

## **After the Archive: An Archaeology of Bosnian Voices**

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The voices of the dead speak in uncanny ways, preserved by various technologies mediating between past and present.<sup>1</sup> In his posthumous book on oral tradition and the Internet, John Miles Foley describes an experience with a broken link on a multimedia website he had created to explore the oral poetry of Halil Bajgorić, a singer from the town of Stolac, located today in Bosnia-Herzegovina. After describing his media-rich project on Bajgorić's song *The Wedding of Mustajbey's Son Bećirbey*, Foley recounts:

One day, quite out of the ether, I received an email from a certain Ćamil Bajgorić, who pronounced himself interested in reading [the online poem]. It seems he'd discovered an online reference to the eEdition while surfing, and was contacting me because the URL wasn't working... Now as a rule, broken links are a dependable source of embarrassment, but in this instance the reported malfunction turned out to be a stroke of good luck... Why? Because Ćamil went on to mention that the guslar (or epic singer) Halil Bajgorić, the performer of the epic he wanted to read and hear, was none other than his own grandfather! He wanted to read and hear the story, of course, but part of his motivation was also, shall we say, genealogical. (Foley 2012, 141)

Foley uses this exchange to explore the rich parallels between the "pathways" of oral tradition (OT) and information technology (IT): the grandfather in the anecdote, Halil, "himself preliterate, composed his epic without the cognitive prosthesis of the page," while his grandson Ćamil, a "book- and computer-literate resident of Michigan" had in turn "sought to attend that performance via the virtual reality of the Internet" (142). Foley finds it significant that the analog

medium of the book, or “the culturally sanctioned vehicle—never figured in the interface between grandfather and grandson” until he mailed a copy to Ćamil (ibid.).

Reading over Foley’s shoulder, as it were, we might see other pathways in this anecdote: pathways of the archive, of diaspora, and of temporality. In this chapter, I echo Foley in positioning these issues at the faultlines of digitization—the moment when the analog is rendered almost-immaterial—but I do so not to erase the analog, but rather to suggest its perpetual intertwining with the digital. Like Foley, I draw on the history and archives of the Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature, an archive comprising poems from southeastern Europe and especially the former Yugoslavia that have been inscribed in a number of different ways: as written texts, as sound recordings on various media, and even as photographs. I undertake a sonic archaeology of this archive and particularly what I call its afterlife, or the complex web of technologically-mediated and in-person encounters it has generated some eighty years after its creation. The ongoing returns, recursions, and repatriations that have marked its history continue today, shaped all the more by the diaspora from Bosnia (and other parts of the former Yugoslavia) since the wars of the 1990s. I focus on two case studies to show, somewhat paradoxically, that precisely *because* global flows of people and media have destabilized traditional geographical ideas of a homeland (i.e., *patria*) and bounded cultural heritage, repatriation becomes ever more vital. In addition, the ongoing flow of people and media associated with this archive similarly destabilizes the archive itself, as well as certain theories of archive—in particular, the otherwise illuminating field of media archaeology. These theories of archives and archaeology have all too often failed to account adequately for questions of power in archival transactions, questions that become increasingly visible (and pressing) in the case of

the Milman Parry Collection in light of the transnational flows of archival materials and people between the former Yugoslavia and the United States.

In other words, repatriation calls attention to the uncertain stability of archival projects. This uncertainty pervades not only because repatriation means that objects may continue to move in or out of archives well after those archives have been established, catalogued, and made public; repatriation also unsettles the archive by pointing to the precarity of its formation and the social, political, and technological conditions that produced the archive. As the examples here will show, the disintegration of the basic political entities on one end of the Parry Collection's production—the former Yugoslavia—makes it difficult to know where the *patria* of repatriation is in the first place: should materials be sent (back) to Serbia or Bosnia? To Texas or some less easily-delineated online public? Conversely, repatriation also underscores the cultural stability and political hegemony the United States enjoys, which makes the archive's history after collection rather uneventful by comparison. Repatriation is not only a process of returning archival holdings, but a kind of critique of the entire archival venture. At the same time, the transfer of these holdings in one direction or another (i.e., collecting or repatriating) is a process saturated in technologies whose affordances are also highly contingent. In the case of the Milman Parry Collection, without a custom-made sound recorder (discussed below), these epic songs could not have been recorded in full, a process that produced not just a large repository of recordings, but also a kind of imaginary repertoire in the archive that far exceeded any singer's individual repertoire. Similarly, without the specific affordances of the internet, any act of repatriation would have required choosing particular destinations (again, the question of *which patria*).

Central to my discussion here, then, is the very idea of *archive*: what constitutes an archive, and especially a sound archive? What kinds of power dynamics emerge from it and inflect the knowledge produced from its holdings? And how can the life of an archive be narrated to account for these broader exigencies? Acts of repatriation, while apparently subsequent to the formation and definition of the archive and its scope, will play a critical role in addressing these questions of power and ontology. Drawing on theories of archives and temporality, I suggest here that what comes *after* the archive, especially including acts of repatriation (or decisions not to do so), demand users and curators to rethink what a particular archive is, what it contains, and how those contents interact with the world beyond the archive. Ultimately, I argue that the afterlife of an archive demands repatriation, not only as an act of cultural remuneration—a kind of belated payment for the artefacts in question—but also (even for the most self-interested of archives) as a means for self-explication. Precisely *after* the archive, and especially through acts of repatriation, we begin to understand its meaning in the world.

