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UCC
University College Cork, Ireland
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

Photographs of the religious underground: Tracing images between archives and

Communities

Kinga Povedák

Orcid.org/0000-0003-1182-5836

**Abstract**
In this chapter, which is based on an in-depth analysis of a single secret police file, 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? 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, allow alternative narratives to emerge.

## Introduction

In this chapter, which based on an in-depth analysis of a single secret police file, 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? 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, referred to by Kapaló as "hidden galleries" (2019, 88), enclosed within the secret police archives. Are photographs we find there more reliable than texts? In this chapter, I seek to demonstrate that secret police photographs are not only suitable for illustrating articles as complementary elements but have significantly more potential. 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, allow alternative narratives to emerge.

## The 'József Németh' case

In order to escape the attention of the communist state and the eyes and ears of the secret police, some religious groups in Hungary attempted to hide their activities. Clandestine religious rituals, base communities or prayer group meetings were only sporadically documented by participants at the time and there are no precise descriptions or data on how these groups operated during the communism-era. There is scarce knowledge of the practices that developed within the framework of everyday or vernacular religiosity (see Hesz, Chapter 10, this volume) in these underground religious groups. Aware of the lack of sources and the methodological

constraints this poses, I was extremely excited to find a well-documented description of a religious community accompanied by 27 photographs inserted into a secret police operational file. A part of the photographs documented a church hall in every detail: separate pictures were taken of the furnishings, such as the chairs, wall clock, donation box, pictures and electric organ (see figure 1). Several pictures also show the church members sitting in the hall and the pastor preaching (see figure 2). In addition, five images depict a baptism ceremony with the baptised dressed in white with an image that captures the actual ritual action (see figure 3). Such visual data and resources of rituals and spaces are extremely scarce from this period in Hungary. Although it was not apparent at first glance, five of the 27 photographs depicting the baptism and eight depicting persons preaching or testifying to members of the congregation were confiscated from the community, whilst the remaining 14 were taken during raids by the secret police. In the case file, these two sets of images are not separated, so on first glance the researcher does not necessarily feel the irreconcilable contrast between them, which only becomes evident on reading the written documents amongst which they sit. While the confiscated photographs portray religious events and ceremonies, or the encounter with the transcendent, the photographs taken during the raid were intended to operationalize the community's destruction.

Figure 11.1 Goes here

Figure 11.2 Goes here

Figure 11.3 Goes here

We learn from the file that the photographs were taken in a hidden house church, in the home of Pastor József Németh in Budapest. In 1968, Németh left the congregation of the Evangelical Christian Church—or the 'Pentecostals' as they are referred to in the files—which was recognized by the State Office of Church Affairs,[1] and founded an independent congregation. At first, he wanted to keep the new congregation within the framework of the Church, but his attempts failed after long negotiations. Németh and his followers did not want to accept the restrictions imposed by the Evangelical Christian Church, which allowed them to meet only once a week under the supervision of a pastor sent from the centre. Németh's newly planted congregation, now operating without permission with 50-60 members, met three times a week in the hidden house church. The secret police considered Németh's congregation dangerous, "as it seeks to hinder the further development of a good relationship between the state and the church. He is fanaticizing its members with extreme religious views. They are trying to attract and win new people" (ÁBTL 3.1.9. V-160122, 3). Alongside the threat posed by his beliefs, Németh and his associates were also suspected of illegal profiteering. The report of 23 June 1972 highlights the relations of the forbidden congregation in the FRG (Federal Republic of Germany), from which they received aid, and specifically mentions that "they also possess a high-value electric organ from the FRG" (ÁBTL 3.1.9. V-160122, 1).

The file also includes a detailed plan of action to liquidate the congregation. As a first step, the secret service officers produced an anonymous letter[2] stating that "a citizen" had found an envelope on the street along with religious booklets and an invitation to their secret meeting.

However, the alleged "citizen" did not find a church at the address provided, so he or she took the envelope to the police. To verify this, the police raided the congregation during a meeting to "catch" the members and seize evidence. The purpose of the house search was also to "assess the assets of the unlicensed congregation, to obtain data on their financial resources and related written materials" (ÁBTL 3.1.9. V-160122, 14). A staff photographer also participated in the operation. According to the descriptions, the room was 4 meters by 6.5 meters and had wood panelling on the walls, it had 55 chairs, an altar and an electric organ next to it, with 18-20 people praying, all of whom were required to show their identification papers to the officers (ÁBTL 3.1.9. V-160122, 22.). In addition to booklets and a cash register containing a list of church members, religious booklets, bills, letters, and five photographs of a church ceremony were seized during the raid (ÁBTL 3.1.9. V-160122, 19).

