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Feasting and Fasting: The Evidential Character of Material Religion in Secret Police Archives

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Abstract

This chapter explores the value of textual data on material religion in secret police files for contemporary research on religious transmission and ritual life during communism. Based on examples from an operation targeting Inochentist-Stilists in 1950s and 60s Romania, I highlight the significance of the numerous insider-informer surveillance reports that focus on the foodways of the community. Although not qualitatively the same as ethnographic sources, I view the reports composed by these informers, as “surrogates” of the performances that led to their creation allowing the researcher today to access material, spatial and somatic aspects of religion that are often overlooked in readings of secret police files. Through the presentation of a series of brief examples, I illustrate how alternative readings emerge when data on religion is taken seriously and not discounted simply as an reflection of the ideological vision of the regime. The data we find presented in the files invites us to question its evidential status, both at the time, as evidence of criminal or anti-state activity, and for the scholar of religion as evidence of religious practice, meaning and agency. I argue, that when viewed through a material lens and situated within a broader appreciation religious lifeworld and cultural context, the texts and images in the archives reveal aspects of the material aspects of the transmission of religion in the underground that remain relatively under-explored and little analysed.

Introduction

During the decades of communism, both the regimes within the region and scholars of religion (overwhelmingly outside the region) were engaged with the same question; how socialist modernity was impacting on religion and whether the expected demise of religion would prove fatal (see Rogers 2005, 6). Whether wished for or lamented, the assumption was that religion was in terminal decline in the Soviet Union and its satellite states, just as it was understood to be in much of the West. But as Sonja Luehrmann (2015, 12) notes, since that time “...the basic assumptions that ground the debate have shifted” and in the post-communist context we can bring new questions to research on religion under communism, and to our explorations of the documents bequeathed to us by communist regimes. In recent years, interest in the role that the memory of communism plays in society and amongst religious groups has begun to eclipse the

historical study of religion under communism. Nevertheless, the persistence of religion under state sponsored secularization remains an important question for scholars of religions not least because, as Chris Hann observes, if we want to find satisfactory answers to our questions regarding the contemporary post-communist context our “inquiries cannot proceed without careful reassessment of the transmission of religious beliefs and practices in the socialist era...” (Hann 2010, 8).

The anthropological study of religion, as Rogers reminds us, “was at best difficult and at worst impossible in the socialist period” (2005, 5). Partly as a consequence of the absence of ethnographic research conducted at the time, archival research in the once secret files of the communist state, has become pivotal for scholars wishing to explore religious processes and identities during communism. In this chapter, I argue that an exploration of the material aspects of religion as represented in the archives of the secret police can offer valuable insights into the transmission of religion in communist societies. When viewed through a material lens and situated within the broader religious context and lifeworld, the texts and images in the archives reveal aspects of the reality of life in the underground that remain relatively under-explored and little analysed. Although not qualitatively the same as ethnographic sources, the reports and images compiled and composed by agents and informers, can be viewed as “surrogates” of the performances that led to their creation (Zeitlyn 2012, 469, citing Taylor 2003) in a similar way that ethnographic fieldnotes might, allowing the researcher today to access material, spatial and somatic aspects of religion that were captured by those I term here ‘insider-informers’. Exploring material religion in the secret police files in this way, however, also invites us to reflect on the interpretational problems associated with its dual evidential status, which at the time constituted evidence of criminal or anti-state activity while today, for the scholar of religion, is transposed as evidence of religious meaning and agency. The unintended “evidential multiplicity” of material religion in the secret police archives encourages the scholar of religion to apply a “strategic methodological pluralism” (Vásquez 2017, 236, 238) that can add new layers to our understanding of the complexity, diversity and paradoxes of clandestine religion and its transmission during communism.

As Hesz (chapter 10, this volume) observes, by shifting our viewpoint and by applying alternative methodological apparatus, namely those of the scholar of religions rather than of the historian of communism or the secret police, the archives can offer up data that is both intriguing and illuminating. Over the past decade, scholarship on religions, influenced by

broader trends in the social sciences and humanities, is increasingly exploring the significance of materiality. The so-called “material turn” has inspired renewed attention towards practices, spaces, bodies, landscapes, sensory and lived experiences and their intersection with non-human agencies (see Hazard 2013; Bräunlein 2016; Vásquez 2011, 2017). Secret police archives contain a wealth of sources that refer to, represent, reproduce and capture in images aspects of material dimension of religious lives (see Kapaló 2019; Kapaló and Vagramenko 2020). These archival sources come in many forms; written accounts such as informers and interrogation reports, lists and photographs of confiscated items; publications and devotional materials; photographs of communities and their spaces, both those confiscated from communities as well as images taken by the secret police during operations (see Povedák, this volume, chapter 11). Despite the significant epistemological and ethical challenges associated with the use of sources compiled and composed as part of anti-religious operations, they constitute one of the few sets of historical data available for researchers seeking to understand lived religion during communism.