While I draw here on several more recent theories of archives and afterness (Derrida 1995, Ernst 2015, Richter 2011), two key publications bookending the 1960s set the tone for addressing these questions in the context of the Milman Parry Collection: Albert Lord's 1960 *The Singer of Tales* (reissued in 2000 with a CD-Rom of audiovisual archival materials), and Michel Foucault's 1969 *L'archéologie du savoir*, or *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (published in English 1972). The former articulates theory about oral utterances based on this particular archive, the latter articulates theory about archives based on general reflections about archives. In short, Lord was the student of Milman Parry, the archive's namesake, and his book draws on the holdings of the Milman Parry Collection to theorize about the nature of oral poetry. The archive serves as the source material for a broader theory of speech, song and other discourse.

Foucault, in turn, is particularly interested not in making theories out of archival holdings, but in theorizing more broadly what archives themselves do. An archive is not a set of texts or even institutions, but rather “a system of discursivity, in the enunciative possibilities and impossibilities that it lays down” (1972:129). Archives are sites of cultural power, not only collecting utterances, but creating rules for those utterances. Archival theory since Foucault has followed at least two major directions: one, among historians and anthropologists, observing actual archives and their legacies; the other, among theorists and media scholars, addressing the technological and processual dimensions that set into motion and then perpetuate archives’ cultural power.<sup>2</sup> The life history of the Milman Parry Collection and its repatriations bring both those strands together again, showing the particular social, technological and political contingencies of archive-making and maintenance, as well as the possibilities for actively combatting the inertia of archival power through repatriation. Again, this process of repatriation, while apparently a geographical gesture, is just as much a temporal and ontological act of rethinking and remaking the archive.

### **When and Where is the Archive?**

The story of the Milman Parry Collection is often told—not incorrectly—as a geographical narrative, marked by a constant flow of people, machines, and recorded media between the United States and the former Yugoslavia. Milman Parry, as is well known, was a scholar of Homeric epic with interests in their genesis and poetics.<sup>3</sup> After completing his doctoral studies at the Sorbonne, he returned to the United States and soon thereafter began teaching Classics at Harvard University. In 1933, following up on the urgings of mentors and colleagues

at the Sorbonne (particularly linguist Antoine Meillet and Slavist/ethnographer Matthias Murko), Parry spent a summer in Yugoslavia, studying a living tradition of epic song. Among the singers he met at that time was Nikola Vujnović, a literate singer who would become his principal assistant in the field. He made arrangements to return for the academic year 1934–1935 (including summers), during which time he recorded thousands of epic and lyric songs with an eye to carrying out a comparative study of how epic singers in Yugoslavia learned and performed their repertoire of songs. Parry died shortly after his return to the United States in December 1935, after which time the massive collection was turned over to his former student and assistant, Albert Lord.

The archive's history becomes both more complex yet equally fascinating in its own right as an archival constellation after this initial period of recording—of inscription, broadly, since Parry was recording audio but also taking down large numbers of texts by dictation or “autograph” (having singers write them themselves), as well as photographing singers and on at least one occasion, filming as well. A web of relations emerged, spanning the archive at Harvard, American scholars (especially Homerists), and oral poets and scholars in Yugoslavia as well as the surrounding countries. The trans-Atlantic flows of people and media that emerged included some of these notable highlights: return trips by Albert Lord to Albania (1937), Yugoslavia and especially Macedonia (1950, 1951, accompanied by Miloš Velimirović), and then again repeatedly in the 1960s, with emphasis on Bulgaria (accompanied by David Bynum); the invitation of field assistants and other colleagues from Europe to aid in archival transcription (or reinscription in a different medium), including Parry's assistant, Nikola Vujnović (1937–38), Hungarian composer/ethnomusicologist Béla Bartók (beginning in spring 1940), Lord's assistant from the 1950s trips, Miloš Velimirović, who would remain in the United States to pursue a

career in musicology; and publications by figures such as Zlatan Čolaković, a prodigious scholar and Fulbright stipendist at Harvard (1984–88), whose publications in the two decades before his death in 2009 renewed scholarly interest in the archive, especially in the former Yugoslavia. The flow of media that circulated with and around these people is less well documented, but in many ways represents the central process at work in the narratives that follow.

These movements of individuals overlay on broader movements and cultural shifts: World War II, for example, not only reconfigured much of Yugoslav culture and politics, it necessitated Albert Lord's service in the Navy, slowing down his work on the archive; it precipitated Béla Bartók's exile to the United States, where he would die shortly after the war's end in 1945; and it also led to the death of Parry's assistant, Nikola Vujnović, who went missing during the War. The large-scale migrations that have taken place since the wars and political upheaval in the former Yugoslavia, especially in Bosnia (1992–1995), have similarly shifted the terrain from which this collection was recorded. Any attempt to clearly delineate the archive as “here” and the field/recording site as “there” loses coherence quickly.

