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Performing Clandestinity: The Religious Underground, the Secret Police and the Media in Communist Eastern Europe

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ABSTRACT

The Cold War was frequently cast in the West as a religious war, a conflict between Christianity and atheism of the Marxist-materialist kind. Propaganda narratives produced by the opposing sides pitted faith against godlessness or science and progress against superstition and exploitation. The religious underground, which was at the centre of much of this propaganda activity, had both a metaphorical and literal meaning. With the opening of the secret police archives in the region, scholars of religions have been presented with important new sources to understand the relationship between anti-religious propaganda, western projections of religious life under communism and the actual clandestine practices of underground religious groups. Whilst the textual materials found in the archives have been the primary focus of attention for both historians and transitional justice projects, the search for 'truths' about the past has largely overlooked the visual and material traces of religion produced by and about religious groups. In this article, I explore the complex intersection of the religious underground and the secret police and how this was reflected in the public media and film during communism. Through an exploration of photographic and filmic representations of religious clandestinity produced by or with the help of the secret police, this article illustrates how such imagery, despite its complicity in the construction of a certain image of the religious underground, nevertheless also reveals aspects of the lived reality, creativity and agency of underground communities. This research is based on the findings of the European Research Council Project, *Creative Agency and Religious Minorities: Hidden Galleries in the Secret Police Archives in Central and Eastern Europe* (project no. 677355).

KEYWORDS

Secret police; archives, religion; communism; visual media; Eastern Europe

Introduction[1]

In this thirtieth anniversary year of the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe, and following a long lull in academic interest in political, social and religious life in the region, post-communist societies are once again moving up the political and academic agenda. The economically turbulent and socially transformative 30 years that have followed the collapse of communism have produced some rather unexpected results. The euphoria of the 'spirit of 1989' produced a sense of certainty that the march of liberal democracy and the market economy (Goschler, 2015, xiii) was unstoppable, and that this revolutionary spirit held the answer to all of society's ills. At this time of reflection, however, we must recognise that this renewed interest in the region has come about due to a series of unfavourable, and uncomfortable, turns of events. Russia's actions in Ukraine, the return of spy wars, the emergence of populist, so-called illiberal politics in Hungary, Poland and elsewhere, have each contributed to Central and Eastern Europe moving back up the agenda.

It has been argued that one of the reasons for the current 'hangover' effect in post-communist Central and Eastern Europe, as one political scientist has termed it (Goschler, 2015, xiii), was the way that these societies subsequently chose to deal with history and with the past. In this article, I explore the legacy of the communist past in relation to religion and the study of religions in the region, focusing on the complex intersection of the concept or image of the religious underground and the role played by the secret police and how this was reflected in the public media and film during communism.

Following a discussion of the significance for political, cultural and religious life of the archives of the communist-era secret police in post-communist societies, I briefly outline insights drawn from the work Catherine Verdery (2014, 2018) and Cristina Vatulescu (2010) on the meaning and performance of secrecy by the secret police. Based on research conducted in by the Hidden Galleries research team in the secret police archives in Hungary, Romania, Moldova and Ukraine, in the following section I point to the presence and significance of visual and material religion in the archives and explore the methodological opportunities this offers the scholar of religions. I argue, using a number of examples of secret police images and their use in print and film propaganda, that the largely overlooked visual representations of religion produced by the secret police represent a valuable lens through which to re-examine Cold war representations of the religious underground. The examples of images from the archives I explore in this article, which were complicit in the construction of an certain image of the religious underground, nevertheless

[1] The findings presented in this article form part of the ongoing European Research Council project, *Creative Agency and Religious Minorities: Hidden Galleries in the Secret Police Archives in Central and Eastern Europe* (project no. 677355). I would like to thank the project team members and collaborators past and present, Igor Cașu, Iuliana Cindrea-Nagy, Ágnes Hesz, Dumitru Lisnic, Gabriela Nicolescu, Kinga Povedák, Anca Șincan and Tatiana Vagramenko whose contributions to the Hidden Galleries project have enriched the ideas I am presenting today. Some of the points made in the this article are further elaborated in James A. Kapaló (2019) 'The Appearance of Saints: Photographic Evidence and Religious Minorities in the Secret Police Archives in Eastern Europe', *Material Religion*, vol. 15, no. 1, pp. 82-109.

reveal aspects of lived reality, creativity and agency of underground communities.

Religion and the Cold War

The Cold War was frequently cast in the West as a religious war, a conflict between Christianity and atheism of the Marxist-materialist kind with religion used as a 'tool of mass persuasion' (Shaw, 2002, 5). Propaganda films and narratives produced by the opposing sides pitted faith against godlessness or science and progress against superstition and exploitation. The so-called religious underground, which was at the centre of much of this propaganda activity, had both a metaphorical and literal meaning. With the opening of the secret police archives in the region, scholars of religions have been presented with important new sources to understand the relationship between anti-religious operations and propaganda, western projections and the actual clandestine practices and lived reality of underground religious groups. Whilst the textual materials found in the archives have been the primary focus of attention for historians, politicians and transitional justice projects, the search for 'truths' about the past has largely overlooked the visual materials produced by and about religious groups. The secret police archives give us a unique insight into the production and uses of visual images of religion during communism and give us cause for reflection on the significance of the performative act of revealing that which was hidden twice over – firstly by clandestine religious groups and then by the secret police.

The persecution of religion was 'one of the most emotive major themes of Cold War discourse' with Western intelligence agencies intimately involved in the propaganda war (Shaw, 2002, 7). Yet while the KGB and their colleagues in satellite communist states were pursuing reactionary religious forces in society, in the United States of America the FBI were also engaged in their own struggle against dangerous religious elements in society. Recent scholarship on the entangled relationship between the FBI and religion in the US allows us to observe some parallels in terms of the 'hostile mischaracterization', as Johnson and Weitzman put it (2017, 2), that the FBI fed to the US and international media in its struggle to undermine the Nation of Islam or to shape opinion in regard to the various Cult Controversies of the 1970s and 80s. Just to give one very brief example, in February 1959 the FBI leaked sensationalist materials, photographs and fake dossiers to both international and domestic news media in its attempt to undermine key figures in the Nation of Islam (Evanzz, 2017, 156). Simultaneously in the Soviet Union, at the height of the Khruschev-era anti-religious campaign, the KGB supplied journalists and filmmakers with dossiers for use in newsreels and print media of anti-sect operations that contained fake or distorted visual evidence against the religious groups they were targeting.

Besides the symbolic significance of this anniversary year, the contemporary relevance of this area of research was confirmed recently when in 2017 surprising footage appeared on various media channels, including the BBC, of renewed Russian state security operations against Jehovah's Witnesses. The film footage showed startled believers turning to see secret police agents bursting into their church in the middle of a service. The action being taken by the Russian state against what it terms an 'extremist

organisation' recalls Soviet-era raids, arrests and deportations of Witnesses 60 years earlier. Mirroring the way that anti-religious operations were carried out from the 1950s-80s, the state security agencies ensured that visual evidence was gathered both for use in criminal prosecutions as well as for consumption on news and social media platforms.