In this chapter, I explore one aspect of the material religious practices of a community in 1950s and 60s Romania as reflected in the secret police record. As Graham Harvey argues food, and the abstention from food, is central to religion and religious acts (Harvey 2014, 32) and this is certainly true with regards to the Eastern Orthodox tradition. Practices associated with food, or foodways, are extremely important in Orthodox Christianity for individual spiritual, communal and economic life. There are multiple occasions when special foods are prepared and consumed, including amongst others, funerals and two distinct forms of the periodic commemoration of the dead, *parastas* and *pomana* (see Geană 2005); there are complex and diverse fasting rules and traditions that many devout Orthodox follow, including obligatory periodic fasts associated with religious festivals and daily fasts performed each week; and there are also important distribution networks, charitable activities and food exchange practices, including *milostenie*, or the giving of charitable gifts to monasteries. Not least amongst the ways in which food is engaged is the act of communion with the divine through the Holy Mystery of the Eucharist, or *împărtășenie* in Romanian, which also requires the special acquisition, preparation, consecration and consumption of foodstuffs.

During communism, most Orthodox Romanians openly continued these practices and their associated foodways to some degree or another. For groups observing the Old Calendar (see below), however, certain of these ritual meals, as well as the fasts and feasts needed to be

performed secretly in order to avoid the attention of the authorities. The reports discussed in this chapter, can be read as evidence of the importance of the distribution and consumption of special foodstuffs by this community in the context of their underground religious life as well as of the significance that the secret police on food as material and economic value.

The descriptions of this community's foodways, like all other secret police materials, were ideologically shaped by the Marxist-materialist dogmas of the regime, discursively 'confining' their religious practices within a frame defined by the regime. The attention that was placed on the food transacted by the community, was in part a reflection of the importance that the regime placed on discovering and eliminating the material and economic means by which dissenting communities sustained themselves. From the early 1950s, the beginning of the period of surveillance of the so-called Inochentist-Stilist network, into the 1960s, there were a host of issues that impacted on food consumption and food security for the population, including drought, grain requisitioning, collectivization and war reparations. All of these factors were referred to in the informer reports resulting from the surveillance operation against the Inochentist-Stilist group targeted in the secret police operative files. These reports, however, far from simply reporting accusations of ant-communist attitudes, parasitism or illegal hoarding of food, when read with close attention to material religious practices, instead convincingly reveal the spiritual centrality of food for this religious community and the agency of food itself in shaping the complex relations inside the group.

Making material religion "evidential" (Morgan 2017, 14) for the study of religions in the secret police archives in this way, as in all other social and historical settings, requires foregrounding "images, emotions, sensations, spaces, food, dress or the material practices of putting the body to work" (Morgan 2017, 14). In other words, in order for the texts and images in the archives to speak fully of the complexity of lived realities, we need to take special care, and intentional methodological steps, not to disembodify the characters, practices and past lives we encounter in the archives. The material approach to religion, however, implies more than simply taking physical things seriously (Plate 2015, 4) or taking them as evidence of something that cannot be seen, such as belief or thoughts (see Keane 2008). In my reading of secret police files, I afford the material a status *as* primary religious phenomena, upon which beliefs may be predicated, an approach that contrasts with long-held interpretational tendencies in the study of religions (see Plate 2015).

In the case I present below, the food swallowed by the archival record speaks of the broader religious, cultural and socio-economic lifeworld of a community in 1950s and 1960s Romania. As Luehrmann, one of the few scholars to have written specifically about the problem of religion in communist-era archives asserts, documents can, and do, contain “valid insights that do more than simply perpetuate an existing regime of truth” (2015, 22). The secret police archives, as this chapter seeks to illustrate, sometimes ingested objects, materials and cultural practices that could not be fully digested into the regime of truth of the secret police or the communist state. The references to the religious foodways of this community, presented as evidence by the secret police of something secretive and hidden that needed to be exposed, also illustrate common practices that in normal circumstances would be in plain view. The fact that the food was doing things with and for the community other than economically, escaped the attention of, or was of no interest to, the secret police. Interpreted by the scholar of religions, however, the food appears as the very substance and agentive force of the community.

Material Religion and Secret Police Archives

Material approaches to social phenomenon, which have in large part grown out of the disciplines of archaeology and anthropology, represent an implicit critique of approaches that “reduce the material world to the effects of discourses, expressions of signs or symbols, ideas or ideologies” and, as Bräunlein outlines, they reflect the ongoing dissatisfaction with the constructivist approaches born out of the Derridean and Foucauldian traditions (2016, 366); traditions which had earlier laid the groundwork for the archival turn in the social sciences and humanities, including poststructuralist and postcolonial approaches to the archive. The transformational influence of the archival turn, which emphasized the archive as an expression and instrument of societal control and transformation (see Zeitlyn 2012), roughly coincided with the opening of the archives of the communist regimes of Eastern Europe and has proved pivotal for contemporary analyses of knowledge production and technologies of the self during communism, an approach perhaps exemplified by the “Soviet subjectivity” school (Fitzpatrick 2005, 8). Of the many shades of constructivism (see Vásquez 2011, 123-24), researchers working on communist archives have tended to emphasize linguistic regimes of truth, discourses, and social categories as the principal means by which to make sense of historical reality and reconstruct identities during communism.

