



The Secret Police and Study of Religions: Archives, Communities and Contested Memories in Central and Eastern Europe

Abstracts



Closing Conference of the European Research Council Project:
Creative Agency and Religious Minorities: 'Hidden Galleries' in the Secret Police Archives in
Central and Eastern Europe (project no. 677355)



This project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme No. 677355



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Keynote Lectures

Truth and Memory: The Twin Perils of Secret Archives
Lavinia Stan (St. Francis Xavier University, Canada)

For centuries intelligence services have collected information on individuals, but differences in surveillance among democratic and dictatorial countries have emerged more clearly only after World War II, as this talk explains. Throughout their existence communist countries have conducted “wide” repression and mass surveillance, to use Tina Rosenberg terms, compiling huge collections of documents, manuscripts, photographs, smell jars and other items. Since the 1990s some parts of these vast archives, more or less extensive, depending on national legislation, have been made available to ordinary citizens as well as historians interested in piecing together the recent past. File access has offered a number of benefits, including the forceful end of secret operations, the retirement of secret agents and informers, as well as a better understanding of the chain of command within repressive institutions, of the methods and agents of repression and persecution, and of the ways in which victims’ lives have been affected. However, as this talk argues, the opening of these secret archives has also underscored the perils associated with the effort of reconstituting the memory of communism and of finding the truth about the recent past.

Archival Hybridity
Cristina Văţulescu (New York University)

In the course of my research, secret police archives never ceased to surprise me with the hybridity of their holdings. Forensic logic often trumped archival preservation best-practices that mandate medium separation. As a result, secret police files can present a bewildering variety of mediums: photographs, drawings, films, x-rays, maps, wiretapping recordings, a wide range of print and handwritten materials, as well as confiscated material evidence of all kinds—guns, clothes, various objects related to the practice of religion. Indeed, I argue that secret police archives make meaning, and wield power, not within one medium, and not even in neatly separated multimedia, but rather intermedia, in the crafted collusion of different mediums. This poses a real challenge to our specialized—often discipline and medium specific—methodologies. In its attempt to develop methodologies for this intermedia challenge, this talk takes cues from recent archival theories and practices, as well as from the work of Eastern European visual artists and filmmakers who engage with the visual component of these archives.

Anthropology and the Religious Imaginary of the Past
Catherine Wanner (Pennsylvania State University)

There is a new emotionality arising in public domains in many parts of the world. It is remaking understandings of neoliberalism, citizenship and rights, and even personhood itself. This new era is characterized, not only by nationalism, populism and patriotism gaining ground, but also by dissolving the lines of division that used to clearly separate politics from popular culture, public from private spheres, and historical studies from memories of the past. In such a moment, the Hidden Galleries project makes a particularly valuable contribution to our understandings of the past in Eastern Europe and to the clandestine lives so many citizens in socialist regimes led. Many religious minorities in the region, whose existence was largely underground and yet vigorously pursued by state authorities, now have a legal status and can assemble with a degree of ease that was unimaginable in the past. However, when these communities continue to exist it is often through adaptation to dramatically new social and political circumstances. The collapse of socialist regimes poses a challenge for all scholars: how can we know what inspired and motivated socialist-era religious minorities to take such risks to live an unauthorized life? When our own religious imaginary is not up to the task, where can we turn for clues as to what animated these communities and lent meaning to the individual lives of their members? This talk will analyze why memory studies has become so tremendously fashionable in Eastern Europe and what anthropologists through their study of material culture can add to our understandings of the past and specifically the insight offered by the study of processes to “other” non-conforming religious communities.



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Paper Abstracts

(alphabetical by presenter)

Beliakova, Nadezhda (Senior Fellow at the Institute of World History, Russian Academy of Science and Associated Professor at the Department of Humanities at Sechenov First Moscow State Medical University, Moscow, Russia)

In the Shadow of the KGB: The Role of the Soviet Secret Police in the Construction of the Evangelical Baptist Identity (late 1960's – early 1980's).

Within the narrative of the “Initiative Group” movement, which shaped in the U.S.S.R. in the late 1960's as the “Council of Churches of Evangelical Christian Baptist (CCECB)”, we find the concept of the One True Church (interpreted as the “underground church”), a Church that would refuse to interact with the “godless, atheist” state and thus retaining genuine Christianity. The “Initiative Group” refused registration with the Soviet authorities and hence was illegal in the Soviet Union. Furthermore, its activists accused the religious leaders of the officially registered All-Union Council of Evangelical Christian Baptists in compromising with the government and collaborating with the KGB, calling all registered senior presbyters “KGB agents.” This stance was notably elaborated on the pages of CCECB's periodicals (produced illegally in the Soviet period), as well as in the memoirs of the movement's leaders. For their part, representatives of the officially registered Baptist Council (the “grand brotherhood”) offered their own reasoning, arguing that the KGB was interested in planting the split within the Baptist movement in the Soviet Union. Members of independent (from both the official Council and the CCECB) Baptist communities, in turn, often suggested that Gennady Kryuchkov, the leader of the CCECB, was directed by the KGB.