Figure 1. A still from a Soviet anti-religious documentary film 'Return to the Truth' (Moldova Film, 1985) showing KGB officers entering an illegal place of worship and shining a light into the faces of startled believers.

The full corpus of photographic and filmic representations of the religious underground produced by or with the assistance of the secret police in Central and Eastern Europe has become increasingly more accessible to researchers since the opening of specialist institutions in the region to manage the archives of the former secret services. Images and footage, such as this still from a Soviet film in figure 1, were produced during secret police operations for use in anti-religious propaganda campaigns aimed at shaping public perceptions of clandestine religious groups. The incredibly diverse and rich visual materials found in secret police files illustrate how, with the help of the state security agencies, religious secrecy was performed and publicly paraded during communist rule. The scholarly use of such images, however, although highly problematic from an ethical and epistemological perspective, can also offer us valuable insights into the lived reality of the religious underground.

On the other side of the Iron Curtain, similar links also existed between those making cinema and government propagandists who together shaped the image of religion under siege in the Cold War (see Shaw, 2002 , 4). In Eastern Europe, this serious game of hide and seek which was dramatized in the communist media and in film, I will argue, has had a lasting effect on the post-communist societies in the region. The storehouse of powerful images of religious clandestinity that are now seeing the light of day, offer us a new lens through which to view pressing questions relating to civil liberties, mass surveillance of society, the right to personal privacy and civil activism and dissent in contemporary times.

The images used to illustrate this article are drawn from the Digital Archive created by the Hidden Galleries project, which showcases examples of material and visual aspects of religion found in secret police archives in four countries, Hungary, Romania, Moldova and Ukraine.[2]

The Secret Police Archives and Post-communism

At the height of the demonstrations that swept East Germany in the autumn of 1989, attention was already turning to the secret police and their archives. Erich Mielke, the Head of the Stasi, began ordering the destruction of state security files beginning with evidence of illegal phone tapping and postal interceptions and the lists of names of unofficial informers and collaborators (Engelmann, 2015, 176). In Hungary, in the months following the change of political system in October 1989, film footage emerged of the surreptitious destruction of secret police files precipitating the so-called 'Dunagate' scandal (Uitz, 2008, 58) whilst in Romania, in the chaos of the days that followed the revolution in December of that year there were several reports from various corners of the country of secret police documents being systematically destroyed or stolen (Stan, 2005). Mielke soon followed up his initial order with instructions to destroy a much wider range of Stasi files including the shredding of sensitive 'Church Department' documents (Engelmann, 2015, 176). Protesters responded by storming the Stasi Headquarters to prevent their destruction.

In the years and decades that followed, the fate of, access to, uses and methods of interpretation of secret police files have been at the heart of a range of historical questions, political debates and public controversies producing what Catherine Verdery (2014, 3) refers to as the secret police 'file fever.' Whilst access to secret police archives constitutes one of the most important, and perhaps most contentious, elements of the broad movement for transitional justice, the archives have also become a principal site of the 'symbolic battle for the possession of the past' in post-communist Eastern Europe (Horváth, 2008, 247). Building on the model of denazification after World War Two, programmes of transitional justice were initiated across the region aimed at overcoming the legacy of repressive regimes and working towards justice and reconciliation in society. These transitional justice measures, which were both backward and forward looking, proved to be highly problematic, however, as they were often used to 'delegitimize political opponents and strengthen certain political positions' (Goschler, 2015, xiv). A brand of 'anti-communism' which, as Muriel Blaive (2017) asserts 'claims to be based on the authority of history [and] has an answer to everything and can never be faulted, namely that the pre-1989 period was evil, and communism is to blame for everything, past and present' was fed by the secret police archive frenzy that constituted one of the central platforms of post-totalitarian justice (and history writing). The political culture that has emerged, clothed in anti-communist garb, functions, Blaive observes, in a similar mode as the ideology it claims to have overturned. This culture encourages an attitude towards the archives that claims to know what the archives represent and therefore to know what we will find there.

[2] Available at: http://hiddengalleries.eu/digitalarchive/s/en/page/welcome.

The opening of the secret police archives therefore, as well as presenting scholars of religions with important new sources with which to catalogue the history of victimization of religious groups and trace the history of state policy towards religions in the twentieth century, are also a central platform of projects designed to overcome the legacy of repressive regimes and to work towards justice and reconciliation in society. As ever more states in the region aspired to the path of Euro-Atlantic integration, secret police archives continued to be opened in the name of societal openness and democratization. In the course of 2014, both Ukraine and Albania introduced new 'de-communisation' laws, which have given access to secret police files for the first time to both victims and researchers.

The mandates of institutions set up to manage the archives of former communist secret police services vary from country to country but most combine a number of key components. In Romania for example, The National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives (CNSAS), has four key areas of responsibility: 'I) to ensure the free access of individuals to their personal files;' (this was granted to 'victims' as 'information compensation' and represents a peculiarly Eastern European measure, see Stan, 2013) II) to facilitate the 'vetting of individuals seeking public office;' a process called Lustration designed to vet individuals to prove they had not been informers or collaborators with the regime, a way of future proofing democracy against those with a proven totalitarian-inclination, III) 'to expose publicly the former agents and informal collaborators of the Securitate in accordance with rule of law principles;' and finally IV) 'to develop research and education activities… about the repressive actions of the Securitate' (CNSAS Annual Report, 2010, Synopsis, cited in Horne, 2020). The remit of the secret police archives, as these diverse roles demonstrate, are as much about what kind of societies these states aspire to be as they are about the past.

The burden of achieving these ends was placed squarely on access to the case files of individuals or the so-called 'personal file.' The secret police bureaucratic process was modelled on the Soviet system with the central organising principle being 'the target', the individual at the heart of an operation. Starting from the individual, the secret police built network files by tracing their connections and relationships, documentary files on specific problems or large scale operations, and then ultimately judicial and penal files, once it was decided to charge and sentence individuals. Informers also had their own files, where details of how they were recruited and their career was recorded as well as a compilation of all their informer reports. While the personal files, which recorded not just one crime but the entire biography of the individual, became during Soviet times 'the most authoritative account of an individual life' (Vățulescu, 2010, 13), in postsocialism they have also become the primary object of research. The truth-value of such files is, of course, questioned due to the ideologically and politically motivated fabricated crimes, false testimonies, made up conversations, and silences about the sometimes brutal conditions under which information was gathered but the idea has prevailed that by reading the files in the correct way one can reach the truth. This has exposed a range of problems associated with the common sense categories inherited from Cold War polemics of perpetrators and victims, dissidents and collaborators, informers and so on (see Apor et al., 2017), categories which have been deployed in an effort to rectify past wrongs through reparative justice

measures but which washed over the many shades in between that were often the result of difficult personal circumstances and complex moral and ethical dilemmas.