After the raid, the pastor József Németh and treasurer Anna Sima, and later several congregants, as well as other individuals who came into contact with the congregation, were interrogated. During these interrogations, Németh spoke in detail about his conversion, his growing immersion in faith, his conflict with the leaders of the Evangelical Christian Church and then his separation from the church and the process of setting up a new congregation. During the multiple interrogations, they were primarily asked for information about the financial functioning of the congregation, which was compared with data and numbers in the confiscated cash book. Among other things, Németh was asked about the salary he received from the congregation, the donations made in the donation box during services, and how and for what they were used. During the interrogations, it is mentioned several times that Németh had left his job in 1970 in order to dedicate all his efforts to the congregation, for which he received a monthly donation of 1,500 HUF. The interrogations of Anna Sima, the treasurer and one of the leaders of the community, focused on the circumstances of the purchase of the apartment for the purpose of setting up the secret house church, as well as the acquisition of the various furnishings.

In light of the interrogation reports the content of the 13 confiscated images becomes clear: five images show the baptism (see figure 3, 4), which pastor Németh performed once or twice a year in a small garden pool built specifically for this purpose. In the following photographs Németh preaches (see figure 2), and other leaders of the community, such as his brother Mihály, and the congregation treasurer Anna Sima share their personal testimonies. According to the file the photographs were taken by two congregants, Zoltán Sajtos and Jánosné Hetesi.

The interrogation records state that Németh and the other congregants were cooperative throughout the process, with no significant anomalies in their confessions. They acknowledged that occasional foreign (from FRG, Czechoslovakia, Romania) guests also visited them, preached or testified, named the sources of their religious material received from abroad and acknowledged that the seized religious samizdat booklets had several anti-Soviet contents. Based on the written documents and photographs, we are dealing with a simple, straightforward storyline: Németh acknowledged that he had created a "sect" that was not recognized by either the Evangelical Christian Church nor the state; He had not worked since 1970, was supported by members of the illegal congregation, set up their house church from donations from them, and wanted to organize a "gypsy mission" without permission. In view of all this, the punishment imposed on the leaders of the congregation in 1975 seems mild: four leaders received only a warning, József Németh was sentenced to 3 months imprisonment by the Court

of Budapest for the misuse of the right to freedom of association. The sentence was suspended for 3 years. Anna Sima was fined 1,500 HUF (which was about 60% of her monthly salary at the time).

The secret police had woven the images and texts into a coherent narrative. The 55 chairs, the wood panelling on the walls, the wall clock, the ornate donation box, the altar, the confiscated samizdat literature, and the expensive West German electric harmony organ were carefully documented. Although Németh was not a legally licenced pastor of the Evangelical Christian Church, the images testify that he did baptize others and preach to the community. The correspondence he received from the leadership of the Evangelical Christian Church also proved that he was aware of the illegality of his church activities. We also learn from the secret police file that Németh stole yarn from his workplace in 1957 for which he had been convicted.

**Reading photographs**

As Barthes noted, photography is not about what is no longer, but about what has been (Barthes 1981, 96). Following this realistic position and the arguments of those theoreticians of photography who see photographs as evidence of the real—the photographs that appear in Németh's secret police file verify the events recounted. The photographic images in secret police files, therefore, can be understood as "incontrovertible proof that a given thing happened" (Sontag 2005, 3) and inform us of moments of a reality that once existed. The secret house church did exist, baptisms were actually performed in the garden pool hidden from the outside, the baptised did indeed wear white robes and certain details of the secret police raid can be recalled with their help. Based on this approach these photographs represent proof that can contribute to our understanding of an unknown aspect of underground religious culture. Consequently, such images are valuable snapshots for the scholar of religion, portraying and documenting the unexplored religious life and the hidden forms of religious practice during communism, albeit from the perspective of the regime. This evidential nature, or indexicality, assured that "[p]hotography was considered one of the most important means by which the secret police could track their targets and gather convincing evidence of the activities and networks of those under surveillance" (Kapaló 2019, 89).

