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Introduction: Reframing the Religious Underground

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Abstract

In this extended introduction, the editors of this volume explore the contours of the emerging field of research on the religious underground and secret police archives. The introduction addresses a number of key concepts that frame this edited collection, including an exploration of the formation of the religious underground and its meaning in the Cold War, the significance of the secret police and their role in anti-religious operations. Following this, the introduction addresses the politics, ethics and uses of secret police archives in post-communism as well as introducing emerging methodological approaches to the archives. Drawing on insights from the case studies included in the volume, the editors suggest important areas of future research in the field.

As one of the primary instruments of political control and social change both in the Soviet Union and in the satellite states in Eastern Europe, the secret police played a pivotal role in most, if not all, anti-religious operations launched during the communist period. They did so with specially trained, dedicated units established to counter the activities of enemies labelled as "clerical reactionary forces", "spies" or "saboteurs" and to prevent the pernicious influence on socialist society of superstition, religious charlatanry and economic exploitation; all of which were associated with the activities of the so-called religious underground. Following the establishment of Soviet power, and in close collaboration with the relevant government ministries, commissions and agencies, the secret police were charged with maintaining the social order, which entailed identifying, surveilling and infiltrating religious communities in order to undermine, eliminate or control them from within. As Soviet influence and domination extended into Central and Eastern Europe following the Second World War, anti-religious and anti-sect policies were adopted and enacted - in some cases wholesale, in others only piecemeal - by the new subject regimes and their own recently formed secret police forces.

In the context of the Cold War, the fate of religious leaders, Church institutions and ordinary believers became a cause célèbre of the West, where society was mobilised in the name of the defence of religion against atheism and an image was projected of defiant priests and pastors engaged in a serious game of cat and mouse with the secret police. This image of a religious underground, which was based on the testimonies and reports of religious dissidents and émigrés, was promoted by Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty that claimed to be able to report on the realities behind the Iron Curtain but were themselves of course heavily biased by Western perceptions of what life must have been like there (Kasprzak 2004). 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 much more complex lived reality in which violent persecution and repression at the hands of the secret police formed only a part. Accommodation, compromise and collaboration were also central to this relationship. The religious communities that came to be referred to as the religious underground, however, were not devoid of agency; they were able to deploy creative means not only of avoiding arrest, foiling agents and uncover informers but also to establish resilient, viable and meaningful lifeworlds beyond the strictures and confines of officially prescribed lives in the factory or on the collective farm.

Following the fall of the communist regimes in the region, scholars have gained a considerable, if also extremely problematic, new resource for the study of religions. In many states, the communist secret police left behind a vast archival collection that meticulously catalogued the complexity of their information gathering and repressive operations from brutal mass deportations, undercover operations and interrogations, to the subtle manipulations and creative fabrications of secret agents. The archives of the secret police have been at the heart of an urgent re-examination of the legacy of communism aimed at "clarifying the past, uncovering the truth, and furthering the search for justice" (Apor et al. 2017, 1). The truth and justice projects pursued through the archives have proven highly contentious, exacerbating the particular ethical and epistemological challenges that confront scholars of religions working with secret police materials. This volume engages the incontestable abundance and incontrovertible complexity of secret police archival documents with the aim of fostering new methodological approaches and comparative research on the complex intersection of religion and state security in the communist and post-communist context. The authors included in this volume recognise, however, that the secret police archives, especially when approached as stand-alone sources, have their limits. Several authors in this volume are at the forefront of

endeavours to engage the archives in dialogue with other sources and their contributions draw on the archives of religious communities, contemporary testimonies and oral historical interviews. In addition to contributing to our understanding of the history of Church-state relations, of communist-era state security, and indeed of religion under communism in general, this volume also aims to inform our understanding of the role of memory politics in post-communist societies, questions of democratic rights and freedoms of minority groups, the roots and legacy of activism and dissent in the region and the very question of the value and status of truth and trust in contemporary society.

Comparative endeavours in relation to the varied experiences of communism in Eastern and Central Europe are relatively rare, and especially with regards to religion under communism (one notable exception is Ramet 1998), as most scholarship has, as Blaive (2018, 1) points out, tended to emphasise national exceptionalism over "a systematic approach to understanding communism as an international social phenomenon."