Based on the materials from the archives of the CCECB communities, I will focus in this paper on the role of the Soviet intelligence services in the construction of the movement's identity. I examine how the very image of the “omnipotent KGB” influenced the relationships within and between the communities and shaped their internal communication, as well as the interaction between the competing leaders. Recurring mutual accusations in being KGB agents or collaborators were used as a tool in internal power struggles and as a means of social control and manipulation within the movement. The image of the everlasting presence of the secret services of the “godless state” along with the notion of the unceasing struggle against them were dominating features of the movement and its system of identities and often overshadowed the confessional core of the religious teaching. This oftentimes gave way to brutal power struggles within the movement, when the harshest accusations were made against fellow believers.

The Russian archives of the Soviet secret services from the 1960-1980's are almost inaccessible for researchers, hence it is unknown the degree of KGB interference into the internal life of the given religious movement. The opening of the SBU (former KGB) archives in Ukraine revealed that the Soviet secret police attempted to infiltrate the group, sometimes successfully. The newly opened archival materials suggest us to revise the approach towards collaboration: from the binary “collaborated/ not collaborated” towards the analysis of the patterns and strategies of KGB involvement in the religious life of “illegal” religious groups and how the very structure of these organizations made them vulnerable for secret police infiltration.



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Biliuță, Ionuț (Gheorghe Șincai Institute/Romanian Academy)

"Dreams of Terror" and Divine Visions: Legionary Encounters with the Inner-Self and God in Communist and post-Communist Romania

This paper analyzes the importance of preemptory dreams and religious visions in archival materials and prison narratives penned by former Iron Guard members in shaping a fascist carceral religiosity. For the fascist prisoners, dreams established links with the legionary past and provided much-needed hope for enduring the years left from their sentences.

As "dreams of terror," nightmares signaled the brutality of the environment and in which they carried on their lives. Furthermore, the experience of dreams provided the detainees with access to their inner selves and unmediated perceptions of the Communist reality. The religious experience of seeing Jesus, the Virgin, the Captain, or previous legionary martyrs emboldened the legionaries to continue their resistance to Communism in prisons. It also provided them with powerful encouragement for an intense religious experience.

Cindrea-Nagy, Iuliana (Doctoral Researcher, Hidden Galleries Project)

When absence comes to matter: the Old Calendarist Church's strive for survival

Absence is made present through objects, images, texts, or thoughts and, through various practices, absence has agency. According to Severin Fowles (2010, 25-28), absences prompt people into action and have their material consequences and effects on the world. Absence was often a reality which Old Calendarists had to endure due to the intrusive character of the secret police: their churches were destroyed, they were deprived of their religious books, photographs, icons, and even religious leaders. These actions created an absence which, in turn, I argue in this presentation, inspired the Old Calendarist's strive for survival. More than that, the secret police equated these "absences" with the dissolution of the religious groups which it sought to destroy, unknowingly empowering them with even more creative potential and will to endure the repressive strategies targeting them. Today, the secret police in Romania archives store many of these "absences", be they objects, images or life stories, that could become presences and continue, complete, or simply end some chapters in the histories of the Old Calendarist Church. In this presentation, I will offer examples that convey the manners in which the Old Calendarist Church managed to navigate through and make use of these absences in order to survive persecution, highlighting the value of the secret police archives as sites or spaces of recovery from absence and loss.

Clark, Roland (University of Liverpool, UK)

How Charismatic Religious Leaders Responded to the Rise of State Socialism in 1940s Romania

Charismatic religious leaders were overwhelmingly horrified by the establishment of state socialism in Romania during the late 1940s. Unlike the democratic, fascist, and authoritarian regimes that had preceded them, the Romanian Communist Party was unwilling to tolerate religious leadership that was not subordinated to and integrated within the state apparatus. Over a period of several years, the Communists systematically curtailed the contact charismatic leaders had with their followers, their freedom to engage in religious practices, and worked to discredit the supernatural claims their authority rested upon. In most cases, charismatic religious leaders responded using the same strategies that had helped establish their power during the 1930s. They prophesized the downfall of the Communist Party,



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consolidated faithful communities around themselves, and engaged in deeper, more concentrated prayer.