Going further, however, in the case studies that follow, I suggest that the fundamental question here is one of time rather than place: not *where* is the archive or homeland, but *when*? Art historian Gerhard Richter has argued for the importance of *afterness*, the unique ontological and epistemological status that comes with following something, a state in which the thing-following-after haunts and reshapes the thing itself (2011). What he writes about museums readily applies to archives: “What is a museum [or archive] other than the concretized space in which the after is staged in particular and ever-shifting relations to social, historical, and aesthetics-political force fields of associations, expectations, and imbrications? (11). Instead, the museum or archive become sites not so much of memory, but of reading and reconsidering

implicit ideas of temporality. Afterness is haunted by but also haunts that which preceded it in an ongoing feedback loop. Jacques Derrida argued that archives are similarly made up not so much by what they contain but by future responses to them, an idea he calls (somewhat opaquely) the “*archivable concept of the archive*” (his italics), which points always already to the future: “It is a question of the future, the question of the future itself, the question of a response, of a promise and of a responsibility for tomorrow. The archive: if we want to know what that will have meant, we will only know in times to come. Perhaps” (36). The archive then becomes something that always precedes us, that entails a future obligation on its users and curators in the (never-ending?) process of its becoming-an-archive. This afterlife of responsibilities encompasses the geographical shifts and contingencies of migrations and other movements, calling for a certain curation, or caring-for-the-soul, of the mediations between disk and voice, between individual and place, between cultures. But in that future obligation also lies the possibility for understanding what the archive had already been. We will only know the archive in times to come—specifically, in times of repatriation.

### **The Parry Collection as Media: A Brief Archaeology**

If an archive like the Parry Collection entails a particular kind of temporality, such temporality is produced in large degree through an array of technologies that document and affix sung performance. Even before Parry left Yugoslavia in late summer 1935, he was already transcribing material he had. This is clear from the archive itself, in particular through the *pričanje* interviews conducted with epic singers. Parry and Vujnović ask questions about particular words in the poems that had been recorded, suggesting they were likely listening back through them. (Perhaps Parry was taking notes through the course of performance instead of, or

in addition to, re-listening; Béla Bartók seemed to think that Parry was not doing any transcription, cf. Bartók 1942.) In any case, one of the central challenges that emerged after the return from Yugoslavia in 1935—and one that every archivist knows—is the need for systematic and almost incessant copying, or more precisely transferring, from one medium to another. This transfer took a variety of forms during the early decades of the Parry Collection (aluminum disk copied to duplicate aluminum disk, or transcribed to paper notebook or musical manuscript paper; later wire spool copied to tape, or transcribed to various paper formats, etc.) and continues to current efforts to digitize the recordings. Such multimedia inscription and proliferation is, again, an integral part of this archive, but likely part of most archives, especially those involving time-based media that may have a limited shelf-life.

Parry's approach to the question of duplication and inscription in the field was, again, active and multifaceted. He relied on multiple modes of inscribing songs in the field: recording audio, as described thus far; taking down dictations of poems from singers in person (the working method used by previous scholars like the turn-of-the-century collector, Luka Marjanović); collecting dictations at a distance through proxies (Kosta Hörmann's method, and also the method used to gather most women's lyric songs, cf. Vidan 2003); or even having literate singers write their own "autograph manuscripts." This heterogeneous corpus of "texts" or "songs"—neither term adequately covers the entirety of this material—augmented the already heterogeneous documentation from Parry's 1933 trip, for which he used a parlograph, an early dictation machine that recorded to cylinders (Elmer 2013, 342). Adding to this, as mentioned above, Parry also took photographs and collected various objects, including a series of picture postcards. While the postcards and many of the photos bear little information about the actual performances in question, some of the photos show singers in what looks like a posed

performance, while a few show the actual recording process. (One of these—of Jusuf Smajić, discussed below—is of particular importance to the question of copies and family-mediated sharing.)

The history of the archive that followed has been told most often in conjunction with the articulation and propagation of oral-formulaic theory as described in Albert Lord's *The Singer of Tales* (1960). A broader telling may include Lord's collaborative 1951 publication with Béla Bartók (see Suchoff 2001), as well as the volumes of published poetry in the *Serbo-Croatian Heroic Songs* series beginning shortly thereafter (see Parry and Lord 1954a, 1954b). But if we think archaeologically, other narratives also emerge. My first impulse in writing this essay was to emphasize that these materials would not have been documented without the documenting efforts of Parry, Vujnović, and Lord. This is not an archive of looted objects but rather “intangible heritage” that was on the verge of becoming not just intangible but non-existent.

However, other more interesting archival tales can also be told, including one about the ontology of archives, the other about the temporality of copying (especially of copying sound). In terms of ontology, the Parry Collection is arguably more interesting not because it almost did not exist (i.e., this tradition was dying out, etc.) but because it set out not merely to document, but also to create a kind of fictional repertoire. Or rather, a meta-repertoire: the sum repertoire of all singers across all locations (to the degree possible) in the mid-1930s. The archive is an explicitly material instantiation of that imaginary repertoire, which no single singer could have known but might be thought of as an ideal form of “the tradition.” In terms of copying and its temporality, however, the archive becomes a massive simulacrum, a series of copies, transfers, and transcriptions, first of sound transcribed on paper or aluminum disc, then later transcribed to paper or typed, then perhaps recorded to reel-to-reel tape for easier access, and then again in the

past decade, digitized. The time of these copies is critical: they all began in the sound of performed poetry, making repeatability fraught, if not impossible, even when recorded. (Each playback degrades the recorded medium itself, not to mention the passage of time for any given listener.)<sup>4</sup> The former archive is in the spirit of Lord, a concrete collection of actual objects that determine the possibilities of theory; the latter archive is in the spirit of Foucault or Derrida, an assemblage of inscriptions that stake out the bounds of the utterable within that cultural moment and space. Repatriation would bring these two archival strands together, as copies of these materials would be sent “back” to the former Yugoslavia (but also to Texas, and the virtual non-place of the internet), yet that process would ultimately clarify what the concrete objects had been in the first place.

