the registrational archive of the Department for the Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the third section of the *fonds* consists of the private correspondence of high-ranking officials of the Department and the Provincial Government in Sarajevo, the so-called Private Registry. Most records within the collection are hand-written in the Gothic German *Fraktur* script, leaving them difficult to read for those without specific training. Typewritten documents appeared only at the beginning of the 20th century.

It is important to emphasize that in addition to the files mentioned, record-keeping aids from the Austro-Hungarian period have also been preserved, which facilitate the work of researchers—although some improvements by today's archivists would seem appropriate. For example, for working on the general files of the Joint Ministry of Finance, researchers have at their disposal the subject registers (called *Materie*), large heavy books impractical to use, and which are extremely fragile after more than 140 years in existence. The digitization of those registers should really be a future priority of the Archives of Bosnia and Herzegovina. In addition, the entries in these books are not always easy to decipher, as

different scribes entered short content descriptions of documents in their various handwritings. The result then, is that the Austro-Hungarian colonial archival heritage seems somewhat incomprehensible, or at least not the most welcoming, almost as if willfully shrouded under a veil of secrecy. The researcher must be experienced enough to know within which larger thematic frameworks they can find records related to their particular research topic, and even with that knowledge things are not always straightforward. For example, a regulation related to schools will not necessarily be kept under “Education”, perhaps instead being found under “Law”, for which there are usually hundreds of entries about various legal acts passed or prepared for some particular year. Among the search for documents one can soon imagine one is in a maze.

Despite such aggravating circumstances, these old registers are of great value to researchers because they were created following a name–subject principle, so that an extremely extensive archive can be searched by name or subject, which are arranged alphabetically. The covers of each record, listing all other records related to that record as well as the document’s topic, are another aggravation for researchers. However, at the same time, Carlo Ginzburg’s “archives of repression”⁴ emanate from these old books in the very choices of names and subjects, for their creators directly channel the researcher towards specific subjects such as education, law, or religious questions. A similar situation is found in the *Präsidium* files, where name–subject indexes are also existent and helpful. However, information on women prisoners, or juvenile offenders—where it existed—was hidden away within larger thematic units, so that documents related to such topics can be found only by researchers with extensive research experience.

And finally, research on the records of the third section too, the Private Registry, has been facilitated by name–subject indexes organised per one or more years. Working on various subjects in the field of Bosnia and Herzegovina’s economic, legal and social history at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, my personal experience with these Private Registry records has not been entirely satisfactory, as for the most part letters can be searched less frequently by subject matter than by name.

It is worth emphasizing today how remarkable it is that the records of the Joint Ministry of Finance, Department for Bosnia and Herzegovina, have survived to be considered one of the best-preserved *fonds* in the Archives of Bosnia and

⁴ The phrase “archives of repression” is used by the world-renowned Italian historian Carlo Ginzburg to emphasize the idea that archives are repositories of knowledge as well as the institutions connected with the dominant culture and power structures; ultimately, this may explain why archives often fail to provide us with sufficient information on the views and experiences of the ordinary and underprivileged people. For more information on this concept see Ginzburg 1989, 17, and Wagner 2007, 15–24.

Herzegovina (Arhivski fondovi i zbirke 1981, 10).⁵ That is because the material was moved around so much. Originally kept in Vienna, where the records were created, it was transferred to Belgrade in 1925, when following the First World War Bosnia and Hercegovina had become part of the newly established Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, of which Belgrade was the capital. Then, during the Second World War the German occupying army returned the *fonds* to the *Reichsarchiv* in Vienna;⁶ but finally in 1947, after a decision was reached on restitution of cultural material, they were returned once more to Belgrade, from where they went to the Archives of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Vodič Arhiva Bosne i Hercegovine 1987, 20, 23). At any time during such an incredible journey any archival *fonds* could so easily have been partially or even completely lost or suffered all manner of devastation, but in fact most of the archival records have almost miraculously survived.