This paper examines the experiences of three charismatic religious leaders – Petrache Lupu, Mother Veronica, and Sandu Tudor – during the early years of state socialism in Romania through the only sources on this period we have available: secret police archives. It asks how the secret police understood the actions of these three individuals and how the Securitate's interpretive lens hinders our ability to understand them from their own perspectives. Finally, it argues that despite crushing all three leaders as individuals, state repression was unable to eradicate the sense of mystery that surrounded them and which had originally launched their careers as mystics.

Djurić Milovanović , Aleksandra (Senior Research Fellow Institute for Balkan Studies SASA)

Religious Minorities Experiences and Contested Memories in Socialist Yugoslavia: Understanding the Concept of “borders in motion”

The presentation focuses on the position of minority religious communities of neo-Protestant origin in Banat region during the socialist period of Yugoslavia based on the community narratives, oral history and archival sources. The complexity of the state policy towards religious minorities was often closely connected to their national or ethnic minority position as well. Therefore, a number of ethnic minorities belonged to religious minorities as well, having the so-called position of a “double minority”. Their position brings into attention the concept of borders and identities, diverse experiences and contested memories, especially in borderlands of Banat. In the presentation the concept of “borders in motion” of Piero Zanini is used in order to analyse the process of expressing ethno-religious minority identities under years of state repression. Perception of the Other, understanding identity diversity, including religious diversity, possibility to have multiply identities or covert to another religion was also related to the question of borders between communities, missionary efforts and border transgression during socialist era. Therefore, the concept of “borders in motion”, brings new insights into identities dynamics, whereby transcending borders and creating new ones is not necessarily related to crossing state borders, but rather religious community boundaries which were continuously reinforced due to state marginalization and oppression.

Dyck, Johannes (Research fellow at Bibelseminar Bonn, Germany, doctorand at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam)

Jakob Görzen as a Member of a Middle Rank Group within the Soviet Underground Baptist Community: A Case Study

This contribution argues that in dissident communities, a group of middle rank members, positioned between leaders and plain members, existed. Under the conditions of high secrecy, this group took care for robust infrastructure, stable communication, and organization of high-security projects like underground publishing. Members of this group enjoyed the special trust of the leadership but at the same time were just as much under suspicion of the security services. Their activities were to be invisible not only for the latter but also to their co-workers, neighbors, and even co-religionists. On the other hand, they had to find performers for their dangerous tasks among plain church members and even other, non-dissident, churches. This conclusion can be drawn from the memoirs of Jakob Görzen published in November 2020 in Germany. Görzen emigrated to Germany in the 2010ies from Karaganda in Kazakhstan where he belonged to a so-called unregistered church belonging to the underground International Council of Evangelical Christians-Baptist Churches. Görzen, born 1951, was



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part of the printing activities since 1974. The Görzen memoirs differs from many recollections of his co-believers published in Germany following the discourse of suffering. They provide valuable fresh insights into structures and networks previously only guessed at.

Giakoumis, Konstantinos (University College LOGOS, Tirana, Albania)

Underground Spirituality & Its Materiality: Religious Culture under Surveillance & Persecution in Communist Albania, 1967-1990

This paper delves into the significance of material culture of a religious nature in identity processes at times of surveillance and persecution in the course of Albania's communist regime, especially after 1967 when state anti-religious frenzy intensified, leading to Albania's proclamation as the first world-wide atheist state in its 1976 Constitution. To investigate this, this paper is divided in two major parts. The part introduces the subject in three sections. The first section outlines the methodological design of this study, while the second sets forth the basic principles of the Identity Process Theory, a social psychological approach to look at "feelings and experience" for the purpose of comprehending emotions "whilst also standing back and analysing the effects of surveillance on the individual and their social relations." The third section delineates the historical background in which religious communities and individuals found themselves vis-à-vis their faith identities in the period under consideration (1967-1990). The second part of the paper deeply dives in a comparative fashion into four religious artefacts and their stories in association with the faithful who reserved and used them: **1.** the relic and reliquary of the skull of St Nikodemos of Vithkuq, preserved in the house of Ilia Koci in Berat; **2.** the *aer* of Fr Kozma Qirjo, kept and used by him in the course of his underground activity as a priest at his village, Bestrovë and elsewhere; **3.** A paper icon printed in USA for the Evangelical Mission in Albania kept by Kostandina, a faithful woman from Korça; **4.** and hand-copied excerpts from liturgical books kept and used by Mihal Postoli in Durrës. With the help of these case-studies, I am striving to demonstrate how surveillance and prosecution mobilizes identity processes that often act in dissidence to the political establishment.