When approaching religion in communist archives, the tendency of discursive approaches to theoretically restrict access to real bodies and material lives has been compounded by the

tendency amongst scholars of religions to emphasise ideas, beliefs (largely drawn from texts) and cognitive processes over religion as lived (Harvey 2014, 33). The combination of these two factors has contributed to a reluctance amongst scholars of religions to see the secret police archives as a valuable or reliable sources of data for research on religion *per se*. Indeed, the ubiquitous misrepresentations of motivations, false interpretations of beliefs and distorted presentations of religious practices discussed in several chapters in this volume (see in particular chapters by Vagramenko, Pintilescu and Petrás), suggest that data on religions in the secret police archives may only have utility for studies focussing on the discursive processes deployed as a means social control or transformation. Despite both Foucault and Derrida having explicitly recognised the possibility for the archive to disrupt or subvert the hegemonic system that created it (see Zeitlyn 2012, 463), appreciation of this potential has been overshadowed by the implied impossibility of escaping the “evidential purpose” or intention of the secret police archive and the discredited regime that lay behind it.

In relation to research on other historical settings, a number of approaches have been developed with the aim of uncovering voices and lives lost or silenced by bureaucratic and colonial archives (see Zeitlyn 2012); Comaroff and Comaroff have advocated reading the archive “against the grain” (1991) by using traces external to the archive to re-interpret archival documents and recover lost voices, whilst Stoler’s much cited approach to read “Along the Archival Grain” (2009) in order to grasp the “biases and preoccupations of the creators of archived documents” (Zeitlyn 2012, 464) can also retrieve seemingly lost subjugated or subaltern voices. In a similar vein, Sonja Luehrmann describes her attempts to “pierce through” the layers of “rhetoric and standard formulae” in Soviet documents in the hope of being able to “filter out facts” about religious life (2015, 3), explicitly rejecting the idea that communist archives speak “only of the internal workings of Soviet state bureaucracies.” These approaches, which recognise that “a record may be created for one purpose but used for other ends” (Zeitlyn 2012, 463), accepts that the archive can become the means by which “traces” that were never intended to form conscious historical remains (see Assmann 2008, 98) can bear witness in the future.

Speaking more broadly about cultural memory and acts of remembering and forgetting, Assmann (2008) makes some pertinent points with regards to the nature and content of political archives. Highlighting the means by which “acts of forgetting” are enacted, which although often “violently destructive when directed at an alien culture or a persecuted minority” are not

always a “successful instrument for destroying material and mental cultural products” (Assmann 2008, 98), we are reminded that violent attempts to subjugate knowledges, cultures and identities during communism largely proved unsuccessful (the persistence and re-emergence of numerous targeted religious communities attests to this). In the case of communist regimes attempts to destroy or obliterate religion, which was pursued through very diverse means as the chapters in this volume attest, the archives of the secret police have paradoxically become the place where “traces” of persecuted groups have remained. As already mentioned, the folders in the archives contain between their covers a rich collection of confiscated items such as photographs, religious art, pamphlets, diaries, poetry and hymns. These materials sit alongside texts, photographic images, graphs, maps and tables created by the secret police in the course of their investigations. Secret police archives, therefore, represent an important resource not only for understanding both how the totalitarian state constructed an image of religious others in order to incriminate and control them, but also the unintended material traces and self-representations that have the power to destabilise both the power of the archive and the dominant historical narratives that have emerged from it (see Edwards 2001, 4).

As discussed above, actual operations against Churches and religious communities, due to the ideological imperative and operational needs of the secret police, placed enormous emphasis on the material existence and financial means of targeted communities. In many cases, it was easier to charge members of religious communities with economic rather than political crimes and for this reason evidence of the material bases of religious lives often appear in the archives very prominently (see Povedák, chapter 11, this volume). This has proved serendipitous for contemporary scholars of religions, for the secret police archives often place a rather pronounced emphasis on religion as lived - that could be captured, catalogued, confiscated or destroyed - rather than religion as believed; the lens of the secret police was oddly in tune with the way that many contemporary scholars of religion approach their object of study.

In Assmann’s terms, the revolutionary break with the communist past that happened from 1989 to 1991, changed or shifted the identity of the secret police archives from being active *political archives* to *historical archives* (Assmann 2008, 103). This distinction, however, when applied to the archives of the former secret police in Eastern Europe, obscures their political uses in the present. They do not “store information which is no longer of immediate use” (2008, 103) as Assmann supposes, but are the active concern of political interests and memory projects in

the present. The constructivist approaches that have been applied by contemporary historians and political scientists to communist archives, have drawn our attention towards enduring power of the archives to shape contemporary political, cultural and religious realities and structure historical memory (see Apor et al. 2017; Blaive 2019; Stan 2013) more effectively than they have towards the new historical questions that Hann, Luehrmann and others have highlighted relating to the transmission and lived experience of religion during communism.