The Provincial Government for Bosnia and Herzegovina

The Provincial Government for Bosnia and Herzegovina, based in Sarajevo, was placed under the Joint Ministry of Finance. It officially began its operation on 1 January 1879.⁷ In charge of it was the commander of the 15th Army Corps, assisted by a civilian called the *adlatus*. Early in the same year, the Provincial Government issued “Temporary Business Rules for Administrative Operations” (*Privremeni poslovni red administrativnog poslovanja*) specifying how the *Präsidium* and general records were to be kept and remaining in force until the end of Austria-Hungary’s administration in 1918. As mentioned, the *Präsidium* files, mainly covering the work of the head of the Provincial Government, were kept in the utmost secrecy while the general files were the result of the work of the individual

5 While Vojislav Bogićević believes, yet without substantiating his claim with evidence, that many records were destroyed after 1918 due to the negligence of the Yugoslav authorities, and also during the Second World War (Bogićević 1952, 55), Kasim Isović (2007), in working on both the *fonds* of the Provincial Government and the Joint Ministry of Finance, managed to determine how many records were produced and which parts thereof were preserved, and he did support his allegations with empirical data.

6 More generally on the fate of the archival records of Czechoslovakia, Poland and Yugoslavia, Niessen 2007.

7 The scope of the work of the head of the Provincial Government was determined as early as 29 October 1878 (Sammlung der für Bosnien und die Hercegovina erlassenen Gesetze, Verordnungen und Normalweisungen 1878–1880 I, 1880, 10). The administrative structure of the Government became definitive in mid-1882 (Sladović 1916, 101).

administrative sections. Since the volume of the operations of those sections of the Provincial Government was much higher than that of the head of the Government, there are far more general files than *Präsidium* files, which in turn influenced the process of entering the documents in protocols and indexes (Bogićević 1952, 56, 59).

Unlike the *Präsidium* files, the documents of which were simply entered into the protocol and the name–subject index, general files were archived using an extremely complicated system. Files were given signatory numbers, codes and subcodes by which any record could be requested, a complicated way of archiving that determined the availability of the general records of the Provincial Government for researchers. Moreover, name and subject indexes were preserved only for the period after 1906 and it was not until the 1970s and thanks to the efforts of Kasim Iović, that thematic catalogues began to be produced to facilitate access for researchers to records created before 1906. A summary analytical inventory for the period between 1878 and 1890 was issued and published later, in 1989 (Radosavljević 1989, 9).

Thanks to the above efforts of the staff of the Archives for Bosnia and Herzegovina, it is now easy for researchers to use even the general files of the Provincial Government. However, unfortunately it seems that scholars are unaware that the citing system for records of this kind must be very precise if other interested researchers are to be able to find the same document again. Many researchers state in their publications only the number of the record used, the number of the box, and its year of origin, but neglect to provide the most important information, which is the code and subcode under which the record was entered in the archive. Since all records in the boxes are kept according to codes which correspond to a certain thematic framework—for instance, code 4, which for a time referred to the topic of colonization—such a deficient mode of citation effectively prevents other researchers from tracing specific records.

The quality of content of the general files of the Provincial Government can hardly be compared with that of those kept in the *fonds* of the Joint Ministry, exposure to which many find decidedly Kafkaesque, as everything seems indistinct and confusing. Numerous drafts and preliminary writings are kept in one case, as well as sporadic letters from lower administrative bodies, so that to trace how some matter was resolved requires a process of reconstructing, which is both arduous and—perhaps worse—uncertain. More than once the Provincial Government warned the Joint Ministry of Finance that the scope of its work was enormous; it was often impossible for them to effectively manage the first occupied and later (in 1908) annexed Bosnia and Herzegovina. The problems are clearly reflected in the general files, from which it is obvious that from time to time the Provincial Government had no clear channels of communication with the lower administrative

authorities, so that requests from the Provincial Government to district and county offices were not responded to promptly, that deadlines were not met, and so forth.

In that sense the *Präsidium* files are much easier to use because they can be searched by name and subject indexes inherited from the Austro-Hungarian administration, which listed records under a certain number. However, one should bear in mind that most such files reflect the work of the colonial administrative machinery, some of it done by those at the very top. Until now the information available in the files has been used very one-dimensionally mainly to open historiographic questions related to the political history of Bosnia and Herzegovina at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries (Kapidžić 1973). While there is no doubt that taken as a whole the archives of the *fonds* of the Joint Ministry of Finance and the Provincial Government are exceptionally valuable and important for the study of Bosnia and Herzegovina's Austro-Hungarian period, I must concede that the fine detail of the records is inclined to be unexciting. There is much repetition and phrasal, specific language which has occasionally affected the style, language and dynamics of research articles based on these records.

