

# Exploring the margins of administrative and police archives. New perspectives on social history (20<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup> century)

Workshop organized with the support of [Le Mouvement Social](#), Paris, June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2025

## Call for abstracts

The workshop, organized with the support of the journal *Le Mouvement Social*, aims to shed a new light on current discussions about archives and address methodological and epistemological issues in studying marginalized individuals and groups.

Marginality indicates the “position or condition of individuals and groups living on the physical or sociocultural margins or edges”, whether through geographical isolation or the effect of “exclusion, discrimination, or subordination” (Singh *et al.* 2024). It is thus conceived as “the expression of a tension between belonging and exclusion, inherent to the system that produces it” rather than “a simple opposition to the center” (Le Dantec-Dowry *et al.* 2018). Inspired by Michel Foucault (1964; 1975) and Howard Becker (1963), social history has focused on the “margins” of the social world (Geremek [1976] 2006; Vincent 1979) since the mid-twentieth century. This “social elsewhere” (*ailleurs social*, Kalifa 2011) has received renewed attention, in fields like Romani studies (Barany 2002), history of crime (Rodak 2013), disability studies (Rembis *et al.* 2018), history of homosexuality (Tamagne 2006) or the history of mental asylums (Le Bras 2024). Frequently in line with intersectional approaches (Crenshaw 1991; Kóczy *et al.* 2015), research has underlined that marginalization is contingent and processual (Anderson 2012), touches different marginalized populations and manifests itself under varied forms (Kennedy & Weston 2024; Irvine 2022; Cronin 2021).

Renewing the studies of social margins has an empirical component. Minority epistemologies have only recently been considered in social history. Notably, considering practices of community archiving transforms research on marginalities. While earlier works were limited to reading sources produced by the “center”, namely administrative, judicial or police records (Schmitt 1978; Farge 2010), current research tends to integrate “popular” or “indigenous” archives (Singh *et al.* 2024). This is part of the “archival turn” that has permeated disciplines beyond history and the social sciences since the 2000s (Poncet 2019), influencing fields ranging from queer studies (Marshall & Tortorici 2022), feminist studies (Eichhorn 2013) to contemporary art (Callahan 2024) or law (Biber 2017).

This workshop aims to **bridge theoretical and empirical discussions on margins/marginalities**:

- First, we aim to **address marginality as a category of analysis**. This can encompass multiple populations, such as national, ethnic or religious minorities, gender/sexual minorities, but also criminals, vagrants, hippies, people marginalized in terms of class, education, work, residency, geography, etc. The distinction between the notion of “margins” and other related terms, such as “minorities”, “deviants” or the “excluded” may not always be explicit, and therefore needs to be criticized and historicized.
- Second, we **encourage reflections on cross-reading State archives with community archives**. We invite contributions that focus specifically on records of the police and state administrations in the 20<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup> century. How can they be (re)read to study marginalized populations? What do they reveal? How can one confront them with other types of sources

held by non-state actors? And what use may one make of inscriptions in the physical margins of archives in studying marginalized populations? Can cross-reading administrative and community archives help renew social history of marginalized populations? Namely, what do these archives tell us not just about their daily lives, practices, and organizations but also about state surveillance practices? How do these renewed readings lead us to rethink the category of “margins”?

While we welcome new analyses of already well-studied groups, the aim of the workshop is to include populations for which academic interest is more recent, such as queer people or persons with disabilities. The call for abstracts is structured around three themes. It **focuses on the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries and is not limited to any geographical area or political regime**. By adopting broad chronological boundaries, we want to bring discussion on the diverse and evolving margins of the social world, allowing for comparison and reflection on continuities between heterogeneous populations or historical settings.

The detailed section of the CFA (below) offers three possible axes along which contributions can be organized:

- 1. Conceptualizing the margins. The categorization of marginalized groups in administrative and police archives**

We invite contributions with a focus on the ways in which state administrations construct the “margins” and categorize certain individuals or groups as “marginal”. The aim is to investigate the making of these groups, while highlighting the instability of the taxonomies produced in archival documents, which are also based on “popular discursive categories” (Chauncey 1994) and constitute “records of uncertainty and doubt” (Stoler 2009). By adopting a broad definition of the “margins”, we want to trigger comparison between different populations and reflect on the limits of this concept. Should we speak of “minoritization” instead of “marginalization”? How should we distinguish between marginality/centrality, minority/majority, exclusion/inclusion (Acke *et al.* 2023)?

The challenge is to think of the historical construction of these concepts. How do archives reflect the ways in which diverse administrative actors (street-level bureaucrats, political representatives, police officers...) categorize individuals as “marginal” or belonging to a “minority”? What does it say about the workings of state administrations? How do these categorizations contribute to suspecting and disenfranchising certain groups? How do criteria and processes of marginalization evolve in terms of class, gender, generation, health, race, or religion? How do they vary in different contexts (national, regional, local...)? The question of categorization raises that of scale. What scale of observation is required to best analyze marginalization, stigmatization and exclusion of certain populations by administrative authorities? And how can we construct relevant categories of analysis of marginalized populations, that take their performative effect into consideration without reproducing state categories? How can we (re)think the definitions of marginalized populations based on new readings of administrative archives?