This discrepancy in terms of the uses of communist archives can be accredited to the failure of historians to view the archive as a participant in the active process of religious transmission. Luehrmann comes close to this perspective when she points towards the documents in the archives as “crucial nodes in nets of relations” that can alert us to realities other than the textual truths of the secret police. The materiality of the archives in her words present “traces of the social relationships from which they emerged” (Luehrmann 2015, 3) and in light of this she encourages us to pay attention to how, where and when human actors met, occupied the same spaces, interacted, socialised and exchanged words and goods, in other words to their temporal, spatial and somatic presence. Numerous *real* people contributed to the assembled texts, images and folders in the archives from case officers, undercover agents, informers, administrators and commanding officers as well as the targets themselves, both directly through their written statements, their signatures and finger prints, and materials confiscated from them, and indirectly, and unknowingly, through references to what they said, surveillance photographs taken of them and descriptions of their activities. Each of these traces of course potentially could be fabricated or distorted, but through their totality, the sheer volume, their multi-vocality and complexity (Verdery 2014, 42), and materiality, they carry the potential to reveal much more than they distort if approached as records of performed, embodied action. When religion, which in most circumstances has an inherently performative character, constitutes the object of study and/or surveillance, this complex archival assemblage of human agencies is perhaps even more apparent than in other social or cultural spheres.

Related to these ideas of the performative character of religion and processual nature of the archival record, is the important observation discussed by Hesz (Chapter 10, this volume), that the work of the secret police informer, from whom a large proportion (perhaps even the majority) of archival data was derived in Romania, can be compared to that of the ethnographer. As Katherine Verdery (2014, 7), who was the object of secret police surveillance operations whilst conducting ethnographic work in Romania in the 1970s and 1980s, observed in relation

to her own police file, the close examinations and interpretations of everyday behaviour and use of similar methods and techniques by the secret police, warrants their comparison with the *bona fide* ethnographer. In light of this comparison, if we views cultural (and religious) memory as a process and inherently performative in nature, as Diana Taylor (2003) argues, and ethnographic fieldwork as the means to capture the active processes of cultural transmission (see Zeitlyn 2012, 469), the performances recorded by the informer in surveillance reports, like those captured by the ethnographer, can similarly be seen as “surrogates of the events that they capture” and as “archives of the performance of research” (Zeitlyn 2012, 469).

Informers were extremely diverse, ranging from the casual and reluctant to the well qualified and diligent (see Albu 2008). Some made excellent ethnographers in the sense that they were able to provide detailed reports that contained not only the words of their targets but subtle observations about their demeanour and the contexts and environments within which the events they captured took place. In regard to the surveillance of religious communities, others who were recruited from within the communities and shared the religious culture of those on whom they were reporting, as in the case discussed below, were able to go even further. In this sense they were not just observers, they were also insiders to the community and participants in the rituals and life of the community they later describe in reports. In anthropological terms they could be considered as participant-observers, with their proximity and participation in the performance of religion granting them a particular authority. I am not arguing here that insider-informer reports are qualitatively the same as ethnographic sources, but certain aspects of what they report and how they report, especially where material, spatial and somatic aspects of religion are described or evoked in their texts, offer us unintended archival “traces” of religious material worlds and agencies.

Inochentist-Stilists in Communist Romania

My case study relates to a group described by the Securitate in its case files as “*sectă ilegală inochentișt-stilișta*”, or the illegal Inochentist-Stilist sect. Inochentism originated in the western Russian provinces of Podolia, Kherson and Bessarabia in the final decade of the Tsarist empire and following Bessarabia’s incorporation into Greater Romania after the First World War, became a significant issue for the Romanian authorities (see Kapaló 2019, 105-138). The movement started to make significant inroads in other parts of Romania, beyond Bessarabia, by the early 1930s due largely to the leadership of Ioan Zlotea, a monk and spiritual father who

continued to preach the message of the movement's founder, Inochentie of Balta. Zlotea, like other followers of Inochentie of Balta, rejected the religious calendar reform introduced by the Romanian Orthodox Church in 1924¹ and continued to practice according the Old Calendar in secret (see Kapaló 2019, 183). The term Stilist is derived from the term 'Old Style' and was used by the Romanian authorities to refer to communities, mostly located in Moldavia and Bessarabia, that rejected the Orthodox Church's change of calendar. Following Romania's adoption of the Revised Julian Calendar, the Inochentists and the so-called Stilists (Old Calendarist Orthodox Church) were subject to violent repression at the hands of the Romanian authorities for rejecting this key symbolic component of the national project (see Kapaló 2019, 126-29). Following the communist takeover of Romania in 1945-46, Stilism had an ambiguous legal status, it was not recognised as a legal sect by the Ministry of Religions but neither was it listed alongside the Jehovah's Witnesses amongst the banned sects. As a consequence, secret police operations focussed on "unmasking enemy elements who carry out their activity under the cover of the Stilist religion" (see Chivu-Duță 2007, 126-7).