Taking this kind of evidential approach, however, as Kapaló points out, misses other important saliences that accrue to secret police photography "….photographs in the archive speak to us first and foremost about the institutional use of photography to exert power over communities" (Kapaló 2019, 104). In relation to secret police images such as those featured in Németh's file, there exists a gulf between the purpose of their creation at the time and the way they can be viewed and used today. Firstly, we should be cognizant of the fact that the repressive apparatus of communism did not intend to establish a database for future use by researchers following the overthrow of the dictatorship and neither was its purpose to record aspects of everyday life and culture of the period. The purpose of the archive was clearly political, that is, to assist the operational work of the repressive apparatus that sustained the dictatorship, and to record, textually, visually and aurally record, any person, community, event, circumstance that might have been dangerous to the functioning of the dictatorship. The question, then, is to what degree these images can be considered as sources, whether they can be used as authentic eyewitnesses[3]

to historical events, and when do they become entirely a ‘studio photo’ that aims to depict something contrived in order to create merely the appearance of reality.

The truth value of photography has been the focus of scepticism and debate in courtrooms as well as in other contexts, as images can be differently interpreted, and may reasonably support different and even contradictory ‘truths’. If we apply a discursive approach and place the images next to the written sources of the files, the ‘objectivity’ disappears from the underlying interpretation. The discursive interpretation of photography “concentrates most on the sites of production” (Rose 2016, 224). The works of theorists like John Tagg or Allen Sekula are “held together by an insistence on the power relations articulated through these practices and institutions. For both of them, visual images and visualities are articulations of institutional power” (Rose 2016, 224-225). Sekula contests the idea that photographs transmit immutable truths and emphasizes that “photographic meaning depends largely on context” (Sekula 2003, 445). As Edwards points out, photographs and their archiving have been produced and controlled through sites of authority, and the nature of photography itself is intrinsic to this powerful process. Through their mutability, photographs are able to create stories, distort identities and appropriate cultures (Edwards 2003, 83). In the case presented here, it is clear that the images have a constructed message, which can be considered a fabricated reading of reality that was intended to justify the actions of the authorities. In the case of secret police photography, the images are instrumentalized and become the powerful tools in support of the police narratives and their underlying truth claims.

As Edwards alerts us, however, “Photographs seldom have closed meanings. Rather, meanings are mutable and arbitrary, generated by their viewers and dependent on the context of their viewing” (Edwards 2003, 84). If we change perspective and approach the interrogation record texts from the dossier as ‘informant’s’ narratives and paste them next to the images, another reading emerges. The photographs become polysemic, ambiguous and opaque. Based on this other reading, pastor Németh was an active member of the Evangelical Christian Church in the 1960s, trying to spread the Word and establish a new congregation. For this reason, he applied for a loan, bought a new house so that he could set up a meeting place in his own home. However, whilst looking after the affairs of the congregation, visiting the patients and dealing with the members, he found he no longer had time for other work, he became a “full-time” pastor and the other members of the congregation voted to pay him a modest monthly salary. Although he received samizdat spiritual literature from abroad, which also included anti-communist views, he did not politicize during the church meetings nor did he have any illegal political connections. The images lined up to demonstrate and prove the illegal economic activity of the congregation lose their power and relevance in this reading as the interrogation reports revealed that the members donated voluntarily, no one instructed them to do so, and the amounts received can be traced from the cash registers. The chairs, the collection box, even the expensive electric harmony organ were legally owned by the congregation. The characters in the photographs of the rituals are indeed praying, testifying, the Bible is indeed open on the altar, and the religious organ, violin, and rattles were indeed used to perform religious songs for the visibly poor, mostly elderly members of the congregation.

In order to prompt the photographs to speak in another way, we have to immerse ourselves in the situation of the creator and the given cultural and political context. These documents were created and documented based on a fabricated narrative and as such the contemporary structures and prefigurations must be peeled off the text (Gyáni 2010, 34-35). The stillness of

photographs—says Edwards—invites certain ways of weaving stories around them. Their meanings are "mutable and arbitrary, generated by their viewers and dependent on the context of their viewing, their relationship with written or spoken 'texts', and the embodied subjectivities of their viewer" (Edwards 2003, 84). According to this understanding we have the possibility to strip both the secret police and the victim narrative from the opposing readings.[4] Even though there is no single 'correct interpretation', we can find new readings of the reality behind the images, as well as details that the images—accidentally or intentionally—do not speak of, that is details that at present we have no idea ever existed or happened. The interpretation of the images cannot be complete, however, without them. Photo elicitation as a research method can help with this.