### **Repatriating Bosnian Voices, I. Online-Offline, Texas-Herzegovina**

As this brief history has suggested, the timelines of the archive most often do not align with the exigencies of life and history. The examples of repatriation here deal with families of singers or (in my concluding section) scholars who were unable to wait, possibly for many years, to have access to the materials through the archive’s website. One example that illustrates the complex temporalities of these media involves the singer Mujo Kukruzović. One of the “Stolac singers” in the Parry Collection, Kukuruzović was in fact from the small town of Gubavica but somehow recorded for Parry in Stolac, a city about fifteen miles away (and farther from Mostar, the cultural capital of Herzegovina). Like Halil Bajgorić, the aforementioned singer who plays such a central role for Foley’s work and comes from Stolac, Kukuruzović was a relatively young (Kukuruzović was forty-three when Parry met him, Bajgorić thirty-seven), pre-literate farmer. He sang and recorded twelve songs for Parry and apparently left enough of an impression that he

recorded on two separate occasions. In more recent years, he has become a figure of increasing stature as scholars—in particularly Foley, who was informally given intellectual stewardship by Lord for the Stolac materials in the Parry Collection, as well as linguist Ronelle Alexander—have devoted more attention to his songs and his speech.

However, interest in the Stolac singers has extended beyond academic circles. In August 2011, Enver Spahalić, a great-great-grandson of Kukuruzović living in Texas contacted the Parry Collection, hoping to find some archival material beyond the limited selections that had already been made available digitally. His great-uncle, Halil, is Mujo's son and is still living in Gubavica. Before long, several relatives were corresponding—by email, a significant note for Derrida (1995, 16–17)—about arrangements to share some of the archives materials with Halil and the wider family. Such requests from scholars are very common, but somewhat less so with families. In this case, my clearest recollection in fulfilling the request was the difficulty of making digital copies of the discs. The analog-to-digital conversion process in a literal sense is straightforward (at least when we make copies ourselves; not so for the professional-grade transfer done by the university's library). It simply entails playing back an analog recording and capturing the audio on a nearby computer. The trick is the playback itself. As noted, the aluminum discs are often not perfectly playable—many have slight warps, calcium deposits, or poorly cut grooves. Digital transfer becomes a combination of DJing the disc through various calibrations of the playback apparatus and of audio editing afterward to stitch together the various usable sections of the recording. Two discs, in particular, consumed extraordinary amounts of time, with one of them never properly transferring. And even more troubling archivally, one disc is simply missing—part of a small but significant number of discs that vanished shortly after Lord's death as curatorial succession was being determined.

Two months later, Spahalić and his wife, Selma, traveled to Gubavica. They generously made a smartphone video and sent it to us, a kind of homemade “feedback interview” (Stone and Stone 1981) that highlights the many layers of mediation involved here, but also the irrepressible materiality of sound media, even in a digital age. Like the “Avdo Kino,” this video clip runs just about ninety seconds. It comprises two shots, both comfortably domestic and focused on Halil Kukuruzović, Mujo’s son and the patriarch of the family. In the first shot, Halil and his wife, Djulsa, sit on a couch, flanked by their sons and grandsons. A laptop lies open on a coffee table, playing back the sounds of Mujo performing *Alija Alagić in Captivity* and serving as a reminder that however immaterial a digital sound file may be, the information it contains must physically displace air to generate sound—in other words, it must materialize in some form, whether via a laptop, CD, or smartphone. Although women are present too—implied by the kiss blown by one of Halil’s sons to an invisible niece, and confirmed in later correspondence—the space is in many ways still gendered, enhanced by the return of this highly gendered archive. The family listens intently to the song, with the teenage grandsons even making a good faith effort (though one is clearly more interested in Spahalić while he films). The second shot shows Halil and his wife alone, sitting on a couch at the home of Spahalić’s mother. Halil addresses the camera to send a message back to the United States:

My good friends, thank you all for providing this material about my father to my nephew.

About him, where he was spent his time, and what he was doing. It means a lot to us.

Thank you very much!

**INSERT FIGURE 1 [Caption: Halil Kukuruzović responds to recordings]**

Ironically, the video file itself (shared via cloud storage) initially would not open and play due to privacy settings, a kind of micro-commentary on archival attempts at repatriation and the return of materials in general. In corresponding about this complication, we began an exchange about the temporal delays in the whole process, dating back to the formation of the archive itself to our present (sometimes beleaguered) efforts to make these materials available to all. Spahalić wrote astutely: “It is amazing that something that was made 76 years ago can be heard today, no one could believe that anything was saved for all this time and that it can be converted to something that can be played today” (email 12/1/2011). This intertwined (and as described above, ongoing) process of saving and converting in order to facilitate contemporary listening is inevitably an experience of deep temporality, as temporality is inscribed through sound, then preserved through sound media, then re-sounded (or resonated) via technical means to be heard again by the ear. Early commentaries on the phonograph pointed to the possibility of hearing the dead; but in a more general sense, people listening to reproduced sound are hearing time, something arguably even less audible than the dead.

As ever, reality flees the archive’s capacity to capture and document. As rich a document as this movie is, the email Spahalić wrote to accompany it is perhaps even more evocative. He responded to my email asking if he had come back yet as follows:

Yes, I came back a couple weeks ago and I was still working on the video for you. The reaction of the family was unbelievable especially after I showed them pictures of Mujo. My great-uncle Halil (Mujo’s son) started crying when he saw the pictures. They did not have any pictures of him at all. Now they are already planning to frame these pictures and keep them in the living room on display. I did not want to give them the material until the whole family was there. My great-uncle, three sons and their wives and kids were there.