Hesz, Ágnes (University of Pécs, Hungary)

Writing as an act of resilience. The archive of a Calvinist Church Choir in Ceaușescu's Romania.

My paper focuses on the local 'archive' of a Hungarian Calvinist Church Choir from Ocna Sibiului in Romania. In 1973, the Securitate accused the choir of nationalism and irredentism, which at the time was a common claim against religious groups with ethnic minority backgrounds. Their case was presented in a secret police file taking the form of a photo album: an assemblage of images of confiscated choir documents (photos, minutes of meetings, financial reports, membership lists, correspondence with former members, musical scores), crime scene photographs and explanatory captions by the secret police. While the choir was allowed to operate after the incident, its documents were never returned which its members experienced as the "theft of their past".

During ethnographic fieldwork in Ocna Sibiului following the discovery of this file, I found several A4 format notebooks, each 100 to 400 pages long, containing copies of the choir's meeting minutes, secretary reports, financial registers, and memories of local history. All were written by the choir's former secretary who was one of the main targets of the secret police raid. It is not clear when the notebooks were produced: some may have predated the incident and some were definitely (re)created afterwards, but most bear some references to it. Reading them against the secret police album



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reveals the many ways these two source materials are interlinked, shows the multivocality of the documents they contain and demonstrates how the act of writing becomes an act of resilience for a group fearing erasure and oblivion.

Kapaló, James A. (University College Cork, Ireland)

Fasting, Feasting, and Famine: Making Foodways Evidential in a Secret Police Operation

This chapter, through an exploration of the significance placed on food in reports generated as part of two-decade-long secret police operation targeting a religious community in 1950s and 60s Romania, challenges the assumption that secret police files have little use beyond understanding how the regime constructed and pursued its enemies. Based on several dozen informer reports, I highlight how the foodways of a group of so-called Inochentist-Stilists were central to the representations generated by a group of informers who were also religious insiders. I argue that although food supply and production was a fundamental concern at this point in Romanian history, both for the state and for local communities, the archival record of religious foodways not only reflects the ideological or material concerns of the state but also the particular spiritual significance of food in the context of life in the religious underground. Food is at the heart of the Orthodox Christian tradition and carries powerful symbolic meaning even under ordinary circumstances. In the context of sustained surveillance, the affordances of food, its acquisition, spiritual transformation and distribution, multiplied for this group becoming the fundamental mode of religious transmission and ritual life experienced in the End Times.

Krzywosz, Maciej (University of Białystok, Poland, Institute of Sociology)

The Secret Police and the Marian Apparition: The Miracle of Zabłudów as a case study from Communist Poland

In 1965 in Zabłudów, a small town on the Catholic-Orthodox borderland in north-eastern Poland, a Marian apparition took place, called by local people as the miracle of Zabłudów. On 13 May, in a meadow near the town, the Virgin Mary appeared to the 14-years-old girl – Jadwiga Jakubowska. This event initiated a series of social facts important not only for the local community. From placing religious symbols in the apparition site, to using direct violence by the communist authorities, including firearms, to pilgrims gathered there. These and other measures were effective since they succeeded in put an end to the pilgrimage movement to the apparitions' place and ridiculed the miracle, by associating it with ignorance and backwardness. The communist secret police of that time, the Security Service, played an essentials role in actions against the miracle of Zabłudów.

In the first part of the speech, which is partly based on materials collected and produced by the secret police, brief socio-religious characteristics of Zabłudów and the course of events related to the miracle will be presented. In the second, I describe the measures taken by the secret police to the dismissing of the miracle and a social movement centred around it. These actions are analytically divided into three levels: i) collecting information; ii) creation and disseminating fake news; iii) intimidating and threatening. During the speech, scans of archival materials produced and collected by the secret police and stored at the Institute of National Remembrance in Białystok will be displayed.



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Dumitru Lisnic (Doctoral Researcher, Hidden Galleries Project)

The making and unmaking of the synagogue in Birzula: materiality, textuality and agency in early 1920's Soviet Union

This presentation explores the relationship between religious materiality and textuality in the Soviet archives as reflected in the case of the 1923 closure of a synagogue in Birzula, a town located in the northern part of Odessa oblast of Ukraine. The study is about how to read the textual to discover the agentive power of the material, and combines the approach of the Foucauldian “Soviet subjectivity” school with the methodological framework of new materialism. The seizing by local authorities of the synagogue in Birzula was part of the 1923 campaign of closing of synagogues, which represents an interesting example of the mass seizure of sacred buildings in the early Soviet period. In their confrontation over the status of the synagogues, religious actors, state and party agencies with different agendas, central and local authorities, and Soviet activists, had produced numerous documents in which the issuers spoke about themselves and about sacred buildings. The archival documents referring to the case of the synagogue of Birzula encapsulate the wider confrontation over the role and status of religion in Soviet society. In this study I identify and analyse the traces of the agentive power of the synagogue of Birzula in several archival documents. The analysis of the materiality of the Synagogue aims to demonstrate the generative power of its agency that can only be made by identifying tracks of its influence on archival documents produced by the Jewish community and by the Trade Union of Birzula.