- 2. Archives of the marginalized: confronting administrative and police archives with other sources**

The second focus of this workshop will be on how the production of physical or digital archives (Bouillard 2023) by marginalized groups challenges readings of administrative and police archives and calls for rewriting the history of these groups from a new angle.

How do marginalized communities create archival centers of their own as an alternative to state archives? How does the emergence of these archives, often conceived as a form of "epistemic struggle", "queering" (Marshall 2014, 2015; Faure 2021), or reversing stigma, invite us to re-read state archival collections from a new angle? How can we reassess the limits of archives produced by the police or state administrations by confronting them to community archives? How does that redefine what constitutes an archive (see, for example, the exhibition "[Alice.x in LGBTQI+ archives' land](#)" at Palais de Tokyo)?

This raises methodological questions: how to cross-read administrative and police archives with community archives? Would it allow us to grasp differences in the ways marginalized people define themselves compared to how administrative actors define them? In broader terms, how do these archives created by marginalized communities transform social history when we use them to either gather new sources or study the movements of alternative archive production?

The production of archives by marginalized communities is not new, as demonstrated by the decades-long existence of lesbian archives (Petit 2021) and LGBTQI+ archive centers in Berlin or Bologna. It remains, however, a relevant topic on an international scale, with numerous recent examples: [LGBTQI+ archives in Paris](#), which claim the emancipatory character of the archive, [Lithuanian Queer Archive](#), congresses of [community archives](#) in Poland (Wiśniewska-Drewniak & Pełtowska 2022), "[affective](#)" archives (Hertzberg 2023). We invite contributions that address the creation of archives of marginalized groups, question the role of researchers in such initiatives (see Robène & Serre's "[Punk is not dead](#)" project), and discuss the role that digitalization plays in preserving archives of marginalized communities and making them visible (see Romani archives projects in [Poland](#) or the [Czech Republic](#)).

Above all, we encourage contributors to look beyond the usual taxonomies (public/private archives) and consider the intersection of administrative and police archives with other types of sources, such as oral archives (Portelli 2003), photographic archives (About & Chéroux 2001), iconographic archives, sound archives, audiovisual archives (Andro & Le Bonhomme 2024), and everyday objects. How can we (re)read the paper archives produced by state administrations against the backdrop of these other types of sources?

### **3. Focusing on the physical margins of administrative and police archives**

Finally, we welcome papers that focus on the materiality of archives: annotations, layout, marginal notes, and signs of archive production. How does attention to the physical margins of archives contribute to the study of marginalized populations? While we do not suggest that there is a necessary link between social marginality and the material marginality of an annotation, we encourage exploring such links. Does being *in* the margin also entail being *on* the margin? How are margins of the social world and physical margins of the archives intertwined?

Building on academic works that read peritextual annotations of bureaucrats in the margins of administrative archives (Zalc 2020), we want to discuss the ways in which reading between the lines and in the margins of police or administrative archives may renew the study of marginalization. For

instance, can attention to the margins enable a change of scale in the history of the marginalized? What methods should we adopt to study information located in the margins? How can we include it in databases and quantify it (Lemerancier & Zalc 2019)?

Following Ann Laura Stoler's (2009) pioneering approach, still largely applied in (post)colonial studies (Sowry 2012; Hossain 2024), how can we read administrative and police archives “along and against the grain”? How can we rethink the study of marginalized people through questioning the materiality of archives? How does the digitization of archives affect the possibilities of reading archives through their margins? Can digitization enable the study of certain marginalized populations (Barré 2023)?

We invite abstracts related to either of the three above-mentioned themes. **The workshop is open to social historians, archivists, social and political scientists, anthropologists, and scholars coming from fields in which discussions on the use of archives are revived, such as queer studies, Romani studies, disability studies, literature, or art studies.** Papers that adopt a transnational or comparative approach to archives are particularly welcome. Proposals dealing with (post)colonial and (post)imperial contexts are also encouraged.

## Submission

This workshop, aimed at **early-stage researchers**, is organized with the support of [Le Mouvement Social](#), a French journal in social history.

We invite proposals from **PhD researchers and post-doctoral researchers** up to 5 years after their PhD defense. The abstracts can be written **in French or English** and should be **no more than 300 words long**. Abstracts should contain your main research questions, methods, and sources. Please also add a brief biographical presentation (150 words maximum) to your submission.

The organizing committee will set up discussion panels.

Proposals should be sent to [je.mouvementsocial@protonmail.com](mailto:je.mouvementsocial@protonmail.com) before **January 31<sup>st</sup>, 2025**, at 23:59 (CET).

The workshop will take place on June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2025, at the [MSH Paris-Nord](#).

**Presentations can be held in French or English.**

The journal's editorial board offers the possibility of publishing a selection of papers presented during the workshop.

## Organizing Committee

- Gabrielle Escaich, PhD researcher in social sciences (EHESS - IRIS, ERC Lubartworld)
- Sacha Najman, PhD researcher in arts and language (EHESS - CRAL)
- Tymoteusz Skowroński, PhD researcher in history (European University Institute, Florence, Italy)
- Antoine Perrier, Research Fellow at the CNRS (Centre Jean Bérard), member of the editorial board of *Le Mouvement Social*.

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