The Archival Turn, Colonial Heritage and Bosnia and Herzegovina

In this section I look at the concept of the archival turn and its presence in—or absence from—the historiography on Habsburg Bosnia. Neither the archives themselves nor even the political institutions behind them can be blamed for the tendency among historians to interpret archives one-dimensionally or as nothing more than repositories of documents created in the centres of power. Historians and archivists must continuously encourage deconstructing of archives, give them new “readings”, and change the paradigms according to which they are perceived. Those obligations, so artfully introduced by Derrida, do not fall on historians alone but on scholars from other fields too: ethnology, anthropology, literature; even political science and sociology (Thomas 2013, 33).

Like Derrida, Michel Foucault too offered an alternative experience and interpretation of archives. For him, archives do not represent only the sum of all the texts a culture keeps as documents of its own past, nor does he see their purpose as enabling a particular society to record and preserve discourses it considers ought to be remembered and to remain for ever available. Foucault considered an archive to be “first the law of what can be said, a system that governs the appearance of statements as unique events” (Foucault 1972, 129). Ann Laura Stoler by contrast believes that a change of paradigm in how an archive is perceived—known as an

archival turn—has a wider arc and a longer durée. An archival turn cannot therefore be explained only by the so-called Derridian effect that resonated over the decade after the publication of his famous “Archive Fever” (Derrida 1995). According to Stoler, the archival turn was in fact already underway or had even been completed when Derrida and Foucault were reflecting on the idea of archives. By the 1990s archives had already become a research topic for historians—and archivists themselves. Archives were now a subject, no longer a mere “storage bin” (Stoler 2009, 44). Ever since, archivists and historians have studied postmodernist critiques of history-writing and archives, and have sought to devise approaches to them. Canadian archivist Terry Cook, for example, has wholeheartedly considered such critiques cathartic, a starting point for serious reflections on the archivist’s profession and practices. Historians have long shifted their work from a mere positivist historical account of past events towards interpreting sources as “semiotic signs of hidden meanings” (Cook 2001, 16). Postmodernism has encouraged rejection of the belief that recorded information is static; it is now seen rather as a dynamic and even virtual concept (Cook 2001; cf. also Friedrich 2013 and Rustow 2020).

In Southeastern Europe and especially in the Western Balkans, the archival turn and the postmodernist call to re-examine the dominant ways of imagining archives did not go unnoticed and it is possible to find information about the paradigm change as described (Cupek Hamill 2003; Rajh 2003; Kujundžić 2005). Nevertheless, archival science and historiography on Bosnia and Herzegovina lags somewhat in that the archival turn has arrived there only fairly recently, and its dominance and the influential nature of its ideas are still very far from generally accepted there (Vukliš and Gilliland 2016; Vukliš 2020).

I argue that my idea of exploring the archival turn in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the context of the Habsburg colonial archival heritage faces at least two challenges, both related to a conservative interpretation of the records from the Austro-Hungarian period kept in the two largest *fonds*, discussed above. The first challenge came from the very archivists’ profession the serious development of which began in Bosnia and Herzegovina only after World War II. The archivists themselves worked in extremely difficult conditions alongside authoritarian power structures represented by individuals who, almost paradoxically, only insufficiently understood the significance of the records from the Austro-Hungarian period. Saddled with the baleful legacy left by the Austro-Hungarian administrative machine’s vast bureaucracy, those early archivists did their best to organise and regulate the two *fonds*. For a long time they used the record-keeping aids described above and inherited from when Bosnia and Herzegovina were part of the Austro-Hungarian administration. Given that certain of those aids were impractical and others were missing, the lacunae shaped historiographic research

and achievement. The *fonds* of the Provincial Government, that is its general files section, was almost “impassable” for researchers until the 1970s when, as described above, work began on a thematic catalogue for the period between 1879 and 1899, went on during the 1980s and was taken up again in the 2000s, after the war.

The second challenge to my exploration came from other scholars who accepted the “archive of repression” as such. As Ann Laura Stoler wrote quoting Pramoedya Ananta Toer’s novel *House of Glass*, colonial archives “gave rise, to a special kind of experts who believe that ‘documents are more reliable [...] than the mouths of their authors’” (Stoler 2009, 18–19). Such researchers are guided by such faith in the records produced by the most important administrative bodies—in this case the Joint Ministry of Finance and the Provincial Government—that the course of their historiographic work is determined by how the name–subject registers are organised and how significant figures or particular topics are highlighted in them. But it should be remembered that those who established the *fonds* were the same people who organised the records and determined their order (Rajh 2003, 157). Colonial archives are therefore always a yardstick for what is seen as worth writing about, which was certainly the intention at the centres of Habsburg colonial of power: As historian Vojislav Bogićević correctly noted, Austria-Hungary’s administration *intended* to preserve every document it deemed historically important for which it used durable paper of high-quality and developed a very precise way of processing documents (Bogićević 1952, 50). The question is therefore how to contextualize those documents that were obviously really important to the Austro-Hungarian administration in Bosnia and Herzegovina, namely those detailing the positive effects of the administration and covering the fields of education, the economy, and other similar topics.