Matějka, Ondřej (Institute of Area Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University, Prague)

“He was always on the margins””: Trajectory of a Czech pastor – secret police collaborator

September 1976: four months before the publication of the Charter 77, ten young Protestants moved to Prague to start their studies at the Comenius Protestant theological faculty. They formed an enduring peer community of friends and colleagues sharing common experience of having studied theology during the coldest moments of the “normalization” era in communist Czechoslovakia. They have continued to meet once a year ever since their graduation in the mid-1980s.

In 1984, one of them became secret collaborator of the Czechoslovak secret police (StB) which brought the first serious division into their fellowship. On the basis of oral history interviews with those 10 pastors and the StB file of the pastor-collaborator, this contribution will reconstruct the complicated “logic” of this particular process of becoming the StB collaborator in church milieu. I will first analyze different sources of this pastor’s marginalization (largely not political) which put him “always on the margins” (as one of his fellow students in the 1976 class mentioned) and *in fine* made him more vulnerable to the StB offers. Second, I will describe the process of his exclusion from the fellowship and finally his partial re-integration to it which occurred in the 2000s (again mostly without political motivations).

Mithans, Gašper (Science and Research Centre Koper, Slovenia)

Catholics and deconversion: processes of State-imposed atheization in the Socialist Republic of Slovenia (Yugoslavia)

Profound changes in the religious field were provoked in Yugoslavia by the new socialist regime after the World War II, which promoted the spread of atheism and religion as a private matter, thus stripping the Catholic Church of its dominant role in society in Slovenian and Croatian parts of the country. These



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social changes were stimulated by the phenomenon of individualization of religious beliefs, which can be observed, especially in Slovenia, since the beginning of the late 19th century, and has manifested itself also in religious conversions (Verginella, 1994). Following this trend, to address the processes of regime-propagated atheization, a concept of deconversion will be adopted to discuss individual choices to “leave religion”. A special version of socialism – i.e. Yugoslav Socialist Self-Management – since 1953 onwards resulted in less-restrained relationship with religious communities. The Second Vatican Council gave an impetus for the agreement between Yugoslavia and the Holy See to be signed in 1966 and the subsequent reinstatement of diplomatic ties with the Vatican in 1970. While the increase of de-institutionalization resulted also in higher numbers of non-believers, often nonattendance of religious ceremonies had nothing to do with the loss of religious beliefs nor was the attendance necessarily an expression of profound religiosity (cf. Schnell & Keenan, 2011). The situation for the religious communities was improved especially in late 1970s and in the early 1980s somehow surprisingly approx. 80% of children attended religious education in Slovenia (Kerševan, 1989), although certain questions were still left open. Lay believers in practice kept experiencing some level of discrimination, in particular teachers, professors, and clerks, whose profession was considered incompatible with religious beliefs.

Nicolescu, Gabriela (Postdoctoral Researcher, Disobedient Buildings Project School of Anthropology and Museum Ethnography, University of Oxford)

From secret archives to intimate flats: Exhibitions as devices

In this talk I discuss various uses of personal material objects in research settings. I draw material from the *Hidden Galleries Project* (www.hiddengalleries.eu) as well as from *Disobedient Buildings* (www.disobedientbuildings.com), the project I am currently working for. I problematise the easiness of working with things and about exhibitions as devices, understood not as end products, but as processual entities. In the end, I discuss briefly participation, during the time of the pandemic, in fieldwork/ classical settings as well as on online social media platforms (@disobedientbuildings).