The use of secret police personal files, therefore, by institutions, interest groups and individuals, has proved highly problematic and has led to multiple cases of political manipulation and blackmail, which have, in turn contributed to the shortfallings and general failure of policies and practices of transitional justice that have been charted across the region (Appel, 2005; Kiss, 2006; Stan, 2015; Horne, 2020). A series of high profile controversies that led to calls for the closure and dismantling of the archives in Hungary in 2011 provoked an international campaign by academics that argued the collections should be maintained for their historical value. As Pehe (2019) argues in relation to the Czech case, however, the use of secret police files in history writing has also become extremely contentious as political actors misappropriate them in the search of serviceable historical narratives. Secret police archives have become part of a culture war in which the goals of academic history writing are pitted against an emerging moral logic that wishes to shut down the complexities of the past from close examination and see the installation of a 'preordained historical narrative' (Blaive, 2017, 3).

Churches and religious communities have been embroiled in a number of such controversies associated with secret police files, especially in relation to Church leaders, priests and pastors who have been revealed as former agents or informers. These have included such high profile figures as the former Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church, Teoctist (see Vasile, 2017) and Stanislaw Wielgus, the Archbishop of Warsaw, who in 2007 was forced to confess to having been an informer. The focus on 'main characters' in post-communist public memory (Šústová Drelová, 2017, 287) can be contrasted with grassroots activism through the archives that Stan refers to as 'vigilante justice and unofficial truth projects' (2015). Some members of Christian communities have aimed at redeeming and cleansing the past sins of their pastors and preachers who refused to come forward and confess their former lives as agents or informers by taking the initiative to expose them publicly (Cindrea-Nagy, forthcoming 2021). As a consequence of these controversies, some mainstream churches have sought to block access to files that might compromise their church leaders whilst others continue the pursuit of truth and redemption through them.

At the heart of these archival truth projects lies a paradox; while the personal files represent the fullest and most detailed biography of individuals, and in post-communism they have also become the primary object of research as a site of 'truths' they are also discredited as 'the immoral documents of an immoral regime, as Bence Rétvari, Hungary's one-time Justice Minister once referred to them ('Closing down history', 2011). Both the societal and academic focus has to date been on questions of truth, the failures of transitional justice and the political uses (and abuses) of the archives.

Secrecy and Visibility

In seeking to understand the complex question of the power of the secret police archives in post-socialism and the significance of the representation of the religious underground the secret police generated through them, it is important

to take account of the performative practices of the secret police themselves. Following Vățulescu's lead (2010, 3), I use the term secret police in preference to a range of other available expressions such as state security agency, security organ or political police – all expressions used at different times by the various institutions themselves – because of the role that the 'idea' of secrecy played in their activities. The secret police were never truly secret as everyone knew of their existence; they presented what Vățulescu refers to as a "visible spectacle of secrecy" (Vățulescu, 2010, 3). Katherine Verdery has also challenged the stereotype or assumption of the secret police's invisibility; she characterizes it as a managed performance of secrecy rather than truly secret or invisible work. Officers could be seen, they were 'the guys hanging out in places where potential "dissidents" might congregate' (Verdery, 2018, 284), they dressed a certain way and had the same haircuts. The very visibility of agents, who in some cases were surprisingly obvious and unorthodox in their approach was designed to have a prophylactic effect, acting as a deterrent and a constant reminder of the watchfulness of the state. This enabled the secret police, in the post-Stalinist era to become a 'preventive institution' based on fear rather than on the violent repression of the past (Verdery, 2018, 285). Paradoxically, the secret police had to be known to exist, they had to be selectively observed in their operations; they were only able to achieve their various goals based on a selective performance of visibility and invisibility in different contexts. This 'histrionic secrecy' of the secret police allowed for secrecy to be exhibited without revealing anything that needed to be hidden (Vățulescu, 2010, 3-5). Secret police files, as Vățulescu explains, were 'routinely paraded in front of the public' in Soviet newsreel coverage of trials as one of the means of creating an 'obsessive fascination' (2010, 5) with, and fear of, the secret police. The power of their actions was performative as well as coercive and contributed to the authority of the texts contained within the archives, which could only ever be glimpsed but not read.

Material Religion in the Secret Police Archives

Despite the attention on the vast collection of personal files, they represent just one, admittedly very large and very important, dimension of the holdings of the secret police archives. The folders and documents in the archives, however, also contain between their covers a rich collection of confiscated items such as photographs, religious art and pamphlets, as well as diaries, poetry and hymns. As part of their mission to incriminate, control and eliminate certain religious groups, the secret police preserved the visual and material traces of otherwise invisible clandestine or underground communities. Inserted, pasted or stitched into folders on the kilometres of shelves stacked with case files, the archives contain a hidden repository of confiscated religious materials, the ephemera of religious, and personal, life of believers. Oftentimes, illegal religious communities and churches such as the Nazarenes or the Inochentists (discussed later in this article), that due to their marginalised status, underground existence or ambivalence towards the act of historical record making preserved few records themselves, can be found represented in great detail in the secret police record. These materials sit alongside 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 for understanding both how the totalitarian state constructed an image of religious others in order to incriminate and control them as well as how certain religious communities chose to represent themselves in times of extreme repression. In this sense, the visual and material presence of religious communities represents a meeting place of agencies that if viewed as an active space has the power to destabilise both the power of the archive and the dominant historical narratives that have emerged from it (see Edwards, 2001, 4). The diverse objects and photographs in the secret police archives, that were either collected or generated by the secret police, offer the possibility of multiple modes of interpretation. Exploring such materials, against the intentions of the secret police and against the 'grain' of the 'hostile archive' (Luehrmann, 2015, 19; see also see Stoler, 2009) allows alternative histories to emerge from the epistemological fissure that separates texts from images, photographs and objects.

These materials are not just valuable for scholars, they are also of immense significance for the religious communities that produced them, which in many cases have no idea that the archives contain these stolen materials. The communities that feature heavily in the archives continue to suffer societal prejudice, and in some cases overt official discrimination on the part of the state, as evidenced by the recent campaign against Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia mentioned above. The Hidden Galleries project team has found that exploring these visual and material aspects of grassroots religion as practiced during communism, can offer extremely important insights on a range of questions from the role of women in the religious underground, to the relationship between state propaganda and religious narratives, to the use of new media by underground religious groups, all things that have been largely overlooked in the mainstream Church history writing on the period. In foregrounding the visual and material presence of religion in the archives we gain a new lens through which to view the religious field during communism creating a counterpoint to the search for 'textual truths' that has defined research in the archives.

The visual images and material objects confiscated from religious communities represent a stark contrast to the visual representations of religious groups, rituals and objects that the secret police produced as part of the generation of incriminating evidence and knowledge production. Such representations are diverse and include photography of religious 'crime scenes', mugshots of arrested individuals, graphic representations of underground networks, maps and surveillance photographs. The following brief examples illustrate what Cristina Vățulescu (2010, 1) refers to as a 'police aesthetic', the product of an 'entangled intersection' between Secret Police and forms of cultural production; this intersection encompassed a whole range of representational practices, graphic, photographic and cinematographic. Central to this visual language was the ascription of political or anti-social, and therefore criminal, meaning to religious practices and beliefs through a 'rhetoric of unmasking' that applied to all classes of social enemy (Vățulescu, 2010, 24). Stalinism, as Vățulescu describes, propagated a way of looking, a 'watchfulness', that required a peeling back of 'the surface of reality in expectation of the worst' (Vățulescu, 2020).