When researchers sought to read the history of the indigenous population from the colonial repositories, for the most part their narratives remained caught up in the relationships among foreign rulers and domestic elites—of all faiths and nationalities; Croats and Serbs, Muslims, Catholics, and Orthodox (for example Šehić 1980; Madžar 1982). A special problem is the fact that archivists and historians alike have continuously repeated the same mantra on the value of the *fonds* of the Joint Ministry of Finance and the Provincial Government. Little has changed since at the beginning of the 1980s the official guide to the archives presented them as the basis for writing a history of the “development of capitalism and the working class in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the development of national movements”, assuming it would be dedicated to “major events, such as the occupation of 1878, the annexation in 1908, the Sarajevo assassination, the First World War, etc.” (Arhivski fondovi i zbirke 1981, 10, cf. Vodič Arhiva Bosne i Hercegovine 1987, 22). The latest review of the historiography related to Habsburg Bosnia emphasizes that

political history still dominates a type of research (Šehić 2020, 132) that, inadvertently or not, thinks of the Habsburg archival heritage as a monolithic mass, its narrative structure set in stone and able to offer answers to only a limited number of research questions. Mainstream historiography continues to mean political and military history, important local public figures all of whom were male; the agrarian question, cultural life, and the legal status of occupied—later annexed—Bosnia and Herzegovina (Gabriel 2003; Šehić 2007; Okey 2007; Šabotić 2019). The authors mentioned above of course raised and discussed questions of undeniable importance, but because for some decades now research interests having expanded well beyond both the traditional political and military history, and other research strands mentioned previously, it seems to me important to point out that scholars now researching the history of Habsburg Bosnia can use the available records to find their way to new research avenues. Various authors have tried recently to widen the lens and use the archival records to write about women and children in Austro-Hungarian Bosnia and Herzegovina, for example, a subject obviously beyond the scope of traditional political and military history (Younis 2018; Giomi 2021). Nevertheless, such attempts are still relatively rare.

My impression is that certain historians have seen themselves as participating in the work of a culture of memory, while at the same time perhaps inadvertently nurturing a “non-culture” of forgetting, excluding, and silencing.⁸ I must emphasize here that I do not believe they always did so deliberately nor even consciously; in fact I am more inclined to think that for most researchers it was more opportune to accept and maintain existing historiographical canons.⁹

Given that I completed my undergraduate studies at the Faculty of Philosophy in Sarajevo, obtained my Master’s degree at the University of Zagreb and then went back to Sarajevo for my doctoral degree, I too am a product of this same historiographic tradition. I was taught that research topics are *serious* or *casual*, so at first I dealt with Austro-Hungary’s trade policy, the national affiliations of the inhabitants of Bosnia and Herzegovina between 1878 and 1918, and its colonization by German peasants after the Austro-Hungarian occupation (Kasumović 2009, 2010, 2016). They were *serious* topics; the only ones—as I thought—that could establish the basis of my scholarly work. And so they did, until I became enthralled

⁸ For more information on the excluding and forgetting, cf. Stoler (2009, 8). For more on “silenced history”, cf. Kolanović (1999, 31).

⁹ Among the Bosnian authors who wrote extensively on the period of Austro-Hungarian rule in BiH on the basis of archival records, which I consider mainstream historiographers, I would like to single out but a few (Kruševac 1960; Juzbašić 1974; Imamović 1976; Mikić 1983; Kraljačić 1987; Juzbašić 1999; Šehić 2007). In addition, there are authors who wrote about Habsburg Bosnia in English, belonging to different historiographical schools (Donia 1981; Okey 2007; Hajdarpašić 2015).

by the archive itself whereupon I decided to explore how they and everything hidden in them could answer questions prompted by my true interests, which were closer to what was thought of as *casual*.