**Photo Elicitation**

So far we have uncovered two divergent readings of the same set of photographic images found in the secret police file. There are several ways to resolve the differences between the two. The first obvious option is to conduct oral history interviews. Through oral history, a personal reading of past events opens up a bottom-up perspective that can reveal how certain political-economic-cultural processes have transformed and been experienced in everyday life. In our case, the validity of the oral history method is strengthened by the fact that due to the relatively short time that has elapsed since the creation of the secret police file, it is still possible to supplement the archival data with oral history interviews. However, as time passes we find fewer memories, and stories become more and more obscure. The change of political system that has taken place in the meantime, the multiple changes in attitude towards the dictatorship, including a certain degree of nostalgia for the Kádár regime (1956-1989), means that oral history interviews conducted today contribute to a fragmented and constructed knowledge. Due to its subjectivity, the oral history method is not primarily aimed at searching for 'historical truth', but at 'democratizing' historical events and exploring their experiential dimension. However, oral history is essentially an interview, in which a personal story unfolds along the researcher's pre-structured questions. In relation to Németh's case file, it was possible to deploy another method, which is in some ways similar to oral history, that places photographic images at the centre of the research process.

Photo elicitation emerged from the classic power relations of anthropology, its methods and goals—says Edwards—were developed as a methodological tool to trigger memories and glean cultural information (2003, 87). Collier was first to introduce this method in a much-cited article from 1957 and later in several of his books. The essence of the method is that during photo elicitation, the researcher does not ask questions but allows the photograph to replace the question. In his study of the method, Douglas Harper briefly states that photo elicitation is "based on the simple idea of inserting a photograph into a research interview" (Harper 2002, 13). This evokes the personal experiences and impressions of the observer making the photograph an active participant in the dialogue. In this way, the photograph becomes a social actor, impressing, articulating and constructing fields of social actions and relations (Edwards 2003, 88). In photo elicitation, people speak by photographs (Pink 2001, 74) and photographs and people perform histories together (Edwards 2003, 89) allowing participants to articulate histories in ways that would not have emerged in that particular figuration if the photograph had not existed (Edwards 2003, 88). It is both the indexicality of photographs, the idea of "what has been" (Barthes 1981, 85), along with photography's ability to trigger memory that is utilized though the method.

Photo elicitation as a method thrusts images into the centre of a research agenda (Harper 2002, 15). Perhaps the most significant and important advantage of the method is that topics can

emerge when looking at the photographs without the researcher having had any prior knowledge of them. In Rose's words "while ordinary interview talk can explore many issues, discussing a photograph with the interviewee can prompt talk about different things, things that researchers hadn't thought about" (Rose 2016, 315).

In her exploration of visual methodologies, Rose (2016, 315-316) points to four important benefits of using photography in research in the social sciences. It is worth recounting these briefly as they each have relevance for the use of images from secret police archives. Firstly, *photographs encourage different insights, not just more but different, into social phenomena* and they have potential for opening alternative histories. Consequently, a different kind of knowledge is evoked.

Photo elicitation also *encourages talk that is more emotional, more affective more ineffable.* In our case, perhaps most importantly, it is easier to talk about sensitive topics in this way. As Sztompka aptly puts it, photo elicitation is like looking at photos in a family circle, while oral history can be more like an exam or questioning (Sztompka 2009, 83). While standard interviews tend to take place face-to-face, the researcher and participant often sit shoulder-to-shoulder when focused on the image before them (Williams and Whitehouse 2015, 306). The difference in mood between the two can help each different depths of the personal sphere — even the "intimate" inner feelings and events.

Rose also emphasizes the obvious fact that *visual materials are particularly helpful in exploring everyday, taken-for-granted things.* Due to the selective and imperfect nature of our memory, the objects, clothes, decorations, etc. that appear in the pictures in many cases are stored only latently, requiring stimulants to activate. A photo can raise such memories and bring them to life.