Following the loss Bessarabia and Transnistria to the Soviet Union at the end of the Second World War, Romania became a refuge for many Bessarabians that had been associated with or had worked for the Romanian regime before and during the war. A part of these refugees from Soviet-occupied Bessarabia constituted priests, monks and nuns of the Romanian Orthodox Church, some of whom were native to those regions whilst others had been posted there from the rest of Romania (Petcu 2009, 147-48). Amongst these Romanian Orthodox refugees was a group of monks and nuns who had belonged to Inochentist networks in Bessarabia and had practiced their faith, counter to Romanian law, according to the Old Calendar. This group of refugees and returnees, devotees of Ioan Zlotea, formed the core of what the Romanian secret police came to refer to as the Inochentist-Stilist sect.

At the head of this community was C.A., a monk of the Romanian Orthodox Church who had served in Bessarabia in the 1940s and had been a spiritual child of Ioan Zlotea.² He first came to the attention of the Securitate in 1951 when an unsuccessful attempt was made to recruit him as an informer. His refusal was taken as proof that he was a religious "fanatic" (ACNSAS I 237454, vol.1, 11). From this point forward he was placed under surveillance, which lasted for almost 20 years. For part of this time he served as a priest and abbot of two Orthodox monasteries. In the 1950s, he was suspected of secretly encouraging the use of the Old Calendar when he was dispatched to a village to combat the lingering "Stilism" practiced there

(ACNSAS I 237454, vol. 3, 194). In 1959, after being forced to leave his monastery during the period of mass closures of Orthodox monasteries, he first set up home with another ex-monk, P. G., who later informed on C.A. and his community. Shortly after, between 1960 and 1962, C.A. built a house together with I.M., another ex-monk from Bessarabia who was also revered as a saint by the community.

I.M., whom C.A. had been “supporting with money and food” since their arrival in Romania from Bessarabia (ACNSAS I 237454, vol. 3, 197), was considered a visionary and his prophecies were communicated by letter to members of the community in different parts of the country. The *turmă*, or flock, established by C.A. was widely dispersed in at least three cities and several towns and villages in eastern and southern Romania, and was described by the Securitate as being made up of individuals who were “culturally backward.” They venerated their spiritual fathers (and mothers) variously as incarnations of the prophets Elijah, Enoch, Elisha, and John the Evangelist (B. E.) and referred to C.A. as “tăticu” and I.M. as “mămica”, expressions which one of the community described during an interrogation as reflecting the “familial closeness of the spiritual relationship” that existed between the followers and their priests and charismatic leaders (ACNASAS D010110, 54). The community was observed to be supplying their spiritual fathers materially with all they needed and they were reported to be living a “wealthy and carefree life” without the need to work (ACNSAS I237454, vol.1, 11-12). Numerous reports include reference to the support offered by individuals to the two monks as *milostenie*, a form of charitable donation usually made to a monastery, whilst also interpreting the gifts of food, money and cloths as material exploitation of vulnerable people.

On 29th July 1967 C.A. was given a 6 month correctional prison sentence under article 256, of Penal Code 2. for having continued to practice as a priest after his exclusion from his monastery in 1959 (I237454, vol. 1, 35). The sentence was later reduced to 3 months on appeal on grounds of his age and that the case was only able to produce firm evidence of one serious infraction, a memorial feast to commemorate C.A.s parents at which he was said to have performed many prayers and blessings (I237454, vol. 1, 38). The archival record of the surveillance of C.A. and his followers between 1951 and 1975 stretches to several thousand pages of informers reports, interrogations, court proceedings and communications. The many observations, accusations and pieces of evidence that were presented in the secret police case files placed a great deal of focus on the material practices of the group especially on the collection of money and foodstuffs from followers.

This long running surveillance operation relied on a group of longstanding informers, some of whom were members of the flock, close family members or monks who had served in monasteries with the two leaders. Informer D.G. actively reported on the group between 1955 and 1975, and M.O. lived with C.A. for a period of several months. These were not occasional spies but were deeply embedded in the community and trusted individuals with an intimate understanding of the groups practices. The closeness of the informers to their targets and the nature of their reports in this case serve as a reminder not exaggerate the “social distance” of officers, agents and informers from those they described (Luehrmann 2015, 22).