The secrecy practices of the secret police were in some sense mirrored or paralleled by the secrecy of the religious groups they were surveilling. As Teeuwen reminds us 'Secrecy is an essential part of most, if not all, religious

Traditions' (2006, 2) but during communism this became amplified as some religious groups created hidden spaces and places of worship, created secret codes and networks of couriers, and hid things that could potentially incriminate them or give away the identity of other members of their communities.

What was the religious underground and when did it come into being?

The religious underground had both a literal and metaphorical meaning during the Cold War with representations of the underground featuring in the discourse of both sides. The term was widely used in the Western media and by Christian dissidents who cast the struggle against communism as war between darkness and light, between Christian faith and godless atheism. Through the naming of memoirs such as that of Romanian pastor Richard Wurmbrand's *In God's Underground* and of organisations such as *Underground Evangelism*,[3] whose mission territory was described as the 'unregistered underground church,' the image of heroic priests and pastors defying the communist authorities, dodging the secret police, maintaining their faith in prison despite mistreatment and torture was a powerful faith-affirming image that was propagated by Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty and the BBC. Based on the testimonies and reports of religious dissidents and emigres, these stations claimed to be able to report on the realities behind the Iron Curtain. They were, however, heavily biased by Western perceptions of what life must have been like there (Kasprzak, 2004) with information having been funded by and fed to them by the CIA and the British Foreign Office (Shaw, 2002, 7).

For the communist regimes of Eastern Europe, religion was understood in ideological terms as a reactionary, counter-revolutionary hostile force that ultimately should be eliminated from society. The term religious underground was deployed by the Soviet state as early as the 1920s to refer to religious communities that were denied registration or were legally prohibited, however, it expanded to signify all religious practices that were extra-legal, that were discouraged by the state or that simply slipped from view. First Lenin, then later both Stalin and Khrushchev recognised that hasty anti-religious policies, if conducted without preparatory ideological groundwork, could easily lead to a strengthening of religious feeling and an increase in unregistered groups (Fletcher, 1970, 364). Commenting on this dynamic in 1970, Fletcher (1970, 365) observed that 'So long as believers are permitted legal outlets for their religious desires, their activities can be observed and, to some extent, supervised' but if these options have been eradicated the business of day-to-day control 'must be overcome by the most laborious process of investigation and liquidation.' Fletcher, in his brief characterization of this process, nevertheless makes a salient point, as worshipping legally and openly became impossible, or the compromises involved became intolerable to believers, the catacomb churches and clandestine forms of religious practice, from catechism classes to secret baptisms, and from apocalyptic chain-letters to secret pilgrimages, multiplied and became increasingly more creative. Therefore, as well as the powerful religious institutions and figureheads that the regime had initially targeted and desired to topple, a whole raft of new innovative

[3] Founded in 1960, *Underground Evangelism* began by smuggling bibles into the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. The organisation still operates today under the name Mission Without Borders https://www.mwbi.org/about-us.

manifestations of religion became the target of the secret police and state propaganda. The religious underground 'was the kind of discourse the Soviet secret police harboured and caused to function as true' (Vagramenko, forthcoming 2021) both through their knowledge production and through the direct exercise of repressive actions that both encompassed and flowed from their construction of knowledge.

The underground, as defined and targeted by the state, was diverse and was comprised of many groups of religious dissenters that refused compromise with the communist authorities. Initially in the 1920s and 30s, these were mainly Russian Orthodox believers whose churches were closed and whose priests we deported to the Gulag or shot, but these were soon joined by many other religious groups of western origin who were also denied legal recognition including Seventh Day Adventists, Pentecostals, Jehovah's Witnesses to name but a few. These unregistered religious groups were, by their nature, difficult to keep track of and control (Baran, 2014, 46) as many of them had never been officially recognised or registered and hence there were no public records pertaining to them.

Religious communities were projected as dangerous by the Soviet authorities for a number of reasons. Refusal to participate in social and cultural life, the rejection of civic duties, such as military service or voting, as well as resistance to collectivization of agriculture were all key factors in the early years of Soviet power. Connections to external centres of power in the West, whether the Vatican or missionary groups in the US, ensured that certain religious groups were high up the list of targets throughout the communist period. The religious underground as identified and defined by the state security agencies was projected as being highly organised, politically motivated and networked (Vagramenko, 2020, 36). The Soviet secret police went to great lengths to visualise and materialise the intangible and invisible producing complex graphic materials such as the network scheme shown in figure 2 (see also Kapaló and Vagramenko, 2020, pp. 34-39). This image demonstrates how sophisticated the visual means of representation and construction of knowledge about religious communities had become by the 1930s. The visual representation of the so-called ecclesiastic-monarchist underground in this network scheme was designed to reveal the hidden and unmask simple peasants as 'agitators' or 'spies' in a highly organised underground network implicated in the machinations of 'foreign intelligence agencies' and illustrates the process in which an extremely elaborate 'alternative reality' could be created using visual media (Vagramenko, forthcoming 2021).

As Vagramenko (forthcoming 2021) demonstrates, 'All groups were made to fit the same organizational logic whether this reflected reality or not.' Such schemes were the product both of the ideological model of the enemy constructed by the state and the imagination and aesthetic of the secret police agents. However, as Baran (2014, 49) observes with regard to the Jehovah's Witnesses, Soviet authorities were sometimes actually dealing with genuine underground networks as complex as their own visual projections. The activities, structures and categories of groups such as the Jehovah's Witnesses were easily translated from their emic religious language into an etic political frame. In this sense, the religious underground became a reality that was named and targeted by the Soviet authorities and also served a propaganda purpose as it was used as evidence of parasitic, capitalistic, anti-Soviet

elements embedded deep within the social body. Clandestine religious groups were represented as both an internal danger and an external threat through their global networks. Policies on religions shifted and changed numerous times and found expression in diverse ways in the various countries of the communist bloc, but right up until the mid 1980s, secret police agents across communist Central and Eastern Europe were tasked with surveilling, infiltrating and prosecuting members of illegal underground religious organisations and continued to contribute to the production of anti-religious propaganda materials such as the 1985 film *From Darkness to Light* (see figure 1).

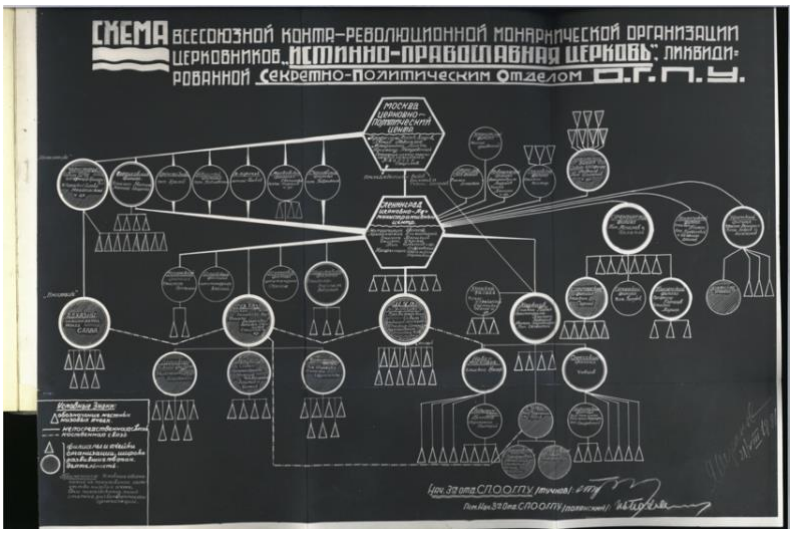


Figure 2. Network scheme produced by the Soviet secret police depicting the True Orthodox Church (ГДА СБУ ф. 13, спр. 385, 387) © State Archive Branch of the Security Services of Ukraine. See Tatiana Vagramenko, 'True Orthodox Church secret police network scheme Ukraine' http://hiddengalleries.eu/digitalarchive/s/en/item/16