The final advantage of photo elicitation according to Rose is that it *demands collaboration*. As opposed to a certain hierarchical relationship between the oral historian and the interviewee in classic oral history interviews, photo elicitation promotes a kind of 'reciprocal ethnography' (Lawless 2019) allowing agency and active collaboration from the research participants. With regard to sensitive material in secret police files, it is particularly important that photo elicitation shifts the researcher-participant power dynamic in this way (Williams and Whitehouse 2015, 306). The informant in photo elicitation is less likely to try to give more and more perfect answers to the researcher's questions, but—as Sztompka discusses—it can unfold as "experience-oriented" conversation of equal parties, during which personal feelings, experiences and memories come to light. As Harper concludes, if the photo elicitation interview goes well "the person being interviewed sees himself or herself as the expert, as the researcher becomes the student" (Harper 2012, 157).

For the reasons outlined here, the most important results of the photo-elicitation method are "emotional revelations and psychological explosions and powerful statements of values" (Collier 1967, 62) that might otherwise be impossible to obtain. This collaborative relationship works even if we are not talking about photos taken of the interviewees themselves. Through the re-engagement with and re-cognition of lost images, photo elicitation can help ensure research is not only about loss, but instead empowerment, renewal and contestation (Edwards 2003, 86).

Although photo elicitation has many research-enhancing benefits and is now a widespread method in the social sciences, it is only slowly taking root in research by scholars of religions

and is still rarely used.[5] This methodological deficit is especially true in research on religions in the countries of the former Soviet bloc. During communism, research on religions meant primarily a Marxist analysis of religious history and ethnography, when it dealt with religion at all, focused mainly on the exploration of archaic elements, superstitions and pre-Christian beliefs, that is, the religious culture of the past. As very few contemporary sociological or anthropological works on religion were produced during the years of communism, we have virtually no knowledge of the transformation of religious culture during these decades. By taking an anthropological approach, the photographs we find in secret police archives can provide an insight into the vernacular religiosity (see Hesz, Chapter 10, this volume) of the time, evoking and portraying the mundane, the everyday, the quotidian and a glimpse of the materiality of the religious experiences (see Kapaló, Chapter 12, this volume).

**Photo elicitation experiences**

From an anthropological perspective, archival research sheds light on only one side of the story. Photos found in archives as 'raw documents' (Edwards 2001a) deprive individuals and communities of their own interpretation. Visiting and finding religious communities that appear in the secret police photographs formed an integral part of the Hidden Galleries project (see Kapaló and Vagramenko 2020) and the research undertaken with pastor Németh's community. Without having taken this step, it would have been impossible to recover their voices and narratives. Although I listed several benefits of the photo elicitation method earlier, this does not mean that there are no risk factors associated with it. While on the one hand, photo elicitation may mine deeper shafts of human consciousness than a words-alone approach, on the other hand, ethical and emotional concerns can emerge that need to be addressed.

How will the daughter of the pastor, who underwent the house search herself and whose father was interrogated by the secret police on several occasions, react to a researcher appearing on her doorstep with photographs from her father's case file? To what extent is the process affected by the fact that the previously underground community is still a minority religion, not recognized by the state as an official church? Will the previously unknown secret police photographs cause repeat trauma and negative emotions? Do the advantages of the photo elicitation method apply in such a burdened and sensitive situation? Having recalled negative emotions and memories, will the collaborative experience-centred narration instead give way to melancholy and alienation?

Before embarking on this research, it was important to keep in mind that the purpose of using photo elicitation was not to refute the agent reports nor to accept another reading that opposes the police narrative as authentic. Rather, my goal was to allow an individual reading that is independent of what is described in the file to emerge; not a counter-narrative but rather one liberated from the confines of the file. Photographic images are used to invoke and elicit new narratives without reading the context, without the burden of representation. By unstitching the archive through a photo-encounter I intend to "listen to, and above all, dialogue with the documents" (Cunha 2020, 31).

With this aim, I conducted a series of interviews with members of the community in 2017–2018. Pastor Németh had died in 2013 so my primary contact became his daughter, Lilla Gere[6], who was mentioned several times in the file even though she was still a child at the time of incident. During the research process, I kept in mind that even though members of the religious community under surveillance were unaware of the existence of the photographs and the

contents of the secret police file, they had a right to learn about their own past and tell their own story.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, the photographs can be divided into two groups. Some were taken in line with the norms of crime scene photography, and were designed to record the environment, context, and circumstances of the crime for use as data for investigations and as evidence in the courts (see Kapaló 2019). The intention of the secret police was to collect evidence of the supposed crimes of the community. A second set of images includes photographs taken by the members of the community themselves during earlier rituals, although they were later used against them in the prosecution. The source of certain images (either prepared by the secret police or confiscated from the community) crystallized during the photo elicitation process, which confirmed several of my positive expectations mentioned earlier. All kinds of difficulties, the tension caused by the formal situation, even if it existed, vanished extremely quickly. The interviewees knew they would see images of their community that had been kept in the secret police archives, but not exactly when and where they were taken. As a result, I encountered excited anticipation rather than anxiety.