Fasting, Feasting and the Distribution of Foods

Inochentists observe all of the regular fasts of the Orthodox Christian tradition according to the Julian or Old Calendar, of which there are four main fasting periods; Great Lent, the Nativity Fast, the Apostles Fast and Dormition Fast, as well as the individual fasting days of Wednesdays and Fridays (days associated with mourning Jesus’ betrayal and his crucifixion respectively) observed in most weeks of the year. In addition, Orthodox communicants are required abstain from all food or liquid from 12 midnight prior to receiving the Eucharist and on the eve of important feasts such as Christmas (Conomos 2011, 242). Inochentie of Balta, the founder of the Inochentist movement, was a monk in the Russian Orthodox Church and in addition to the standard fasts required of lay people he introduced monastic fasting rules for his whole community. These rules required an additional weekday fast on Mondays, the day of the week dedicated to the commemoration of the angels. Associated with both penance and supplication, fasting in the Orthodox tradition is a means to bring one’s passions and desires under control by turning them towards salvation and heaven and not only requires abstention from certain foods but also from marital relations. As such, the approach to fasting adhered to by Inochentists included total abstention from meat, hard liquor and garlic as well as the total rejection of sexual relations, even within marriage (see Kapaló 2019, 88-91). This rigorous approach to fasting set followers of Inochentie apart from their Orthodox neighbours and became an important boundary marker (see Kapaló 2019, 242-43, 259). Fasting for the community discussed in this chapter, although undertaken on a personal level, was also a corporate practice that united the community in a common act of worship, devotion and supplication.

According to the wealth of insider-informer reports, the dispersed community's main reason for gathering was attendance at commemorative feasts and saints' day celebrations, including the Feast of Saint Elijah and the commemoration of the death of Ioan Zlotea, when food would be served and shared amongst the community. On these occasions they would take communion and receive blessings from *tăticu* and *mămica*. Maintaining a supply of the appropriate foodstuffs for these gatherings that conformed with their rigorous dietary restrictions required special logistical arrangements that are recounted frequently in the secret police record. One indication of this comes from an interrogation with one of C.A.'s female followers, who confessed in February 1965 to keeping records of monies collected and foods purchased and distributed.

Also, a number of times I gathered money, about 150 lei from the "girls", with which I brought food and various objects and I sent them to help the monastery... Also, from the collected money I bought foodstuffs which I sent to C.A. and to M.I. These gifts were taken by me personally to city B. when I also gave them money that had been collected. The largest amount was 200 lei (I509215, vol. 2, 7).

Significant for the community's supply of appropriate foodstuffs, one of the members of the community placed under surveillance 10 years earlier, M.Z., was a fisherman by trade, as the informer D.G. reports:

He also said that in their village the "flock" consists of 7 families and they are all party members. He said that he was a fisherman and that before when he used to catch fish he sold it, and no one asked him, and now since the country is headed by the antichrist, he is only entitled to 5 kg. a week, he said that some fishermen had gone to prison over just 2 kg of fish but that he had got away with over 100 kg of fish by saying prayers [calling on] God to have mercy on me God and the Mother of God, immaculate virgin, and [for] *tăticu* to take care of me and nothing happened to me (I 237454, vol. 3, 276-77).

The maintenance of a steady supply of fish was vital for the community as they ate no other kind of meat. Fish was served at all gatherings outside of required fasting days or periods. The informer went on to give other examples where the fisherman M.Z. was seemingly miraculously saved from the clutches of the *miliția* whilst discovered transporting the valuable fish to C.A.

And he said there was another time when he performed a miracle, he was at the station in town T., he wanted to leave on the ferry and he had two baskets of carp weighing about 5-6 kg each and a police officer came and asked him what he had in his baskets, he replied that he had fish, and the officer took the fish out of the basket and he also had eggs and he broke them, and he was asked where he was taking the fish? He replied that he has a child at school in city C. and he is taking him food, and then he asked for his documents and the officer saw that he is a fisherman, and he also saw his party membership card, he then gave him his documents and told him to hurry because the ferry is leaving. M.Z. put the fish back in the basket and asked the officer to pay for the broken eggs as a joke, after which he picked up the baskets and boarded the ferry... (I 237454, vol. 3, 277).

The significance of these reports from the point of view of economic surveillance is obvious, but the miraculous component of these narratives included by D.G. (something he was particularly diligent in recording as further examples will illustrate), suggest that the supply chain had spiritual significance for the community and that it involved well calculated risks that were mitigated against through party membership and acts of faith in C.A. and M.I. On another occasion, M.Z., when asked directly why he travelled so far and often to visit C.A.

M. answered why do you ask? Do you not know that we brothers must keep in touch with *tăticu* if not several times then at least once a month so that we can take communion and be anointed with myrrh for the cleansing of our soul and body and so that we can bring *milostenie* that is of great use and we tell *tăticu* our troubles and joys so that he can bless us often for the tasks we have to do (I 237454, vol. 3, 232).

These accounts point towards both the spiritual and the reciprocal nature of the transactions engaged in by C.A.s followers. That these practices also structured relations with those outside the group is clear from comments in D.G.'s earlier report (above), where we also learn that members of the community were requested or required to become party members as a way of outwitting the 'antichrist'. This practice was useful for avoiding the consequences of encounters with the militia, as in the story recounted above shows, but access to party members also had another function within the group as this report by informer V.I. illustrates:

And I also tell that you “Tăticul” has in his flock different types of people - doctors, officers, teachers. Brother, he has a lot of officers’ and party members’ wives whose husbands know nothing about “Tăticul” but you should know brother John that they are blessed by “Tăticul” and I will tell you how brother: “Tăticul” and “Mămica” together with the nuns they do the mass and consecrate the bread of the host and they give it to the sisters whose husbands don’t know anything just how I am telling you. And those sisters, they asked “Tăticul” to put the blessed *anafură* [host] in the food that they eat and also the holy water that has also been prepared by “Tăticul” they put it in their drinks and they drink it and they eat it and they are blessed and that is how they do it brother (D010110, 13).