The researcher must be responsible for the convincing design of study. I wanted a different reading of the administrative language used in Bosnia-Herzegovina's archive of records from Austro-Hungarian time, so I set myself the task of devising an unconventional approach to it. Heeding to Stoler's advice to read colonial archives "against their grain" (Stoler 2009, 47) I began to search them for what historiographers had recorded either as traces or not at all. I was looking for information on marginal groups such as prostitutes, criminals, prisoners, and Roma people,¹⁰ and wondered if historiographic achievements until then had simply reflected what was actually in the archive. Perhaps nobody before me had written about marginal groups because there was nothing about them in the archive? But I soon learned that was not the reason, because as I immersed myself in the archives, looking through differently searching eyes and asking different questions, I saw the hitherto excluded Other begin to appear. True, they did not always emerge in quite such numbers nor quite so clearly as I might have wished—but there they were.

I learned too that "out-of-the-box" research approaches can pave the way for study of topics related to "history from below", that of everyday life; microhistory. If the research question concerns, for example, how female workers in Bosnia and Herzegovina were treated in the period between 1878 and 1918, the sources in the archive must be scrutinized from a broader thematic base that will respect its organizational units. It must of course consider the history of the labour movement and of strikes, but also of major industrial facilities. Those women are in there, but they are difficult to see. And the same is true for many topics, for that matter, for the archive will not simply serve up its records on a platter. Researchers must be thoroughly acquainted with what documents are hidden in the *fonds* in order to be able to develop research strategies—among them new ways of reading the records—into hitherto unexplored topics. Sometimes too, radical interpretations are called for (Arondekar 2009, 4, 20).

Ironically, records concerning unusual topics in Bosnian historiography, such as prostitution, simply "stick out like sore thumbs" from the summary and analytical inventories made for the *fonds* of the Provincial Government, as well as from the records related to the general files of the Joint Ministry of Finance—all of them extensive and diverse documents in any case. Certain historians have admitted to me that they were aware of all of the above, but were unwilling to

10 As Vukliš (2020, 37) rightly points out, such endeavour should not be the isolated effort of researchers. Scholars and archivists need to, and should, cooperate.

explore nor write about such topics. So I, as others before me, was constantly faced with the dilemma of thinking that certain topics were inherently worth investigating, but what should I achieve if I did so? Some even told me to my face that they considered it inappropriate for me, a woman, to study prostitution. It would damage my reputation, they said; and it would compromise Bosnia and Herzegovina's culture of memory because surely, no-one would care to admit that prostitution was tolerated there at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries?

Given the general aspiration of European state authorities in the 19th century to maintain peace and public order and to preserve the good health of the male population, prostitution was indeed a thorny problem for the Provincial Government. In addition, the Austro-Hungarian administration in Bosnia and Herzegovina wished chiefly to appease the Muslim population, for it was they who protested the most at the large number of prostitutes, and the Austro-Hungarian administration needed Muslims as political partners. For that reason, a large quantity of documentation was produced regulating prostitution, the functioning of brothels, the fight against human trafficking, and so on. The government had little interest in prostitutes socially as a special and often vulnerable social category, but focused on disciplining and strictly controlling them. It is difficult, though not impossible, to overcome this administrative discourse in the sources. For instance, on the basis of police reports and court records, a day in the life of a 19th century prostitute can be sketched, as can her social background, her country of origin, her life before prostitution, her family relationships, and her relationships with brothel owners (Kasumović 2018). Of course, we can never hear that information in the voices of the marginal groups themselves, for the filtered traces left by the dominant, vocal parts of society are all that is left to scholars now (Ginzburg 1989, 17).

The matter of prisons and prisoners is another pertinent example. At least until now, Bosnian historiographers have focused on the central penitentiary in Zenica, built by the Provincial Government in the 1880s (Jalimam, Marić, and Spahić 2011; Mahmutović 2014). The Austro-Hungarian administration intended the penitentiary to be well documented because it served to promote a particular and carefully-painted international image of the Austro-Hungarian administration in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Paradoxically enough, the construction of the penitentiary fitted well into the narrative of an Austria-Hungary on a civilizing mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina. In the 19th century prisons were considered to be mirrors of society, so the Austro-Hungarian government wished its penitentiary in Zenica to be proof that Bosnia's society was finally on the path to modernization and Europeanization. Again, a number of important matters were left outside the focus of interest, such as the treatment of prisoners under the Irish penal model, adopted by the Austro-Hungarian administration who regarded it as modern (Izveštaj o

upravi Bosne i Hercegovine 1906, 491). The treatment of women prisoners has not been researched. They were never given their own prison but served their sentences either outside the country or in the very cramped detention centres of county courts. Finally, the subject of petty crime and delinquency has not been researched at all.