I received a virtually immediate point of access to the memory of both of my interviewees. For Lilla Gere and her husband the images instantly revived latent elements of memory. I learned, for example, that the church hall, i.e. Németh's home, was in a three-apartment building built as a home for a female Protestant religious order in the 1930s, that looked like a bourgeois villa. Each of the three families who lived there belonged to the congregation and had planned in advance to move there. Seeing the pictures, the interviewees were delighted as if they were reuniting with friends they hadn't seen in a long time. The faces were first recalled:

> Wow! She is my grandmother! Uncle Tankó! Andris' grandmother! ... Aunt Ancika, Dad, Uncle Misi, my dad's brother! Here's Daddy, oh, dear, dear! … Old Uncle Zagyva is here too! Well, this is something!" Then, after the faces, the emotions attached to them came to light: "I remember everyone! Aunt Sándor, it occurred to me! Oh, I really loved this aunt! … Wow! It is Eszti, and he is the Sajtos boy. Sajtos… I think Misi… I think they reported on us too!

At first, the memories fluttered freely as more and more burst to the surface. It was clear that the images inspired different insights, not just more but different. Virtually all of the material in the file came to be re-interpreted and recontextualized, and the storyline of the file was contested. Perhaps naturally, the day of the raid depicted in the photographs and the file soon came to the centre of the photo-elicitation process. While we can't find any reference to this in the file, and the whole action and subsequent interrogations are portrayed as a peaceful conversation, we learned another story from Lilla:

> I remember when they rang [the door bell] and came in. It was a horrible feeling that everything was turned upside down, shattered, searched through, even our bedding. That brutality… Mom held me back from going at them [… ] I was very sorry for those old ladies. I loved them very much… I saw my father's face, I saw he was shocked but tried to remain strong […] Worship began, we were still praying. After the gathering, everyone came in, knelt down and prayed. I always sat in the back row with my mother under the collection box on one of the images. We knew there was something up because the ringing was a special thing. I remember the old aunts' terrified face […] They were searching for money everywhere and for samizdat. We even had to take our bedding off […] Everyone's identification was checked, they had to stay there for a long time before they were released, and the officers stayed in our house until dawn."

And then after looking at all the secret police photography, Lilla's deepest feelings came to light referring to a mental image that remained with her even today:

> There is this image that stayed with me when Dad went with them and we didn't know whether we would see each other again. Even now it makes me cry when I think of that [Lilla begins to cry] […] For a month they came and took him away every day for interrogation.

Based on the secret police file, we find that the consequences of the house search were not serious. According to the court decision taken in 1975, József Németh was given a three-month suspended sentence. The surveillance, interrogation, house search, and the confiscation of images and religious materials did not cause the community too much trouble as both József Németh and other members of the community avoided imprisonment. However, the recollections of Lilla reveal a different, more tragic story.

> I was there during the trials and I remember I wanted to run up to and kill these people who accused my father. So, this is in me so deeply even today. […] So this is so deep in me because […] For many years almost every day the cars were standing in front of our house and watching… Papa [Lilla Gere referring to Pastor Németh] was an electrician but he was not allowed back into his profession. He worked as a night watchman. It was horrible, financially. I only had one pair of trousers as a teenage girl, I will never forget that. It was very hard. But he prayed and trusted in God, but we knew they were always watching […]

The recollection of the house search and the interrogation of her father certainly activated other, similar experiences in Lilla Gere. As mentioned earlier, photo elicitation encourages talk that is more ineffable. At the same time, the photographs of the house raid evoked further experiences of repercussions from my interviewee's later years providing an example how a particular image might encourage different insights going beyond the stories related to the secret police photographs.

> [Male informant] Tell us about your decorative [adds sarcastically] companions to high school!—Yes, when I went back to school in the afternoons the agents followed me all the way to the building by car.—[Male informant] And the college?—I wanted to be a teacher. I enrolled in college and at the end of my admission I was asked by the examination committee of KISZ[7] members why I am not a member of KISZ. I said that because I am a believer. So, I was told not to try again because I am blacklisted, they will never accept my application […] What struck me is that because of my faith in God, I was stigmatized and not accepted in this society. In this society, I could not live my faith the way I wanted to, because society did not accept Christians."