The diversity of the religious field in Central and Eastern Europe, with its mix of Catholic and Orthodox majority states, significant Protestant communities and its bewildering array of religious minorities and ethno-religious groups, has also mitigated against taking a regional approach in favour of pursuing research projects based on confessional particularity. Whilst regional studies of Orthodoxy, Protestant Churches or the Catholic Church under communism have explored the particular circumstances of their encounter with hostile communist regimes (see for example Kosicki 2016; Leustean 2009; Michel 1991; Ramet ed. 1988, 1990, 1992), this volume, rather than drawing a distinction along confessional lines, approaches the diversity of religious activity targeted by the state through the lens of the 'religious underground', a label that was used both by the communist secret police and by those resisting them. This term, which has both a literal and a metaphorical meaning, came to refer to all unregistered or legally proscribed religious communities that were the target of the secret police from the earliest days following the Bolshevik Revolution until well into the 1980s. We have drawn together studies from both the Soviet Union (Ukraine, Moldova and Lithuania) and a number of satellite communist countries (Hungary, Romania, Czechoslovakia, and Poland) as well as Yugoslavia) in order to highlight the commonalities and divergent practices through time of the secret police in their anti-religious operations and to explore the various ways in which religious communities responded to them. The studies collected here deal mainly with Christian Churches and communities in the European territories of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe

(with the notable exception of Chapter 8 by Pranskevičiūtė-Amoson who explores the secret police campaign against Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) in Lithuania).

Religious discrimination, ranging from the bureaucratic to the violent and genocidal, has been an integral part of human history up to the present day, even in democratic societies and the targeting of religious communities by state security agencies in the twentieth century was by no means limited to the communist world. Looking beyond Eastern Europe there are many obvious opportunities for comparative analysis and reflection. In the US, the FBI has in the course of the twentieth century targeted numerous religious groups employing many of the techniques we associate with communist dictatorships including mass surveillance and agent infiltration operations, propaganda campaigns based on fabricated evidence, and the widespread interpretation of religious beliefs as political dissent, criminal behaviour and, most recently, terrorism (Johnson and Weitzman 2017, 2). The processes by which, under the guidance and name of J. Edgar Hoover, internal enemies were produced by casting suspicion on progressive, pacifist and left-leaning religious groups resulted in the FBI policing "the borders between true and false religion" (Johnson and Weitzman 2017, 3) using means similar to those deployed by the KGB, which had been tasked with maintaining another religious boundary, this time between scientific atheism and the backward superstition and reactionary clericalism of religious people and institutions. In fact, the context of the Cold War, which in the West was frequently characterised as a crusade to defend religion, offers an important lens through which to view the securitisation of religion in diverse times and settings.

The introduction to this volume was written in the spring of 2020 in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic whilst most of the world was in so-called "lock-down." The quarantine under which large portions of the population of Europe and the wider world found ourselves included the introduction of new policing measures, surveillance by drones, road checks, monitoring of all public spaces and gatherings as well as the closure of most businesses. Places of worship were ordered to shut in a move that in post-communist Eastern Europe carried echoes from former times of the forced closure of churches during the communist era. Reports of neighbours spying on and informing on each other became widespread, as was the case also with police inspections of houses and gardens, and even the contents of the grocery shopping of those suspected of contravening the new regulations. The state and the media mobilised public support to prevent public health measures from being sabotaged by the dangerous actions of irresponsible citizens. In short, we witnessed how the role of the police could swiftly change

in times of crisis and how the discursive strategies of the state could alter our perceptions of our everyday activities, of our friends, neighbours and colleagues. What a few short weeks earlier would have appeared implausible or ridiculous became a concrete and for some a painful lived reality. The opportunities for societal self-reflection at this juncture are enormous; How and why are we motivated to comply or resist when our freedoms are constrained? How resilient are we when confronted with restrictions that change fundamentally the pattern of our days and the rhythm of our lives? How do we respond to unpalatable "facts" and what motivates us to seek alternative truths to comfort ourselves or to shape our resistance?