It is possible to write about all these topics, although the profile of Austria-Hungary's colonial archival heritage makes a straightforward approach impossible. While it is true that the archives on the treatment of female prisoners are not extensive, nevertheless they are sufficient to launch studies on the subject. One hindrance however is the fact that there was never any organisation of the documents of the Sarajevo County Court, which might include records on the hearings of female offenders and therefore would shed light on many more questions about which women were committing crimes and misdemeanours and what led them to such behaviour. Access to such records has so far depended largely on the goodwill of the administration of the Archives of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The marginal position of the Roma is evident even from the carefully organized and guarded *fonds* of the Provincial Government and the Joint Ministry of Finance. The Roma very rarely caught the attention of the Austro-Hungarian administration, even when it wanted to emphasize its efforts to enlighten Bosnia-Herzegovina's society. For the Provincial Government in Sarajevo, the Roma were mainly a source of trouble and a reason for new and unwanted financial expenditures. In Austria-Hungary there was a tendency to corral groups of Roma, to prevent them from travelling to other parts of the Monarchy or even from going to other European countries. The Provincial Government in Sarajevo too tried to keep the Roma of Bosnia and Herzegovina within the borders of the country, often unsuccessfully. If the police arrested Roma individuals from Bosnia and Herzegovina in Austrian or Hungarian territory, or outside the Monarchy, there began a highly complicated repatriation procedure which for the Provincial Government meant paying not only the Roma's travel expenses but those of livestock and possessions too (Kasumović 2017). In that sense the surviving archives on the Roma give just a single perspective, offering little opportunity to consider comprehensively the life of Roma communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. Reading again against Stoler's "grain", that amounts to a call to explore other sources in Bosnian historiography that traditionally have been less accepted, things such as Roma folk literature which tells of their beliefs and customs (Uhlik and Beljkašić 1958). If those sources were corroborated by the glimpses available in the Austro-Hungarian archives, the picture would become more differentiated.

Finally, all of the above demands the question of what an archive really is. Is it worth preserving only the records of official bodies, entrepreneurial companies, schools and institutions? And once that information is gathered, is it an archive?

Are literature, folk culture and custom, oral tradition and—perhaps especially—the personal documents of “ordinary” people worthy of being called archival?¹¹ Colonial powers have more often than not discredited indigenous ways of preserving historical understanding (Taylor 2003, 34), but for that very reason such sources should be sought out because really they are just as valuable as official documents, and corroboration of the two “types” of source material would be a significant step forward and would highlight something that ought to be obvious but is often disregarded: official documents too are not objective witnesses of their times (Macneil 2001, 41). If hierarchical perception of historical records could be completely dissolved, archivists could more freely and comprehensively ponder the question of all the sources to be recognized and acknowledged in their “houses of memory” (Cook 1997, 19).

Conclusion

In the Archives of Bosnia and Herzegovina are 26 *fonds* related to Austria-Hungary’s archival heritage. Until now, the *fonds* of the Provincial Government for Bosnia and Herzegovina and of the Joint Ministry of Finance, Department for Bosnia and Herzegovina have been considered the most important for the study of the history of Bosnia and Herzegovina in the Austro-Hungarian period. Those *fonds*, as well as the *Präsidium* files kept in the Provincial Government *fonds*, embarked on something like an odyssey before they were finally handed over to the Archives of Bosnia and Herzegovina for safekeeping. Their travels have inevitably affected the quality of their preservation. Both *fonds* were managed in the manner stipulated by the Austro-Hungarian administration, and for many years until the 1970s were available to researchers on the exclusive basis of record-keeping aids of the Austria-Hungarian administration. All of that has influenced the dynamics and nature of research, as reflected in the output of historiographers.

Until now historiographers and archivists in Bosnia and Herzegovina have discussed only in passing the archival turn and its consequences for knowledge production using the colonial records of the Archives of Bosnia and Herzegovina. That is why researchers always focused mainly on traditional political history, and only partially on socio-economic history. Now however, following on from the postmodernist critique of archives and archival practices, much could be gained if archival records ceased to be seen as monolithic and scholars and archivists began

¹¹ See Burton (2003, 4) for a study of what counts as an archive, and whether private memories can be used in writing political history. For archives as epistemological experiments see Stoler (2002), and for the meaning of counter-archive see Stoler (2018).

to say much more to promote fresh strategies for reading archival documents. Archives are important and needed; but so is a shift in the paradigm of how scholars approach and experience archives, and how they narrate them.

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