They were sitting and listening amazed for a couple hours, especially the “*Pričanje*” [interview].... I still don’t know how to thank you [all] for what you did for us. (Spahalić email 11/29/2011)

Expressions of gratitude are meaningful, but I suspect I speak for all curators when I say that the description of Halil Kukuruzović’s reaction (not to mention the video Spahalić made) to seeing photos and hearing recordings of his father is even more rewarding.

Several themes emerge from these interactions: the affective power of media; the relative impact of photography, recorded performance, and recorded speech; configurations of family; and even the performative quality of bringing back recordings, as Spahalić took the initiative to create a small-scale ritual here with the gathering of family, the presentation of media-as-gift, documentation (both as a kind of historical evidence and gift in return), etc. For a variety of reasons, such ritualization becomes an important part of many of these exchanges. I would highlight two ideas that emerge here that have relevance for a broader understanding of an archive. First, an archive, like all documentary projects, is always already failing to capture a total reality. Few archives would claim that they are, and their fragmentary qualities are in many ways one of their essential characteristics. In this case, Spahalić was unable or chose not to make a video of the family’s reaction to the photograph, which in many ways was both more intense and more intimate. We are left with a trace of a trace, a retrospective description of an observation of the reactions of others. Second, time is always passing. He notes that he had been home a couple of weeks, that the family is *planning* (i.e., in the future) to frame pictures, that he waited until the whole family was present, and that they sat listening for hours. Again, time is always passing. However, much as it has been noted that music organizes time, so too does the archive, even more so when the archive consists of such an abundance of time-based media.

Foucault's textual archive imposes certain constraints on the potential to make certain statements; here Parry's sonic archive imposes constraints and boundaries on certain experiences of temporality.

The toggling between offline and online media, between analog and digital experience, between absence and presence, culminated the following May when I had the privilege to travel to Gubavica to meet not only the Kukuruzović family but also the Spahalićs, whom I had never personally met, despite our ongoing correspondence. I traveled from Sarajevo with Mirsad Kukuruzović, a grandson of Mujo's who had been informally researching this material for years, reading Lord, Foley, and others' commentaries on these so-called Stolac singers. I was accompanied as well by Ronelle Alexander, mentioned above, as well as the Tuzla-based scholar, Mirsad Kunić, whose research and recent book (2012) fittingly focuses on memory and forgetting in Bosnian epic. We mostly came empty-handed but we were present and had an intriguing conversation about Mujo Kukuruzović, poetry traditions in the area, and the family.

Halil and his family revealed a smattering of new information through our conversation: there was a *kafana* just down the street where Mujo and others would perform; he did not make his living from singing but did earn money regularly and was invited to travel as far as Sarajevo and Montenegro; and he was in demand enough that even Christians would invite him to perform at their weddings, asking him simply to "adapt" the songs a little ("*samo prilagodi pjesme malo*"). However, most interesting to me was to hear about the family's listening process. They did not know that the recordings we sent were made in nearby Stolac. Faint environmental sounds can be heard (birds, other voices), and some family members were certain they heard someone call out "Babo" (Grandpa) in the recording, as though it had been done just in front of their home. We had trouble locating this moment in the recording, but it raises a question of how

archival material should—or could—be listened to. Who is the ideal archival listener? Is there one? Who has expertise about such materials? Since the advent of audio recording and the cultural transformation of psychoanalysis, listening has changed, Barthes argues. Today listening entails “the power (and virtually the function) of playing over unknown spaces,” including the unconscious, the supplementary, and the delayed (1985, 258). Barthes goes on to suggest that listening is no longer about particular signifiers and the recognition of those signifiers, but rather a dispersion or “*shimmering* of signifiers,” which, when listened to, “ceaselessly produces new ones from them without ever arresting their meaning” (259). The productively imaginative listening by the Kukuruzović family resonates with the kind of dispersal—in this case, geographical, temporal and psychoacoustical—of signifying that Barthes is exploring. Listening with Halil and his family suggests the rich play of time that emerges from the archive as it is re-opened and re-dispersed.

## **Repatriating Bosnian Voices, II. Family Photos and Sonic Absence**

A year later, I received an email from Indira Jusić, an acquaintance of Enver Spahalić’s from Texas. She wrote: “Yesterday was one of the most exciting days of my life, since I found out that you have recordings of my great-grandfather in your collection.” Indeed, her great-grandfather, Jusuf Smajić, had fascinated me for several years because of a series of photographs in the Parry Collection showing him recording for Parry in September 1934 while sitting in a field near the town of Glamoc, also in present-day Bosnia-Herzegovina. I had seen the pictures countless times because they are some of the few that show the recording apparatus, which no longer exists (at least in the holdings of the Parry Collection). In a much darker photo from the same session, Smajić is seen close up, but holding his cane in his lap. After years of seeing the picture, I finally

realized that he was using it instead of a *gusle* or a *tambura*, as though he were accompanying himself with it. Jusić and I had a lengthy email correspondence about this absent instrument and the way her father, a skilled singer and multi-instrumentalist, would pick and strum his cane as though it were a lute or other musical instrument.