This account of the secret use of consecrated bread and holy water from 1966, which was reported by the case officer in his summary analysis reports upwards to his superiors (ACNSAS I237454, vol.1, 306), was part of a broader pattern of using the distribution of blessed foods and the surplus generated by the community to affect spiritual influence over others in society. The food produced by the community was used to infiltrate groups they wished to spiritually influence in order to counter any potential actions against them by the enemy. That this was not just a one-off incident is demonstrated by another report dated six years later. N.T. was a worker in the telegraph office who was also under surveillance by a different informer, V.V., six years later in 1972.

Lately, he brings various goods such as food to the telegraph service, inviting employees to take part in the meal, and at the moment when everyone begins to help themselves to something, he begins to talk about the Lord Jesus Christ, who as he said, gives him the strength to satisfy and to support his relatives. In this way he has attracted the majority of the workers at the telegraph service, making them appreciative of N. T. He brought up in conversation that he has a uncle by the name of C.A., with whom by the way he also lives, and in whom he has great faith, considering him a saint being the only honest man with a clear conscience before God, but he is old and has suffered greatly due to Satan” (I 238346, vol. 3, 55).

These reports, and many others like them, show that food for this community represented both a commitment to and contribution towards the community as well as a means of exercising

spiritual influence on the world outside. Contrary to the assumptions made by officers in their summary reports that food was being hoarded or used for profit, informers offered a vivid portrayal of the way that foodstuffs were redistributed both to members of the flock and to others as another informer's report from D.G. from September 1956 suggests:

On the morning of August 28, I went with the aforementioned to the priest A. [C.A.], when I went to E's home and was ready to leave, N.N. arrived and was preparing to come to me, he had *cozonac* [a type of sweet cake] and *must* [unfermented grape or fruit juice] blessed by *tăticu* and sent specially for the brothers who fasted the fast of St. Mary, according to the old [style], which was on that day of the 28th (I 237454, vol. 3, 268) – 5th Sept 1956.

From the body of insider-informer reports accumulated over a twenty-year period, and when considered within the known cultural Orthodox religious frame, we gain a clear insight into the meaning and purpose of the heavy traffic in various foodstuffs that the group engaged in. The donation of foodstuffs in fact served to configure, spiritually sustain and defend the group, an observation that the longstanding informer D.G. was able to articulate to the officer in charge of the case as early as 1955 when he was explaining how one becomes a member of the flock:

The person in question also said that any citizen who wants to enter the flock cannot be chosen and placed in the book of life until the priest C.A. marks him with the seal of the Holy Spirit, and in order to be marked with the seal you need to take oil, wine, flour, and other foods to the priest, and after conducting the liturgy the priest gives alms to those that are not brothers in the flock (I238346, vol. 1, 142).

Eschatology and Food Security

The surveillance of the community spanned a period in Romanian history when food security, diet and food production went through significant and dramatic changes. These included the prolonged effects of the drought of 1946-7; the quota system of food collection from the countryside to feed the growing urban population and to fulfil war reparations to the Soviet Union - partly paid in grain; the imposition of general taxes on agricultural produce, and the more than a decade long process of collectivization of agriculture (Kligman and Verdery 2011, 108-13, see also Iordachi and Dobrinicu 2009). In addition, in the 1960s the rural population of Romania switched from a diet largely based on *mămăligă*, or corn mash, to bread (Scrob 2015); a change that also had a negative impact on food supply in many towns and villages. The

following report, one of several similar examples, alludes to at least three of these factors in the space of a very few lines:

[...] in the village of B., especially because of bad organization, the only business is a restaurant, if you don't go home for food you go hungry and [he said] that he was in [the town of] B. I. and did not find bread and only ate 6 pretzels all day and that bread is given only [in exchange for] a coupon. He also said that 150 wheat wagons from [the station of] B. D. were on their way to the GDR and that he had seen the documents [...]. Then *tăticu* said that it is true that today's leaders make fun of the people because the peasants work all summer in the fields to grow wheat and when he takes it to deliver his quota it is worth nothing and he has no right to buy bread from the city but must go with *mămăligă* in his bag" (I 237454, vol. 3, 253).