Peternel Lana (Institute for Social Research in Zagreb (IDIZ) Zagreb, Croatia), **Filip Škiljan** (Institute for Migration and Ethnic Studies, Zagreb, Croatia), **Ankica Marinović** (Institute for Social Research in Zagreb, Croatia)

Abandoned Sacred Places: Case Study of the Russian and Serbian Orthodox Churches in Croatia

Through the description of destroyed and abandoned churches in Croatia, this paper aims to contribute to the discussion on the status of minority religious communities in the socialist and post-socialist context. Acts of desecration, devastation, or conversion of sacred places and churches established by minority religious communities were the acts of extreme repression toward religious rights and their cultural heritage. However, from the perspective of believers, the destruction of sacred places also raises the question of facing and coping with political repression, and maintaining the faith and religious lifeworlds in the circumstances of discrimination and violence. From the anthropological perspective, we aim to describe the meaning of "spirituality" related to "sacrilege" of the religious secret places. The authors are focused on two Orthodox churches, Serbian in the Eastern part of Croatia and Russian on the Adriatic coast. In the inquiry, the authors use a variety of archival materials from state archives, as well as from private archival collections of minority religious communities. Also, the results of the analysis are based on ethnographic field research, in-depth interviews, and visual analysis of archival



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photographs. The study provides an analysis of the complex political and historical circumstances that trigger the erosion of the multireligious heritage of marginal communities in the Croatian social landscape.

Petrás, Éva (Senior Research Fellow at the Committee of National Remembrance (NEB))

Contested narratives: Jehovah's Witnesses and State Security in Socialist Hungary (1948-1965)

Jehovah's Witnesses has been present in Hungary since the end of the nineteenth century. As in many parts of the world, they fell victim to persecution many times during their history. In Hungary, before and during World War II they were accused of spreading Communist ideas, which were changed to the accusation of supporting the United States and its global policy after 1948. Their work was considered illegal and their communities were persecuted during the whole era of state socialism. JW-leaders were sentenced in show trials and hundreds of members were interned, or imprisoned. Most of their leaders were accused of committing treason and doing spy activity, while community members were regularly imprisoned because of denying military service. Not only missionary work, but also devotional life was forbidden, observed and criminalized. However, the harsh suppression did not result in the decrease of the activity of the Jehovah's Witnesses. On the contrary: it strengthened the resilience of the community. After giving an overview of Jehovah's Witnesses history in Hungary, the lecture will focus on their history of between 1948 and 1965. The first date, 1948, signifies the ban of the activity of JWs in Hungary, which was followed by the show trials of their leaders and imprisonment of hundreds of Jehovah's Witnesses. The last show trial took place in 1965. In these show trials communist prosecutors interpreted JWs activity as anti-communist resistance while JWs took their stand by re-contextualizing persecution according their vocation.

Pimenova, Ksenia (Fonds de la Recherche Scientifique / Laboratoire d'Anthropologie des Mondes Contemporains, Université libre de Bruxelles, Belgium)

Hybrid spaces: secular and religious entanglements in museum space

Since Talal Asad's seminal work (2003), the categories of the secular and the religious have been increasingly understood as interdependent, and their boundaries as porous and historically unstable. The post-Soviet museum, I argue, offers a privileged space for an entangled anthropology of religion and secularism. Drawing on ethnographic data collected in two national museums located in Shamanist and Buddhist republics of South Siberia, Russia (Altai and Tuva), I propose to approach the museums as sites of convergence and interaction between these two categories.

Why do post-Soviet museums interact with the representatives of the confessions? How do they enhance the meaning of the sacred objects in cultural, political and spiritual paradigms? Finally, how do objects of heritage make possible the visitors' relationships with deities or spiritual entities in the museum space? I will analyze the interactions between the religious and the secular logics, using in particular the examples of recent scenographies made for Buddhist objects (in Tuva) and for archaeological human remains (in Altai). I will outline a brief typology of other possible convergences and 'elective affinities' between the secular and the religious (Luehrmann 2009), which transform some museum installations into hybrid spaces. These hybrid spaces, as I will then show, stimulate ritual relations with objects, which can coexist with more "neutral" and "detached" practices of museumgoers.



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Pintilescu, Corneliu (George Baritiu History Institute of the Romanian Academy, Cluj-Napoca)

Securitate's Hermeneutics: Assigning Meaning to Religious Activities in the Everyday Practices of the Romanian Secret Police

The archives of the secret police in the Eastern Bloc are a better source for understanding how these institutions perceived various social groups and individuals and carried out policies than for what historians consider being their main task: reconstructing historical events. Starting from this hypothesis, the presentation aims to inquire how the Romanian secret police developed practices of gathering data about persons and groups, organizing and assigning meaning to this information by focusing on several case studies of religious activities perceived by the Securitate as a threat to state security. Although all religious activities were perceived as being in contradiction with the official ideology in the Eastern Bloc, some religious groups were labelled as more dangerous to state security due to various factors such as their relationship with the state authorities, their contacts abroad or principles of inner organization. The presentation will analyze several everyday institutional practices of what could be labelled as "Securitate's Hermeneutics" of religious activities, in fact a sum of ideological patterns, rhetorical strategies and bureaucratic practices used by the Securitate in producing specific narratives about religious groups. These narratives had several aims such as: producing a specific knowledge about religious activities, legitimizing surveillance and coercion, and providing tools for various official policies which aimed at mastering the religious life of the citizens.