Her emails add so much depth to the biography of this singer, as well as the process of digital transfer and cultural return/repatriation of archival materials, that it is useful to reproduce large excerpts of our correspondence here:

*Email from Indira Jusić (Dec. 19, 2012)*

Yesterday was one of the most exciting days in my life since I found out that you have recordings of my great grandfather in your collection. His name was Jusuf Smajić. I live in Texas, and got your e-mail from Enver Spahalić. I lived with my grandmother and she told me many, many times that her father, was a well-known man and was “recorded on a radio before World War II.” She was a little girl at the time and obviously did not know what exactly was going on. We came to US in 1996 and she passed away here in 2003. I wish she knew that those recordings were here in USA.

*Email from Peter McMurray (Dec. 19, 2012)*

Thanks so much for your email! It’s been a pleasure to get to know Enver and his family—I was fortunate enough to meet some of his relatives in Herzegovina this spring, which was a wonderful experience. Please send him my best regards.

I’m curious how you met Enver? And do you have family still living in the former Yugoslavia? It really is a pity that your grandmother passed away before we connected,

but I must say that for the past couple years I've grown particularly interested in the recordings your great-grandfather made for Milman Parry. We have some photographs of him that look like he was using a cane instead of proper *gusle* when he made the recording.

**INSERT IMAGE 2 [caption: Jusuf Smajić with cane recording for Milman Parry, September 1934]**

*Email from Indira Jusić (Dec. 19, 2012)*

Thank you so much, I am so overwhelmed at this moment, if I could I would jump through this computer and hug you! I am sorry, it might not be the proper thing to say, but I just want to kiss your hand out of excitement, respect and appreciation. I will write to you soon into more details, I just need to put myself together.

*Email from Indira Jusić (Dec. 19, 2012)*

I have known Enver for many years because we both live in DFW. I see him once in a while, but we never get to talk that much, maybe that is why I did not know about his great-grandfather's recordings. I saw a video on Facebook that mutual friend put online that was talking about Avdo Medjedovic, in which they said that Milman Parry was sent from France to Western Bosnia, (where Glamoc is), and from there to Sandzak. My grandmother told me many times how her father "got recorded on radio." Also on a video was a picture of man being recorded. That is when I realized that this is it and I searched Jusuf Smajić and Harvard and that is how I found out. I called this mutual friend that put

the video on Facebook and he told me that Enver is in touch with you since his great grandfather was recorded too.

My mother lives here in Arlington too, and she remembers my great-grandfather. She was in her teenage years when he died. My mother did not live with him, but spend most school breaks with him. My grandmother never referred to her father as being a “guslar,” which would be someone using *gusle*. She always told me that he sang “junacke pjesme” [heroic songs]. He used a cane because he had a leg injury and as a consequence he was left with a limp. My mother remembers him using a cane to perform. She said the he referred to it as “keva” not as “stap,” which is what they call it nowadays. She remembers after dinner he would tell them, “Kids give me my *keva* and I will sing for you.” She also remembers that *keva* had about 3 cracks (but she does not know if my great-grandfather carved them himself) and that he would keep something white in his pocket that he would get out to use on his cane that would serve him almost like guitar pick. (She does not remember any wires on the cane, but the cracks themselves would make sound). She also remembers he had multiple instruments at home, things like “shargije,” “frula,” and “gajde” (bagpipe) that he would use to perform.

Here in Dallas-Fort Worth we have a distant cousin that remembers him. There also other grandchildren in Glamoč, Bosnia, and scattered through Europe. I was very close to my grandmother, and her family always amazed me, since even those that were not very educated were very intelligent people. She was a great storyteller of their past and ever since I had my daughter I have felt that I should write these stories down.

I would love to have any recording that you can share with me. I have been to Boston twice, even my grandmother was there once, but we never knew.

*Email from Peter McMurray (Dec. 20, 2012)*

This is really quite amazing to hear. Your great-grandfather sounds like quite the man! And these details about the cane are extremely interesting. There is a whole corpus of stories that I've heard informally about singers who perform without formal instruments—some who rub sticks against one another (more like *gusle*) or who pace the room, and now this with the cane. Another question that interested Parry and Lord (and me, in different ways) is the overlap between the tradition of singing narrative songs (like *junačke pjesme*) and of other traditions. Parry and Lord recorded a lot of singers who sang shorter lyric songs (especially so-called "*ženske pjesme*") but I've often wondered about instrumental music too. So this is fascinating to hear that your great-grandfather was a multi-instrumentalist.

*Email from Indira Jusić (Dec. 21, 2012)*

It is very possible that he used cane as silent *gusle* too with his "*junačke pjesme*", since most of the time he performed for my mom he sang fast, happy songs so she could dance. She also said all the instruments were handmade. My grandmother also told me he would perform *ilahije* and *kaside* too with a group of girls from village when they had a drought. He also sang *mevlud*, since he took on the role of imam in the village after WWII.

My mom was born in 1949, so she remembers him 20 years or more after his recordings. During WWII he moved to a big city for 5–6 years, and probably was influenced by some things there, too. Enver refers to his grandfather as a *guslar*. I never heard anyone ever say anything like that for my great-grandfather, or even mentioned *gusle*, they always said that he sang or he knew “*junačke pjesme*.”

I am very curious to find out about this too. I will ask some older members of our family and let you know if they remember anything about cane.

*Email from Peter McMurray (May 18, 2013)*

I’ve just transferred the three items we have from aluminum disc to digital soundfile. I could send those to you as a CD or just put them online and you could download them and burn them yourself. What do you prefer?