The raid on the secret house church was not without consequences, the community was shattered and disintegrated. For a long time, even relatives and friends could not visit them because if there were to be an 'incident', pastor Németh's suspended prison sentence would be activated. Lilla Gere recounts of her father's disillusioned state of mind as follows: "The main reason for his disappointment was that several of the believers, members of the congregation, and even Pentecostal leaders, collaborated with the power. They were paid or intimidated." József Németh was only able to founded a new congregation in 1982 within the organizational framework of the Hungarian Free Christian Church.

> He got it in his heart that he needed to plant a new congregation in Erzsébet (a district of Budapest). At the end of 1974, there was a very large wave of revival among the Free Christians. At that time he joined the Free Christian Church in Budapest, in Hőgyes Endre Street, which was led by Mézes Laci. We rented a tiny Reformed prayer house.

The photo elicitation process also revealed significant and intriguing details regarding the confiscated photographs. It turned out that the photo of a young girl being baptised was actually Lilla Gere, the daughter of the pastor, and the baptism had taken place in the garden of the hidden house church, in a specially constructed font (see figure 4). In several cases, the photos also gained new interpretation and details were revealed that put its characters in a new light. When my interviewees looked at the pictures of the raid (see figure 5), the smile on someone's face or a simple glance into the camera captured in the image, prompted unexpected feelings and interpretations:

> Well this was the guy who came to search the house… they just came unannounced, rang and sat down. Everyone is terrified, poor Aunt Ancika is looking straight into the camera, I still see the horror on her face today.

Figure 11.4 Goes here

Figure 11.5 Gies here

A wealth of new, previously unknown information relating to religious life also came to light through this research process. In connection with Figure 6, I learned how samizdat recordings and documents were received from abroad:

> We got samizdat spiritual literature that was brought in by foreigners, by Dutch people, in a double-bottomed caravan. They were brought at night, they stopped in front of the house and it had to be quickly unloaded in secret. But these were all about God, there was nothing anti-state in them. These were translated with horrible spelling by '56 Hungarians but we were terribly happy with them, they were living testimonies. Before that, there were only cassettes and we typed them and duplicated them. […] They were in mason jars. During the raid and the house search they were looking everywhere, even behind the bottles to see if they were there, but they didn't notice they were tucked into the mason jar.

When it came to the image of the electric organ (see figure 1), they were surprised at how much importance the police attached to it. And then from the images of the instruments, they remembered what and how they were singing on church occasions. The photo elicitation also confirmed that visual materials are particularly helpful in exploring everyday, taken-for-granted aspects of religious life in the community such as worship practices.

> Is this serious? Oh, how funny… we were so very well documented! […] Aunt Ilonka played old Pentecostal or Baptist hymns on the organ, Uncle Tankó played the violin, we had a rattle drum, but back then there were only classical hymns, the new ones were still being written at that time. We used Pentecostal or Baptist songbooks.

Figure 11.6 Goes here

The photo elicitation process revealed that members of the community had no prior knowledge, or only false knowledge, of several details of the secret police action. They had no information on exactly what grounds Németh and his associates had been convicted, or who reported on them to provoke the action launched against them, or who the embedded informers had been. The distrust born of these uncertainties was indelibly ingrained in the members of a congregation. During the research, interviewees mentioned certain congregants on several occasions, "he wasn't clean either, I am sure he reported on us as well." As a result, following the raid they became more cautious with new members coming to the church. Their opposition to communism remained strong even during the post-regime socialist governments, and they assumed that agents were still among them even then: "then we knew who the built-in people were who pretended to be Christians but came to observe […] and after 2002 the same people reappeared."

In parallel, their curiosity and determination to learn about their own past grew. Lilla Gere decided to publish a book about her father, including her father's poems. They asked for information on where and how to request access to their secret police files and planned to initiate a crowdsourced oral history project on their congregation during communism. By consciously starting to learn about their own past, they themselves began to reveal unknown details of the past to members of their own community and express the value of research and creating their own record: "When I see how this works [the research process and the interviews], it satisfies me, and for me it is absolutely OK. This fits into my way of thinking, I am happy to make this a public good. I believe these things are something people need to know about."