Based on several hundred informer reports in the case files relating to C.A.'s community, it is clear that rumours intensified during and after the 1956 Hungarian Revolution when concerns about food security combined with speculation about the impending conflict between the West and the Soviet Union gave the reports an increasingly apocalyptic character. Apocalyptic expectation had been central to the Inochentist worldview since Inochentie of Balta first began preaching around 1908 (see Kapaló 2019, 74-106). His followers, drawing on popular belief about the End of Days, associated Inochentie with the prophet Elijah, who together with the prophet Enoch and John the Baptist would walk the earth during the antichrist's reign, prophesying to the faithful and quenching the thirst and relieving the hunger of those they meet. For this community, C.A. had taken on the role of Elijah in the drama of the End Days and was nourishing his followers in their time of spiritual and actual need.³

He told me that *tăticu* had told him [...] now a part of the world is ruled by the antichrist and that only the devil performs miracles with his crafts in order to deceive mankind and even the chosen ones of Saint Elijah [are fooled], and for us to be strong in our faith in *tăticu* and not believe in the hallucinations of the antichrist, for they will not last long. [...] And he also said that the time that the prophet spoke of has come, that the prophet Elijah will come down from heaven to earth with a *corn de prescură* [special bread used to prepare the host] and whoever will partake of it will be made holy, he said that we have tasted of the *corn de prescură* when *tăticu* shared the *corn de prescură* and that we are his chosen ones (I 237454, vol. 3, 225).

This extract from a much longer report that goes on to describe how quotas and grain requisitioning will leave the people with nothing to eat, brings to life the events of the Eschaton as it was being experienced by this small group of believers. According to this existential brand of popular eschatology (see Harrison 1979, 228-29), C.A.'s act of feeding his flock with the bread of the host expressed in this final example goes beyond simply a means to sustain and constitute the community, it represents nothing less than their route to ultimate salvation.

Conclusion

The economic and political context within which the surveillance operation against the Inochentist-Stilists took place goes some way to explaining why the secret police files contain so many informers reports and so much detail focusing on foodways. For this community, maintaining Orthodox ritual life according to the Old Calendar, which under ordinary circumstances would have posed few problems, became a defining feature of underground life. The food produced, blessed and distributed by individuals in the community was central to the complex network of interactions between the widely dispersed members. As the examples from reports illustrate, individuals risked arrest and imprisonment travelling around the country to supply their spiritual leaders and brothers and sisters in faith with the necessary dietary and spiritual nourishment. Communal feasting and fasting represented a pivotal aspect of the way that the community was constituted and sustained, especially in their struggle against the regime, which represented for them the antichrist. The reciprocal relations around foodstuffs, involving religious obligations and social risks, became constitutive of the groups social relations in a way distinctive to underground life; food, one of the key "spiritual and material resources at hand" (see Vásquez 2017, 236), solved the "existential predicaments" of life lived in the underground in the End Times.

In contrast, the regime attempted to create an image of the leaders as religious charlatans who exploited economically their gullible and incredulous followers. From the archival record, however, it is possible to discern, how and why the traffic in food needed to be constant and co-ordinated; this was not due to their desire to hoard food in times of shortage (although this may have also played a role too) but primarily due to the need for specific foods to meet their special religious dietary requirements; when C.A. was arrested in 1965 and his house searched the stock of foodstuffs found, apart from 20 kg. of fish, was very modest (1 kg of rice, 1 kg of sugar, 2 litres of oil) that was nevertheless recorded as evidence against him (I237454, vol. 1,

35). The centrality of the distribution of food was of ultimate concern to the community not because of its worldly value but because it constituted the means by which the prophet Elijah could sustain the lives and save the souls of his followers during the reign of the antichrist.

It was the aim of this chapter, to demonstrate how secret police files are valuable not only for historians of communism and state security, but also for scholars of lived religions. Secret police archives captured material religion in many varied ways, in this chapter I have focused solely on insider-informer reports as a means of accessing one aspect of this material lifeworld and how it related to religious transmission during communism. I have not advocated nor followed a particular theoretical approach to or method of interpretation of material religion, of which there are several (see Vásquez 2001, 2017; Hazard 2013; Morgan 2010, 2017), instead, through the brief examples, I have illustrated how alternative readings emerge when data on religion is taken seriously and not discounted simply as an reflection of the ideological vision of the regime. In the case presented here, insiders to the community (admittedly those who had chosen or been pressured into betraying the confidence of their brothers and sisters in faith) explained to an audience of secret police officers how, for their community, food was “imbricated with other agents in the production of religious efficacy” (see Vásquez 2017, 238). The distinctive transactions through food outlined in this collection of narratives help us appreciate the archival record as a genuine by-product, or surrogate, of performed human activity.

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Notes

¹ The Revised Julian Calendar was adopted by the Orthodox Churches of Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, Greece, Cyprus, Romania, Poland, and Bulgaria at a congress in Constantinople in May 1923. Russia along with Ukraine, Georgia, and Jerusalem rejected its introduction. Today, followers of the Old Calendar in Romania reject the term Stilist as derogatory and prefer their church to be known as the Old Calendarist Orthodox Church.

² In order to protect the privacy of the religious community discussed in this study, I have taken additional measures to disguise their identity including removing the names of locations, cities, towns and villages, and replacing them with initial letters only. All members of the community, including the insider-informers, are referred to only by their initials.

³ On apocalyptic rumour in the Soviet countryside during collectivization in the 1920s and 30s see Viola (1990), Smith (2006) and Fitzpatrick (1994). On the significance of rumour in the context of Romanian collectivization see Kligman and Verdery (2011).