*Email from Indira Jusić (Dec. 27, 2013)*

I went to Bosnia and gave the CDs to my cousins that are still there. They were super excited, and were wondering about the place where it was recorded and about interpreter that is in pictures, etc. Jusuf’s granddaughter, who is now in her 70s (the one that he raised and that still lives in Glamoc), is constantly listening to the CDs, and whoever does not like them or does not want to listen to them is nothing less than enemy to her, hehe. Her daughter is visiting us right now, so she told me that story yesterday.... [I]f you need

any more information I can ask my cousin that is visiting here, since she remembers Jusuf from when he was alive, or her mother back in Glamoc.

A few days later, Indira wrote again with a four-page narrative of Smajić's life, including more details about the difficulties of wartime: World War II for Smajić, and the Bosnian War (1992–1995) for her. Both were war refugees, though Smajić had ultimately been able to move back into his home. Like Enver Spahalić conducting feedback interviews, Indira also took on the role of ethnographer, gathering family history stories from other relatives who were no longer in Bosnia:

*Emailed document from Indira Jusić (Jan. 7, 2014)*

There is a distant cousin that lives here in Fort Worth and remembers Jusuf in this post war time [after he moved back to his home after World War II]. I gave him the recordings that you sent me, too. He said that Jusuf would ride on a horse 20 kilometers to his village to come see his father, and then he would perform songs for many people that would gather. He said there would be at least 20 of them listening, and his mother would prepare a pitcher of lemonade and put it in front of Jusuf. He remembers the excitement of those nights. Jusuf became his role model and he said that he would be sad when Jusuf would not come, but since he had memorized some parts of those songs, he would imitate Jusuf [in his place].

Even edited down to this form, this email exchange—in particular the commentaries by Indira Jusić—offer a wide range of material to comment on, from questions of musical instruments in

traditional life, village religious life, and the impact of World War II to the potential roles of Facebook in ethnography, the materiality of digital sound recording, multi-generational storytelling, and the mediation of memory. I will focus on two aspects briefly: first, the question of archival absences; and second, the ways offline, face-to-face interventions limit and inflect various forms of digital transfer.

In reflecting on the question of absence, much of the energy in this whole exchange comes from that which is missing: for Indira Jusić, the archive in its entirety as well as memory of her great-grandfather, whom she never met; for me, the missing instrument in a photograph. As so often, one listens (and looks) in the archive for the absent; listening to the recording of Smajić (which I had previously done), one hears *only* the voice. In photographs, it starts to become apparent that something more was happening. But only with the additional biographical information from family is this speculation—that Smajić was *not* a *guslar* but nevertheless an epic singer—confirmed. The absence becomes productive in raising questions, which then prompt other questions (as raised by Jusić and her family): Where was this recording session held? Who else was present? Her speculation, “I will probably never find out,” points precisely to the impossible futurity and promise of the archive suggested by Derrida. Indeed, this entire exchange required the passage of time. Had she sought these recordings a few years earlier, I probably would have sent all the same materials but without any interrogations of the use of the cane-as-instrument. Perhaps this is not the greatest revelation—nothing on the magnitude of Parry’s and Lord’s theorizing about the origins of Homer—and yet we have learned something that exceeded the initial grasp of the archive, which reminds us of its contingency as well as its thinness (in opposition to a potential “thick” description). In many ways, the collection of interviews in the archive is a treasure trove of ethnographic detail; in other ways, its fixations on

singers' experience primarily as epic singers elides so many other facets of culture. Anthony Seeger's suggestion (1986) that our archives may be of greater value than our academic theories certainly applies here, not least for its call to repatriate when we can and to plan for unforeseeable future opportunities to repatriate. But this claim to archival primacy fails to acknowledge just how much our archives are in so many ways already a product of our theories—of the things we seek in research—that the two can never be fully disentangled.

In addition to this question of absence is that of presence—specifically human presence, the physical, fleshy encounters that bring an archive, even one that has been (or is being) made digital, into a fully material realm, with all its messiness and resistance to copying. In this exchange, the entire transfer of information and media took place digitally. And yet, it still required considerable physical activity for Jusić to burn CDs, take them to Bosnia, share them with relatives, discuss them, then return to the United States and write to me. And while digital transfer cannot compare with such efforts, it does entail its own (uniquely frustrating) forms of labor to render digital audio from an aluminum disc.<sup>5</sup> The physicality of these interactions is perhaps more pronounced with the earlier instance of return, in which the return was mediated in multiple ways (creating media, sharing it, then having the family make their own media in response), yet Jusić's enthusiastic response that she would like to “jump through the computer” to express her excitement shows the kinds of affective register that exceeds the digital. Paradoxically, where digital communication fails in its communicative capacity, she turns to traditional gestures of respect and affection—kissing the hand—to articulate her sense of this encounter.

More broadly, the encounter with Jusić and the Smajić family via the Spahilic family suggests that the archive is not merely situated in this ecology of interpersonal, on- and offline

connections; it forges them. Without an archive—and especially an online one—I would likely never have met Enver Spahalić and the Kukuruzović family or Indira Jusić and the Smajić family. The particular mix of digital interactions was likewise contingent on Spahalić and Jusić knowing one another from face-to-face encounters in Texas. Such encounters are not simply serendipitous; they depend on a broad range of factors tied to (forced) migration and global politics. This confluence of on- and offline encounters *changes* the archive significantly. Had we never been in touch, the Parry Collection would have remained, for all intents and purposes, just as complete an archive. The archive was already in its afterlife, so to speak. Indeed, our encounters, however interesting they may be, have not generated new songs—the ostensible focus of the Parry Collection’s holdings. Yet these encounters have created a kind of “supplement” (to return to Barthes) that facilitates a new kind of listening. To put it another way, our interactions create no new data but offer important new access to metadata about the archive, the poetic traditions it contains, and their contemporary reception. This metadata could not be recovered from some original source recording; it had to be created anew through ethnography. This slow revelation of the archive’s contents is in many ways a temporal gesture—the aging of the archive and its repositioning in a new time and place, where migration, international travel, and digital circulation are ever more present.