Religious Resistance and the Formation of the Underground

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. Its meaning, however, expanded to signify the many religious practices that were extralegal, 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 the number of unregistered groups (Fletcher 1970, 364; see also Lisnic, Chapter 1, this volume). 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 are eradicated the challenge of day-to-day control "must be overcome by the most laborious process of investigation and liquidation." Fletcher, in his slightly simplistic characterisation 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, in addition to the powerful religious institutions and figureheads that the regime had initially targeted and desired to topple, a whole raft of new innovative manifestations of religion became the target of the secret police and state propaganda. The religious underground, as Vagramenko elucidates (Chapter 2 this volume) "was the kind of discourse the Soviet secret police harboured and caused to function as true" through both the generation of knowledge and the direct exercise of repressive actions.

By placing the notion of the religious underground at the centre of focus of this volume, we aim to bring more sharply into focus the dialogical process that gave birth to a range of grassroots activities, local practices and lived religious lifeworlds that were both the target and the product of diverse repressive operations. As Glennys Young has highlighted in relation to the study of religion and politics in the Soviet Union, which we contend holds true for the other communist societies of Central and Eastern Europe, religion has been treated as "an object of Soviet political mobilization" (1997, 3) with little attention accorded to the ways in which religious agency shaped society, culture and politics. The varied and sometimes rich observations and representations of everyday religious life to be found in the archival documents of the secret police, which are central to the studies in the present volume, grant us the opportunity, notwithstanding their inherent problems, to explore questions that have heretofore been somewhat neglected.

Although we associate the religious underground with communist repression, it is important to note that covert religious communities predated both the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia and the communist takeover in Central and Eastern Europe. For centuries Orthodox dissenters in Tsarist Russia had been establishing secret networks and communities in isolated locations in order to avoid the attention of the authorities whilst in many states in the interwar and wartime periods, the policies pursued by nationalist and right-wing regimes aimed at homogenising nation states around the respective majority ethnic and religious identity produced their own local clandestine forms of religion. In this context, mainstream and majority religions often played a role in the repression of smaller and newer religious communities. In the 1930s and 40s, not only in the Soviet Union but across the region, arrest, detention in labour camps and deportation had become widespread means of dealing with banned religious groups and problematic leaders. By the time of the communist takeover in Romania for example, Old Calendarists, Inochentists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Adventists, and Baptists (see Cindrea-Nagy, Chapter 16, this volume) had developed tried and tested methods of avoiding detection, hiding their leaders or concealing their meetings in order to preserve their traditions (see also Kapaló 2019, 107-177). Likewise in Hungary, Jehovah's Witnesses, Nazarenes and Seventh day Adventists had suffered similar repression (see Petrás, Chapter 5, this volume) and developed their own clandestine practices. Religious difference and innovation in this period, perhaps like at no other time since the Thirty Years War, had become associated with enmity towards the state.

Communist repression of religion was of course different in one key respect, namely the committed goal to eradicate totally religious faith and practice from society. Nevertheless policies and strategies towards religion adapted over time, often for pragmatic reasons (Young 1997, 2). During the early years of Soviet power, policies towards religion were directed mainly at separating Church and state. The Separation Decree of 1918 seemed to level the religious field by granting equal legal recognition for citizens to profess any faith or none (Wanner 2007, 36) and this was followed by moves to reduce the economic power of the Orthodox Church and its control over education. Following the Thirteenth Party Congress in 1924, however, antireligious policy changed in favour of propaganda as the main tool including public debates, exhibitions, lectures and publications (Wanner 2007, 39), although this went hand in hand with "rough methods" including physical attacks on Church property, clergy and laity (Young 1997, 3). Newspapers and journals such as *Bezbozhnik* (Godless) and *Antireligioznik* (Antireligious), dedicated to the publication of anti-religious and anti-sect propaganda were published and supported by the League of Militant Atheists, recruited to campaign and mobilise the people against religious institutions. The anti-religious campaigns of the 1920s, which were intended to liberate people from the grip of irrational belief and superstition were, however, a relative failure, especially in the countryside (Wynot 2004, 97-99).