The religious underground therefore represents co-construction that it can be argued served a function for both sides in the Cold War. This discursive construct, however, also points towards a complex, multi-dimensional, material and tangible 'reality' that has become more visible in its diversity and complexity since the opening of the archives of the secret police (see figure 3). Between the official Soviet narrative of the 'victorious war against superstition' and the corresponding 'religious narrative of martyrdom' (Kelly 2012, 305) which was disseminated in the West, there was a complex lived reality in which violent persecution and repression at the hands of the secret police formed but one part.

Against this backdrop, however, the very concept of 'religious resistance' during communism has been questioned by some as an 'idea made up by the regime' (Fejérdy et al., 2018, 445) to serve its own purposes and which views simple attempts to continue to transmit religious faith and belief as 'opposition'. Indeed, as Vagramenko argues (forthcoming 2021), the secret police intended to produce an image of clandestine religious practice as politically dangerous in order to justify the actions taken against them. Moreover, communist authorities tended to view any attempt to continue to transmit religious faith and belief as a political act of opposition despite the fact that Christians themselves may not always have understood their actions in such terms. According to this view, Christians who struggled to preserve their way of life and faith were not

necessarily resisting communism but were rather engaged in the positive act of 'building Christianity' despite the risks involved (see Fejérdy et al., 2018, 445). This perspective which emphasizes the significance of faith as opposed to dissent in discourses of religious agency during communism can be contrasted, as Wynot highlights, with another tendency amongst historians of the Soviet Union to 'underestimate the depth of religious feeling amongst the laity' (Wynot, 2004, x) rejecting the idea that peasant defiance of anti-religious campaigns constituted genuine resistance instead relegating it to a vague 'desire to defend what was simply familiar and enjoyable' (Husband cited in Wynot, 2004, x).

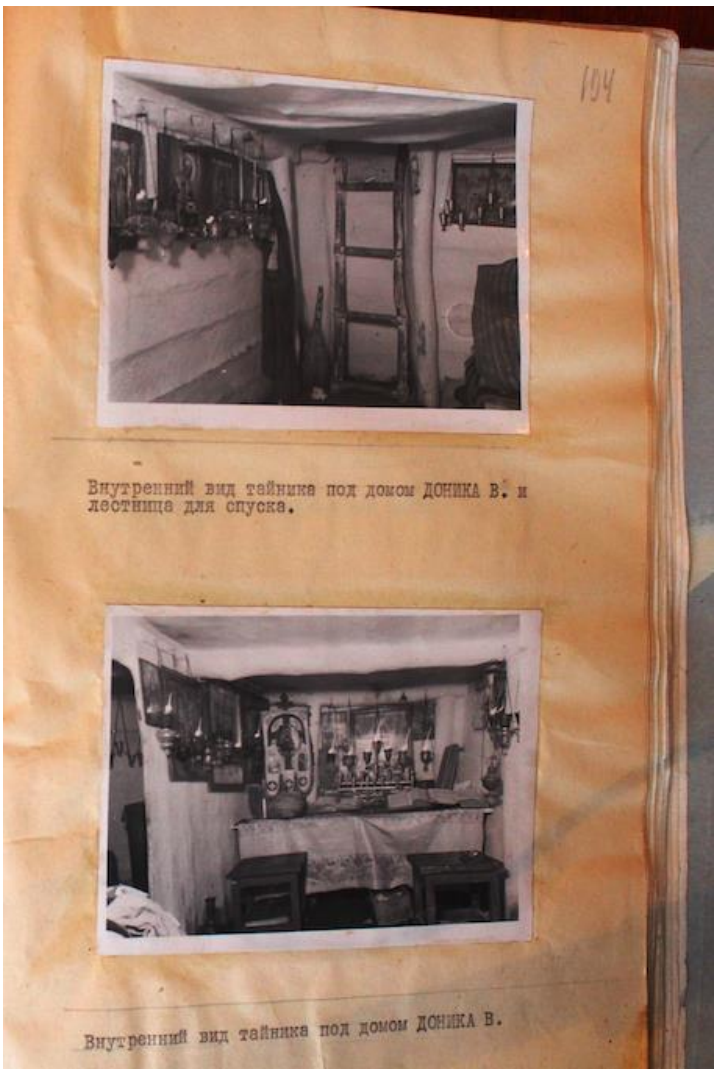


Figure 3. Photographs taken by KGB officers of a underground place of worship in the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic from a case file from 1953**.** Captions read: (above) "Interior view of the hideout under V. Domnika's house and the ladder leading down", (below) "View of the hideout under the house of V. Domnika" **(**ASISRM-KGB, 023262, pp.192-194) © Archive of the Service for Information and Security Services of the Republic of Moldova, former KGB.

The diverse responses of religious groups who came to form the underground, regardless of whether they framed their activities as resistance, took concrete actions to undermine or disrupt the state's ability to pursue its social, cultural and economic policies; the motivation for these actions may have been other-worldly but the results were intended to also shape this world. Whether viewed as a positive act of building Christian faith, the realisation of a socio-cultural alternative way of living or simply as a defence of tradition, the phenomenon of clandestine forms of religion reflect both conscious and unconscious forms of defiance, resilience and creative agency. In this sense, I argue, the religious resistance as witnessed in the underground activities of diverse groups should cannot be reduced to a mere construct of the Soviet and communist regimes or of Cold War polemics, nor indeed a simple unintended consequence of repression. The communities that comprised what came to be referred to as the religious underground possessed their own agency and devised creative means of not only avoiding arrest, foiling agents and uncovering informers but also of establishing resilient, viable and meaningful lifeworlds beyond the strictures and confines prescribed by the state. By approaching the problem of the representation of religion during communism through the frame of the visual and material world of the religious underground, we can interrogate the boundaries between the competing regimes of truth in the Cold War and the lived realities of life in the underground.

The Underground in Images

The visual materials found between the covers of secret police files are problematic from both an ethical and an epistemological point of view. Photography had very early on became an important tool in the hands of the police with photographs becoming invested with the status of 'proof.' Towards the end of the nineteenth century, with the rapid advancement of photographic technology making it cheaper and more accessible (Tagg, 1998, 66), photography was very quickly adopted as a means to 'provide pictorial evidence to substantiate written observations' (Emaliantseva, 2009, 190) and became one of the most important means by which the secret police could track their targets and gather evidence against them. Photographs became the 'ultimate evidence' but they also 'had the potential to allow for a certain agency' amongst diverse groups in society (Emaliantseva 2009, 190) – people could choose to be captured as they wished to look, creating their own presentation of themselves as a way of actively materialising communal memory. Despite its use in the hands of the police to incriminate, photography also became an empowering and democratic medium in the hands of ordinary people.