### **Academic Afterword: From Archaeology to Genealogy**

The foregoing narrative is rather affirmative; it’s archive-positive, so to speak. Archives preserved a repertoire, and that repertoire has since made a positive impact in a few lives. But lurking beneath this glossy surface are weighty questions of politics and power that could be traced in other directions: personal, institutional, academic, and certainly political. In the mid-

1990s, Enes Kujundžić, the director of the National Library and Archive, met with the curators of the Milman Parry Collection. They briefly discussed the possibility of creating a copy of the archive to help replenish the Sarajevo library, which had been destroyed by shelling along with numerous other sites of cultural heritage. These conversations helped nudge the archive to join forces with Harvard's fledgling Library Digital Initiative at Harvard in 2002, thus leading to the digitization and online existence of recordings. The project, and even the prospect of sending a copy back to Sarajevo, raises all kinds of intriguing (and vexing) questions. Where should such an archive reside? What are the prospects and limitations of digital copies? What kinds of institutional arrangements best serve the materials in the archive itself, and do those same arrangements best serve the people who created those materials in the first place? And where do families, friends, communities, and larger polities fit into such a discussion?

The answers to these questions are complex, but it seems that the afterlife of an archive and the afterlife of the places and people involved in it are perpetually intertwined. These two case studies exemplify not only the realities of those intertwinings but also the fruits that can come from them. In short, it has proven to be good *for the archive* to be returned, in some form. The archive itself is richer for these encounters. Both Enver Spahalić and Indira Jusić and their families are refugees from the Bosnian War that came with the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia. Their stories are compelling in their own right—and deserve a telling in another forum. But whatever else may be said, they have transformed the archive by reaching out and connecting with the staff, the recordings, the photographs and other holdings, and even indirectly with the physical space, which now is richer (and fuller) with the inclusion of printouts of their correspondence, request forms, and stored copies of the media they have sent back to us.

On a different level, Spahalić, Jusić and their families have also transformed what the archive can mean. They have transformed the possibilities of theory, to borrow from Foucault once more, from an archaeological approach to a genealogical one. This genealogical existence is both figurative, as Foucault himself (somewhat ambiguously) posited, leaving space for politics and perhaps some individual agency, but also emphatically literal: this genealogy consists of generations of people scattered across new homelands, connecting to their familial past through aluminum discs, reinscribed into digital sound and carried back to Bosnia. An archive cannot retrieve or recreate a homeland, or *patria*, to return to, and the very existence of the Parry Collection attests to the nascent possibilities of a multicultural Yugoslavia, while its holdings point to its eventual disintegration. But through these returns—these post-patriations, in a sense—the archive can perhaps invigorate individuals’ and communities’ connections to those pasts and places, however mythical they may have become.

On a personal concluding note, these interactions are gratifying and yet inevitably disappointing. In my senior thesis, written in 2005 about meeting other families of other epic singers involved in the Parry Collection and bringing them recordings, I noted that the Milman Parry Collection was regrettably inaccessible, especially for those with direct family connections to the archive. In the ensuing years, I have worked as a curator in the archive, which has only heightened that sense. While hundreds of recordings have been put online, they represent only a fraction of the materials in the archive. And the majority of people old enough to remember these traditions first-hand are not likely to be browsing around online. If archives and their repatriations are *temporal* processes, it bears remembering that they are also *temporal processes*. That is, repatriation, like the making of an archive, takes time. Such a sentiment sounds defeatist and perhaps self-rationalizing. With each passing year, I realize I am only beginning to sense the

time of the archive. And yet perhaps, inadvertently, that temporality also grants some small access to the time of the poetry tradition that gave rise to it, itself the product of centuries of sonic process. In any case, the Milman Parry Collection is a better, more complete archive because of these repatriating gestures, however incomplete they remain.

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## Notes

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<sup>2</sup> For the historical/anthropological thread, see Farge 2013 (originally published in 1989 and a key work in the "archival turn"), Steedman 2001, Burton 2003 and 2006, Spieker 2008, Stoler 2009, Weld 2014 and Heller 2016. Many of these works also respond to Derrida's *Archive Fever* (1996). My own essay on the sensory capacities of the Parry Collection (McMurray 2015) also engages these issues anthropologically. For the media theory thread, see Kittler 1992 [1985], Parikka 2012, Huhtamo and Parikka 2011, Ernst 2015 [2002], and Ernst 2016, one of several places where Wolfgang Ernst writes about the Milman Parry Collection.

<sup>3</sup> For further details on Parry's research and the resulting archival materials, see Lord 2000, Mitchell and Nagy 2000, and Elmer 2013.

<sup>4</sup> The temporality of sound and music is a regular point of inquiry for music studies, from Zuckerandl's discussions in *Sound and Symbol* (1956, 151-256) to Georgina Born's recent work on music as process in "Making Time: Temporality, History, and the Cultural Object" (2015).

<sup>5</sup> Kirschenbaum 2007 highlights some of the unseen (or unacknowledged) materialities and costs of digital media and their upkeep.