Ploscariu, Iemima (PhD Candidate, Dublin City University, Ireland)

Bolshevik Baptists: The Siguranța and the Chișinău Israelites of the New Testament

The annexation of Bessarabia after World War I brought to the Romanian state a complex region of minorities, languages, and entangled identities. This proved an obstacle to Romanian statesmen's pursuit of a unified and homogenous Romanian nation. One of the most intriguing groups was led by Lev Averbuch in Chișinău. Averbuch was a Jewish man from the village of Zhabokrich in the Ukraine who converted to Christianity in 1910 and moved to Chișinău in 1918. There he worked as a Baptist minister and as a representative of the London-based organization Mildmay Mission to the Jews. Averbuch led a diverse congregation called the Israelites of the New Testament, with multi-lingual services and publications, reflecting the multi-ethnic membership of his group. Their unique character, inclusive nature, rich musical events drew hundreds to their meetings. This popularity also drew the attention of the Romanian police.

The Baptists had a tenuous relationship with local and state authorities, who viewed them as dangerous sectarians. Averbuch as a "Russian" Jew and a Baptist "sectarian" was considered especially threatening. He and his group were put under surveillance by the Siguranța, the Romanian secret police at the time. Agents attended almost all gatherings and took notes on sermons, lectures, songs, guest speakers, and the demographics of those in attendance. The reports in the National Archives of the Republic of Moldova, reveal how agents mixed different tropes to construct a paradoxical identity of Averbuch and his groups as Bolshevik Baptists- religious revolutionaries seeking to dismantle the newly created Greater Romanian state. Despite this fabricated identity, the detailed reports, interrogations, and confiscated literature, gathered by Siguranța agents, all provide an unintended multi-faceted image. More than any other source, they give us a glimpse into the Siguranța's anti-Semitic, anti-sectarian policy but also into the lived reality of this non-conformist religious group.



This project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme No. 677355



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Povedák, Kinga (MTA-SZTE ‘Convivence’ Religious Pluralism Research Group)

Tracing images from the religious underground: Photo-elicitation with secret police photography

In this paper, I approach the question of how to deal with police photography in the study of religious culture? Are photographs that were intended to capture reality from a certain ideological perspective capable of opening up new layers of the past? Based on an in-depth analysis of a single secret police file, I examine whether it is possible to gain new insights about religious culture during the years of dictatorship with the help of the images and artefacts enclosed within the secret police archives. Are the photographs we find there more reliable than texts? Through a case study of a clandestine religious community, I explain the context and production of photographic images situated in a single secret police file and discuss how these images are presented and situated in the file. More importantly, I liberate or ‘repatriate’ photographs from the archive and, through the process of photo-elicitation with community members, allowing alternative narratives to emerge.

Șincan, Anca (“Gheorghe Șincai” Institute for Social Sciences and Humanities of the Romanian Academy in Tîrgu-Mureș)

Chronicling the underground: the diary of an Old Calendarist monastic brother

At the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s a series of events disturbed the life at the underground monastery Dormition of the Mother of God in Bucharest. The death of Bishop Evloghie Ota in 1979 and three years later the demolition of the monastic complex by the communist authorities, the arrest of the monks and the exhumation of the body of the bishop are chronicled in a diary of a monastic brother that was buried underground when the Secret Police arrived at the monastery.

The diary preserves a naïve image of the life in the underground community. In simple words we witness the day-to-day activities of the community, the services, the readings, the work, the links to the outside world. This presentation discusses alternative sources (diaries, memoirs, notes, interviews) to the Secret Police archives for a closer look at the underground religious life.

Vagramenko, Tatiana (University of Barcelona)

Police ethnography and performance: Religious charisma through the prism of a KGB file

In 1959, on the wave of Khrushchev anti-religious campaign, the Ukrainian authorities arranged a show civil trial of a village priest from the Cherkasy region. Father Mitrofan was known in the region and far beyond as a holy man, clairvoyant elder (*starets*), exorcist and a healer who attracted a large following of pilgrims from different parts of the Soviet Union. The civil trial was filmed and the documentary propaganda film titled *The End of Spider* was released the same year. Trial’s verbatim records and still images from the film were enclosed in a KGB penal file against Father Mitrofan.