The images we find enclosed in the secret police archives, however, whether produced by communities and later confiscated or shot through the lens of the secret police, participated in the secret police archival construction of the enemy. Such photographs, despite their complicity in the 'truth' of a hostile archive, can nevertheless be explored today as images of a lost religious and cultural life. As Edwards points out, photographs capture a 'fragment of space and time' from the 'there-then' (Barthes cited in Edwards, 2001, 8) but their presence in the 'here-now' presents new possibilities unforeseen by the camera operator or the secret police officer. Images that were central to secret police's representational practices, precisely because of their agency in the

'here-now' and their potential to hold many unintended meanings, can contribute to the destabilising of secret police's textual truths constructed through their case files. As Edwards reflects with regards to the relationship between photography and the practice of colonial power, we should avoid the temptation to accept an 'over-determined causal relationship' between photographs, the praxis of power and the power of the archive to determine realities (Edwards, 2014, 184). The rich and varied visual images captured by the secret police, because of their power as 'condensed evidence' and their potential for 'recoding' (Edwards, 2001, 5-6) can act as a catalyst for scholars and communities to address questions, not previously deemed worthy of investigation. What kind of images were captured? How were they selected for propaganda use and for public exposure? How were they implicated in the discursive construction of the enemy? And do they have a documentary value today? These are all questions worthy of investigation. It is extremely interesting to note that despite the large numbers of images in some files, the direct use of photographs as evidence in cases appears far less common than one might expect; instead photographs appear more often for their potential to illustrate the conspiratorial narrative, to produce drama or incite moral panic when revealed in the public arena.

Crime scene photographs constitute a large proportion of images captured by the secret police. Such images often depict home churches and underground hideouts, raids on communities and house searches, as well as re-enactments of religious rituals caught in stills but also sometimes on film, all of which could be used to incriminate and visually unmask their targets for use in anti-religious propaganda materials, in the press publications and educational materials on atheism. Crime scene photographs could, of course, be easily staged, falsified or manipulated with incriminating evidence (which may well have been planted) uncovered in situ for dramatic effect (see figures 4 and 5). The images we see here demonstrate the importance that the secret police placed on capturing the moment of uncovering. Sometimes photographs may have captured the genuine moment, as we can see in the image from a raid on a house church in Hungary (see figure 6), but in the majority of cases, if we look closely at the image, we can see that they are carefully staged.

In contrast to the image of the raid on a hidden house church in figure 6, where we see the genuine surprise and apprehensiveness on the faces of believers as they turn to face the camera of the secret police agent, in figure 7 our view is of a ritual seemingly in process, with the protagonists Mihail Georgievich Arteni, the man on the right in the image, and Maria Ivanovna Petrash, on the left, seemingly unaware that they are being photographed by the KGB. This image is clearly staged, probably under duress post-arrest but pre-trial (the two protagonists were found guilty of crimes against the state and were deported to the Altai region of Siberia). The framing, camera angle, lighting and mood of the photograph were all determined by the photographer with the intention of creating a powerful image for use by the regime. The two members of the Inochentist movement, shown wearing ritual clothing and holding sacred objects, may not be performing a genuine ritual at all. We can surmise that in the absence of surveillance photographs, the arrested individuals were forced to re-enact rituals with the secret police photographing from within the group as if they had been present at an actual ritual.



Figure 4. Typewriter with US Dollars hidden inside discovered during a house search of a Hungarian Cistercian monk in 1961 (ÁBTL 3.1.9. V-146835/3) © Historical Archives of the Hungarian State Security. See Kinga Povedák, 'Evidence of illegal activity of underground Catholic religious order Hungary', http://hiddengalleries.eu/digitalarchive/s/en/item/4



Figure 5. Romanian border guards uncover bibles and religious materials hidden under the floor of a camper van in 1985 (ACNSAS D000003, vol. 1) © The Archives of the National Council for the Research of the Archives of Securitate. See Iuliana Cindrea-Nagy, 'Photographs of confiscated religious materials smuggled into Romania', http://hiddengalleries.eu/digitalarchive/s/en/item/215



Figure 6. Photograph taken during a raid of pastor József Németh's hidden house church on September 26th, 1972 (ÁBTL 3.1.9. V-160122) © Historical Archives of the Hungarian State Security (see Kinga Povedák, 'Crime scene photographs of a raid of a hidden house church Budapest', http://hiddengalleries.eu/digitalarchive/s/en/item/6

An image from the same secret police photo shoot appeared five years later in *Tinerimea Moldovei*, the magazine of *komsomol*, the youth division of the communist party (see figure 8), alongside a dramatized account of the dangerous and subversive activities of the Inochentist sect. The case file from which this image was taken contains a compilation of images from a number of other cases involving members of the Inochentist 'sect', which appear to have been compiled especially for use in publications. Several other images from this collection appear in a series of articles in Moldavian newspapers from the late 1950s and 1960s. The creation and selection of serviceable images of religious life by secret police officers in this case reveals the close co-operation between the state security organs and their colleagues in the press as well as demonstrating that the production of images was guided as much by the need for powerful images for public consumption as the need for evidence in criminal proceedings.

The article in *Tinerimea Moldovei* and many others like it, were produced during the anti-religious campaign launched by Khrushchev at the height of the Cold war. Following the death of Stalin in 1953, there was a relative period of calm with many prisoners, including religious leaders, released from the Gulag in amnesties. Between 1958 and 1964, however, in response to a perceived rise in the activity of religious groups, Khrushchev initiated an campaign designed to replace the mass repression of the past with a return to the policies of the 1930s (Chumachenko, 2002, 193). In part to mark a clear break with the Stalinist era, he returned to the importance of 'scientific atheism' in the construction of a modern communist future (Kelly, 2016, 190). The new campaign had two strands, the first was to create of a clear distinction between registered congregations, which would be offered concessions, whilst cracking down on the religious underground or any groups that were refused official registration; the second strand involved prioritising repression of clergy and preachers in an attempt to isolate them from society, whilst also persuading believers through education led by trained cadres and the media in order to persuade the populace to embrace atheism (Baran, 2014, 70-71; see also

Grossman, 1972). Khrushchev's campaign in practice, however, heralded a return to the kind of 'vulgar rhetoric' of earlier decades with religious leaders portrayed as charlatans and murderers who abused and embezzled money from gullible believers who in turn were invariably shown as vulnerable and miserable people (Kelly, 2016, 191). As a result, this period resulted in the production of a wealth of extremely powerful images of clandestine religion for use in atheist education and propaganda materials. Film played an important role in this new propaganda campaign and, as was the case with print media, we find that the secret police played an important role in the production of anti-religious films.