From the very beginning, the Hidden Galleries research project, out of which this chapter grew, has focused not only on archival research but on bringing materials back to source communities through the framework of collaborative ethnography. As part of the collaborative ethnography tracing the images of pastor Németh's file, Lilla Gere, my key informant, was open and involved in the project. She took part in the preparation of our exhibition that displayed images from her father's file by lending us his handwritten poetry book and by giving her permission to use the transcripts of our personal communications and extracts from our interviews.

The shoulder-to-shoulder collaboration has clearly demonstrated its advantages over interrogation-type data collection. Not only the interviewees and the researcher, but also the interviewees amongst themselves cooperated with each other, building their own readings side by side, correcting each other at times and even encouraging each other to tell more and more stories. Rose's several statements about the benefits of photo elicitation were clearly confirmed, first, that photo elicitation encourages talk that is more emotional, more affective, more ineffable. Lilla Gere expressed her feelings and impressions not only about the images, but also about the photo elicitation and the person of the researcher: "Your kind personality also mattered, but you know, if some ex-communist somebody would have been ordered to come here, I am sure we wouldn't have talked to them."

## Conclusion

In the case of photographic collections in secret police archives, by taking a similar ethnographic approach to that taken to colonial photographic collections, I attempted to unstitch and liberate photographs from their archival holdings by linking secret police photographic

legacy with source communities to allow space for new perspectives and alternative histories to emerge (Edwards 2001b, 16). Bringing the images back to the community, through the process of photo elicitation, set in motion a new process in which the photographic images, as we have seen above, are attributed with a completely different role and significance. They remain no longer merely a document, but a stimulus of remembrance, a generator of the emergence of new historical narratives. In the case of underground religious groups hidden during the dictatorship, retelling their own stories can also strengthen community and personal identity and through such collaborative visual repatriation projects communities can become more visible and audible. Through collaborative visual repatriation we can see the formation of another 'visual economy' (Poole 1997, 9-13), in which 'The Archive' is decentred, and extended and refigured through inclusion, recognition and liberation of the 'indigenous voice' (Edwards 2003, 85). The main feature of this visual economy is the active agency of the researched community through the collaborative process of photo elicitation.

Just as Edwards found in relation to photographic collections in museums having a twofold potential, I have come to a similar conclusion concerning secret police photographs: "They are an evidential source within the communities they depict, inscribing complex layers of cultural information and knowledge, and an important site of negotiation for the development of long-term collaborative relations between museums [in our case the researcher] and communities" (Edwards 2003, 83). The photo elicitation method brought new stories and new emerging narratives to the surface in this research. The collaborative nature of photo elicitation and the emerging trust allowed alternative readings and mundane stories of underground religious life to surface that I may not have been able to access in an oral history interview.

It is important to emphasize that although this chapter focused on the images through which individual emotions and fates appeared, in addition to these, I also gained important information about minority religious culture. Transitions, relationships, and occasional tensions between individual congregations (e.g., the aforementioned wave of awakening in 1974), the material dimensions of religious culture (e.g., musical culture), and the formation of underground religiosity (e.g., samizdat literature), are all aspects that await further analysis.

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**Notes**

[1] Állami Egyházügyi Hivatal.
[2] A copy of the "found letter" is also included in the file.
[3] Peter Burke argues that images have the same historical value as texts and oral testimonies. See Burke 2001.
[4] Recently,the 'truth-value' of archival texts have been questioned on many levels ( Vatulescu 2010, Verdery 2014, most recently Kapaló 2019, 86). The distorting effect of interrogation reports under intimidation can be somewhat offset by photographic documents, but as we can see, photographs can also be used to support several, even contradictory, stories.
[5] From the time of Collier's pioneering writing in 1956 to 2010, Williams and Whitehouse only found a total of 18 English-language studies dealing with religion that used the method of photo elicitation. In addition to these studies, the images appearing in the religious studies literature, especially in the anthropology of religion, in most cases only serve to support a given phenomenon, to prove its occurrence, or to provide a visual illustration, on the basis of which further (e.g. symbolic anthropological) analysis is possible. Even in the analysis of religious experiences, or vernacular religious practices, scholars rarely apply photo elicitation (see Williams and Whitehouse 2015).
[6] I thank Lilla Gere very much for participating in the research. It is usual to anonymize research partipants, however, in this case Lilla Gere and other members of the community were happy to have their names included.
[7] KISZ stands for *Kommunista Ifjúsági Szövetség* which translates as Communist Youth League.