In this paper I examine the convergence of the historical sources - the KGB file, the civil trial and the film (together with recently published memoirs of a filmmaker who gives his own account of the events he was part of). All three – the file, the film and the trial – became interrelated elements of the same historical field, with the Soviet security police as an actor that organized and orchestrated them all. The juxtaposition of these historical accounts exposes concerted strategies of the Soviet state against proliferating popular religious practices. It also sheds light onto less-known everyday life of clandestine religion, social interactions and religious mobility, moral economy and symbolic exchanges within and between religious communities.



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Vasile, Cristian (Senior Researcher “N. Iorga” Institute of History; Romanian Academy, Bucharest)

An Underground Survival in communist Romania: the Case of Greek Catholic Bishop Iuliu Hossu

The Greek Catholic Bishop Iuliu Hossu (Cardinal since 1969) was a prominent religious personality of twentieth century Romanian history. Iuliu Hossu – for decades Bishop of Cluj (later Cluj-Gherla) – was one of the main Romanian national heroes of December 1, 1918, the moment of the proclamation of the Union of Transylvania with Romanian Old Kingdom. Exactly after three decades, during the communist regime, his Church was forced to assume an underground survival, being the victim of a Stalinist-type suppression imitating the Soviet liquidation of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church from Galicia (1946). Our paper’s aim is to tackle Hossu’s biography after 1948 using preeminently the files of informative surveillance drafted by the *Securitate* (Romanian communist secret police) in his case, in order to establish the various ways in which he continued to maintain contact both with his relatives and community of believers from the underground Greek Catholic Cluj-Gherla Diocese. We will also discuss some issues regarding the coming to terms with traumatic past trying to understand why the leadership of the post-communist Greek Catholic Church showed some hesitations in embracing transitional justice matters although it was the main victim of the Romanian communist regime (the only religious denomination that was officially banned at the end of 1948).

Vorontsova, Elena (Senior Researcher in Moscow State Lomonosov University and St. Tikhon Orthodox University)

The True Orthodox Christians (TOC) of the Tambov region in KGB archives and local narratives

The Tambov region (Central Russia) has been a “hotspot” of diverse religious life in the Soviet Union, including numerous communities of the True Orthodox Christians. The paper will focus on the history of a distinct TOC community called “Molchalniki,” whose followers took vow of silence following the religious tradition of Saint Seraphim (Sarovski). Although the origin of the movement dates back to the 1950s, the Molchalniki followed what they perceived as the pre-Revolutionary religious piety. Hence, they rejected Soviet kolkhozes, electoral participation, and even official Soviet schools and money. The group venerated its saint, Blessed (God’s fool) Nastia of Viriatin, who was repressed in 1957 and incarcerated in a psychiatric hospital.

The community was repressed in the Soviet period, but the memory of Molchalniki impregnates the religious landscape of the region nowadays and many holy places are associated with the movement, including the growing pilgrimage to a chapel placed on a Blessed Nastia’s grave. Local narratives also link the Molchalniki with a popular mystical movement of Khlysts (Christ-believers).

The paper attempts to reconstruct the multi-layered image of this community comparing its official Soviet-era representation based on KGB investigation files and Soviet media with local narratives collected during author’s field research in the region.

Yeremieiev, Pavlo (V. N. Karazin Kharkiv National University)

Condemnation, apology, concealment: descriptions of religious persecutions in Russian historiography (the first half of the 19th century)



This project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme No. 677355



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The first half of the 19th century was the time when Russian historians formulated the grand narratives of their history. In that context the history of religion, in particular the history of the Russian Orthodox Church, was rather relevant.

Russian historians were constructing the Russian history and the history of the Russian Orthodox Church as its part, and in that process they had to describe the facts of state persecutions against religious minorities such as “strigolniki”, “Judaizers”, “Old Believers”, different sectarian groups. During the studying those persecutions Russian historians consciously or unconsciously actualized the religious contradictions of their own period. And furthermore, Russian historians of the 19th century understood and described the history of the religious persecutions in the 14th – 18th century in terms of their time, when ultra-violent repressions against the religious dissents were the things of the past, but nevertheless there were administrative and police pressure on the Old Believers and sectarians. Russian historians’ attitude towards the religious persecutions of the past and the present was a result of the influence of their personal religious and political views, such cultural movements as Enlightenment and Romanticism, ideas of German classical philosophy, discussion about the correlation between Christian morality and political life was held during that period.

As a result, Russian historians’ descriptions of the religious persecutions oscillated between moralizing and attempts to judge the past “according to customs and manners of the previous epochs” (N. Karamzin). In the latter case historians of the 19th century often excused the religious persecution of the 16th and 17th century by Orientalizing of the past (in the same terms they orientalized the folk). Such narrative strategy gave an opportunity to reconcile with the religious persecutions of the past and to include them into the national historical narrative.



This project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme No . 677355



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