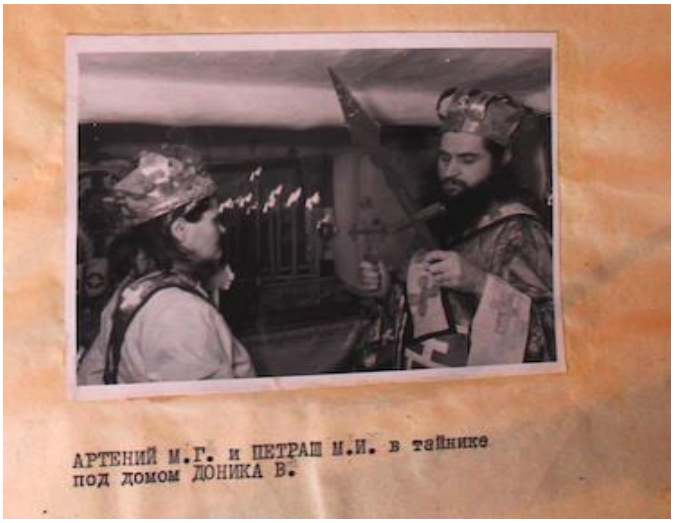


Figure 7. Photograph from a KGB case file of Mihail Georgievich Arteni and Maria Ivanovna Petraș seemingly captured in the middle of a ritual. Caption reads: "M. G. Arteni and M. I. Petrash in the hideout under V. Domnika's house" **(**ASISRM-KGB, 023262, pp.192-194) © Archive of the Service for Information and Security Services of the Republic of Moldova, former KGB.



Figure 8. Photograph of Mihail Georgievich Arteni and Maria Ivanovna Petraș dressed in ritual vestments from the communist youth magazine *Tinerimea Moldovei* published in 1959. The caption reads "Maria Petrash (Mother) and Mihail Arteni (Father) in the hideout in the village of Dakhnovich, Kotovsk region."

Unmasking Religion on Film

The literature of the Khruschev anti-religious campaign, especially reports on the so-called 'sectarians' such as Pentecostals, Baptists and Evangelicals (see Dobson, 2014), Jehovah's Witnesses (see Baran, 2014, 73) and Inochentists (Kapaló, 2019, 229-241), featured monstrous tales of child abduction, child murder and forced starvation. In Soviet Moldavia, the most sensationalist elements from historical cases from the Stalinist-era trials of the 1940s and early 50s were revived and republished in this period. The stereotypes and images produced in this period became the dominant images of the religious underground in Soviet Moldavia up to the end of communism.

Propaganda materials produced during this campaign were specially tailored to meet local needs (Baran, 2014, 72) and in Soviet Moldavia there was a marked increase in the number of publications aimed at Inochentists, an Orthodox dissent movement originating in the region and very active in the republic (see Kapaló, 2019). The anti-Inochentist propaganda of the period, both in print and on film, staged the anti-sectarian struggle as a dramatic clash between the forces of darkness and the forces of light, every bit as dualist as the sectarian theology it aimed to discredit. Unlike earlier coverage of religious questions that had been criticised as having been 'too abstract, theoretical, and disconnected from local conditions' (Baran, 2011, 163), the press and newsreel coverage of Inochentism that appeared in the late 1950s and 1960s, gave the names of protagonists, identifies precise locations and are rich with local cultural references. From the spring of 1958 onward a string of propaganda publications appeared including newpaper articles in the main daily and weekly Russian and Moldovan language papers, including the article in *Tinerimea Moldovei* discussed above, a special volume dedicated mainly to Inochentism and Jehovah Witnesses entitled *Preachers of Obscurantism* by Aleksandrov (1958), a special sourcebook for teachers of atheism entitled *Materials for Teachers of Atheism* which included testimonials from ex-Inochentists (Karpunina and Sibiriakov, 1959) and finally, to ensure that the message about the dangers of Inochentism reached the widest possible audience, a documentary newsreel film was also produced in 1959 by Moldova Film entitled *Apostles without Masks*.

The film features a number of religious groups but is structured around a central interview with a leader of the Archangelist branch of the Inochentist 'sect', Alexandru Culeac, who had been released from the Gulag in 1958 having served a 10-year sentence. In a series of images and brief narratives, the film shows the darkness, deceit and danger of the religious underground contrasted with the light, progress and hope of Soviet atheist society. Opening with a car diving along a country road, which suddenly stops when the driver sees a woman lying by the side of the road sobbing uncontrollably. Two men get out of the car and try to console the young peasant woman (see figure 9). The film narrator explains the scene:

> Maria Covalciuc was a sectarian who was travelling and collecting donations. The leaders of the sect stoned this woman because she did not collect enough money. She managed to remain alive by fleeing from the fanatics. It seems unbelievable that in our country where people are free of religious superstitions there are still hideouts of obscurantism (*Apostles without Masks*, 1959).



Figure 9. Still from the 1959 Moldova Film production *Apostles without Masks* showing Maria Covalciuc recounting her escape from the clutches of the Inochentist 'sect'.

In a series of vignettes, the film goes on to show an illegal hidden Orthodox church where the lazy priest deceives his congregation by playing a recording of the liturgy from behind a wall while he does nothing but collect piles of money; visual materials created by Inochentists, who cut up images of Jesus and the saints adding the faces of their own leaders in order to deceive potential converts; the corpses of dead Inochentists who were supposedly starved to death though enforced fasting (see Kapaló, 2019, 232-34) and contrasts this with the heroism of those that defended the Soviet Union during the Great Patriotic War; images of a baby sacrificed by his Inochentist parents and then worshiped as a saint; and finally the film shows the hidden religious materials, watches and cash horded by Jehovah's Witnesses, demonstrating how their 'religious' activities in reality were part of the black market economy.

Soon after the film appeared in April 1959, an article in the magazine *Sovetskaya Kultura*, Soviet Culture, described for the reader in vivid language the essence of the film.

> On the screen are stunning shots: sectarian hiding places 'death rooms', tortured corpses of men, women, children ... fierce hatred of the Soviet system, deception, lies, shameless extortion, violence, fanaticism – these are the true characteristics of the criminal 'Lives of the Saints' of the Inochentist sect. All this, of course, kept secret from the rank and file of the sectarians. Anyone who intentionally or unintentionally penetrated the inner sanctum of the life 'Archangel' and his entourage is immediately sentenced to death! (Shvedov, 1959)

This story of deceit, violence and extortion 'might seem to run contrary to the spirit of de-Stalinization' (Dobson, 2014, 241) that was meant to be guided by science and legality. As Dobson notes, however, the anti-religious campaign initiated by Khrushchev also attempted to revive the revolutionary spirit, targeting the backwardness of the peasantry in a concerted push to bring progress and modernity to all segments of Soviet society. As part of this effort

to ‘consolidate Soviet values’, the propagandists, journalist and filmmakers, who were enjoying relative freedom of expression in this period (Shaw, 2002, 9; see also Woll, 1999), produced a powerful dichotomy between the ‘decent’, ‘rational’ and ‘disciplined’ citizen and the ‘depraved’, ‘hysterical’, ‘irrational’ and ‘savage’ sectarian (Dobson, 2014, 241). The contrast between darkness and light seen on screen is illustrated throughout with materials sourced from the same secret police case file as those used in the print publications of the time (see figure 10).



Figure 10. Still from the 1959 Moldova Film production *Apostles without Masks* showing the entrance to an Inochentist hideout. This image, along with several others in the film, is taken from KGB file ASISRM-KGB 023262 © Archive of the Service for Information and Security of the Republic of Moldova, former KGB.

The apparent involvement of the KGB in *Apostles without Masks* is eclipsed by the role the KGB played in another film from the period, which also purported to ‘unmask’ an Orthodox dissent movement, but this time in Cherkasy region of Ukraine. *The End of Spider* centres on a public show trial of Father Mitrofan and was released after the arrest of his community in 1958. During the course of her research on the KGB case file of father Mitrofan, Tatiana Vagramenko discovered that a series of what appeared to be surveillance photographs included in the file were in fact taken during the filming of *The End of Spider* (see figure 11). The entire film was created in close collaboration with the KGB with the case file even including several drafts of Father Mitrofan’s self-denunciation speech made during his trial. As Vagramenko, reveals, the film maker, Rafail Nakhmanovich, was hired by the KGB to make this film and received the script before Mitrofan had even been arrested and charged. As Vagramenko notes ‘the film (as well as the show trial) becomes an extension of a secret police file. And at the same time the KGB file used the images from the film as proof of Mitrofan’s criminal activity’ (Vagramenko, 2019). The methods used by the secret police in the production of *The End of Spider* seemed to ignore altogether Khrushchev’s promise to uphold ‘socialist legality’ (Dobson, 2014, 241).

By the 1950s, film had developed into a ‘mass weapon of propaganda’ (Taylor, 1999, vii) in the Soviet Union but relatively little has been written about anti-religious ‘unplayed’ film, as documentary films were known. Anti-religious, and specifically anti-sectarian, films of this kind were not rare, however, as the

1961 film *Clouds over Borskoe* (Moscow: Mosfilm) discussed by Dobson (Dobson, 2014, 244-45) demonstrate, and neither were they all as unequivocal in their condemnation of religion. There is no sign in films such as *Apostles without Masks* or *The End of Spider*, however, of the cultural thaw that may be detected in other areas of Soviet cinema in the 1950s (see Shaw, 2002, 9). 'Unplayed film', as Roberts relates, can be defined by its function, which was to contribute to the creation of Soviet society by combatting '"perceived or projected" constant threats without and crisis within' (Roberts 1999, 4).

The audience effectiveness or the power to change attitudes of such films is difficult to assert or gather empirical evidence about (Roberts, 1999, 5). Soviet ideologists, including Lenin himself, drew a distinction between propaganda, which was comprised of many ideas presented to one or a few viewers and *agitatsiia*, which was designed to present one or a few ideas to a wide, mass audience (Roberts, 1999, 15). Films such as *Apostles without Masks* and *The End of Spider* clearly fitted this second category – they are simple and direct and, at least in part scripted by the KGB and their case files. As Roberts explains (1999, 140), ordinary Soviet citizens would be exposed to this kind of newsreel short film far more than the art or fiction films for which early Soviet cinema is famous in the West. Cultural hegemony and agenda setting could certainly be achieved far more readily through the newsreel-style propaganda film (Roberts, 1999, 149).



Figure 11. Still photographs of Father Mitrofan with his followers in his KGB case file. The images are stills from the film *The End of Spider* © State Archive Branch of the Security Services of Ukraine. See Tatiana Vagramenko, Secret Police Photographs of Ionnite Community, Ukraine', http://hiddengalleries.eu/digitalarchive/s/en/item/161

As Dobson outlines (2014, 259; see also Kapaló, 2019, 222), the anti-religious campaigns of the Khrushchev-era, due to their disturbing sensationalism and powerful imagery, which were sometimes derived directly from the texts, photographs and footage of secret police operations, and their attention to local cultural context, which made them all the more believable and impactful, have left extremely negative stereotypes of the religious other in post-Soviet and post-communist societies. In the case of the Inochentists, the main target of *Apostles without Masks*, the far-fetched and unsubstantiated stories and crude stereotypes that filled propaganda materials continue to shape popular perception of the community today. This is despite the break with the communist past and the rehabilitation of many of those convicted through judicial review in later decades under communism or in the post-communist-era.

Conclusion

Research on religion in and through the secret police archives has focused on the texts of the secret police in a search for historical truth and justice. This work has been heavily influenced by transitional justice projects and memory politics with the archives becoming embroiled in the political controversies and culture wars attempting to define the future of post-communist societies as well as the truth of the past. The Hidden Galleries project, by shifting attention to the material and visual aspects of religion in the holdings of the archives, aims to open new areas of enquiry. On the one hand, these relatively overlooked materials can offer us insights into the lived reality of religious lives during communism, whilst at the same time addressing the significance of the cultural or sacred patrimony of stolen images and artefacts for descendent communities today. On the other hand, the images, graphics and films produced by the secret police represent important sources for us to understand how religion was constructed, staged and visualised by the Soviet and communist satellite regimes for popular consumption. Secret police operations launched during Khrushchev's anti-religious campaign of late 1950s and 1960s, produced enduring images and stereotypes that haunt the popular imagination thirty years after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the fall of communism.

Access to state security files in an increasing number of countries over the past two decades has enabled scholars to engage in research that is starting to reveal the complex role that the creation, curation and publication of visual materials on religion by the Soviet-era secret police played in the construction of knowledge about religion during the Cold War. These materials give us cause for reflection on the significance of the performative act of revealing that which was hidden twice over – firstly by clandestine religious groups and then by the secret police. The secret police materials and propaganda publications and films discussed in this article, demonstrate that representations of the religious underground and clandestinity were drawn directly from, and were sometimes generated through, secret police operations. They also illustrate how the sometimes very real secrecy practices of religious communities were made to 'perform' by the secret police who captured on camera the act of revealing, unmasking, exposing and uncovering.

By drawing attention to the visual presence of religion in the archives we also gain a new lens through which to view the complex question of the enduring and paradoxical power of the secret police archives in post-communism (Vățulescu, 2010, 12)**.** Photographic images, as Edwards (2001, 7) reminds us, defy simple 'decoding' in the pursuit of revealing the truth of an event. Photographic meaning is generated through complex intersections, as both 'a confrontation with the past and as an active and constituent part of the present' - the multivalency of images, therefore, results in a 'raw' potentiality. The hyper-theatrical images and footage that were central to the secret police's representational practices and that were intended to 'present some closure' (Edwards, 2001, 6) or create an indelible mark on reality, instead contain the potential for the destabilization of the archive and its regime(s) of truth. In his study of photographs of the 1956 Revolution in the Archives of the Hungarian State Security, Rolf Müller (2006, 196) observes that 'in any given historical context the function of the photograph can change, new layers of meaning build up, which are able to influence human lives'. The photographic materials in secret police files, just like the texts amongst which they sit, were placed there with the intention of producing knowledge about the groups represented in order to incriminate them and exercise power over them. As Susan Sontag famously asserted, however, the camera record both 'incriminates' and 'justifies' (Sontag, 1977) and as such all photographic images have a dual identity; the images in the secret police archives, and the film footage created during anti-religious operations, exemplify this point as they were created, presented and preserved as evidence of the criminal and dangerous character of clandestine religious groups, and yet they also stand testimony to the agency and creativity of religious communities during communism.

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