Metropolitan Sergei's Declaration of Loyalty signed in 1927 marked a watershed in relations between the Soviet state and the Russian Orthodox believers. From this point forward, diverse groups that refused to accept the compromise or who were denied official recognition coalesced into a diffuse religious underground under the umbrella name of the True Orthodox Church (see Vagramenko, Chapter 2, this volume). 1929 saw the passage of new wide-ranging laws to regulate religion, including the Law on Religious Associations, which became "the principal normative source of Soviet restriction on churches" (Boiter 1987, 109). Amendments to the Constitution, effectively confiscated all Church property and turned it over to local authorities as well as criminalising unregistered religious communities and public evangelism and prohibiting all forms of religious education and severely restricted publishing activities (Wanner 2004, 48-49). These changes heralded in a much harsher period of "threefold secularization" designed to eliminate the role of religion in social, moral and political life that consisted of dismantling the Orthodox Church and its authority, removing religion from the public sphere and the propagation of an alternative Marxist materialist ideology to replace religious beliefs (Wanner 2007, 52). In addition to the use of propaganda and direct punitive

action against individuals, including deportations and executions, the state also began to close and destroy places of worship. Starting with the Russian Orthodox Church but soon extending to other denominations and religions, thousands of churches and monasteries were closed and their buildings and land appropriated by the state. Monasteries were considered especially dangerous as places offering shelter to the "enemies of the people" (see Vasile, Chapter 13, this volume). By 1929, all monastic institutions in Russia had been closed producing the widespread phenomenon of vagrant ex-monastics who formed their own hidden communities and networks in both rural and urban settings (Wynot 2004).

Besides the direct mass repression of the Orthodox Church, the major upheavals of collectivisation and grain requisitioning in the countryside contributed to an upswing in popular religious agency and apocalyptic expectation amongst the peasantry at large (see Viola 1990; Smith 2006) that bolstered membership of a whole range of emergent clandestine forms of religious community and practice. As Vagramenko explores (Chapter 2, this volume), the secret police referred to these prophetically and eschatologically inspired movements under diverse names including "Red-dragonists" or "the ecclesiastic-monarchist underground" amongst others.

The religious underground also expanded to include another important category of believer, the so-called sectarians. Despite the preferential treatment that many sectarian groups received in the first few years following the Bolshevik takeover when efforts were made to mobilise them in the class struggle (see Lisnic, Chapter 1, this volume), by 1923 the Communist Party of Ukraine had noticed that controlling sectarians was significantly more difficult than controlling the centralised and hierarchical Orthodox Church (Wanner 2007, 39; see Pintulescu Chapter 4 and Petrás Chapter 5 this volume). From the mid-1920s, groups such as the Seventh Day Adventists, Baptists, Evangelicals, Pentecostals, Nazarenes and Jehovah's Witnesses were also denied official recognition. These unregistered religious groups were, by their nature, difficult to keep track of and control (Baran 2014, 46); many of them had never been officially recognised or registered in the first place and hence there were no public records pertaining to them. Certain sectarian groups were considered especially dangerous because of their international connections and pacifist teachings, a stance that resulted in the Jehovah's Witnesses, especially, being the target of some of the most severe of repressive operations targeted at any group (see Cașu, Chapter 6 and Petrás, Chapter 5, this volume).

With the advent of the Second World War, however, Stalin was forced to reconsider his attitude towards the Russian Orthodox Church as he needed to strengthen "emotional loyalty to the state" amongst the populace (Dragadze 1993, 153). The new attitude culminated in the famous meeting between Stalin and the Bishops of the Orthodox Church that took place on 4 September 1943 at which an understanding was reached that normalised Church-state relations and allowed the Church to conduct normal activities. In Russia, at least for a time, Orthodox worshippers could once again attend church, perform services at home and take part in religious processions. Islam, which had similarly been suppressed before the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union out of fear of pan-Islamic resistance, was also officially tolerated. By contrast, the so-called sectarians fared very badly in the immediate post-war period (Chumachenko 2002, 190).

All the states that fell under Soviet hegemony after World War II adopted this Stalinist model of Church-state relations where separation, in effect, came to mean total control, subordination and surveillance (see Petrás, Chapter 5, and Köbel, Chapter 3, this volume). In the 1940s and 50s, in the newly acquired or reoccupied lands of the Western Soviet Union and in the new satellite states, widespread closures of monastic institutions and nationalisation of their property and land took place. The dissolution of monasteries gave birth to the widespread phenomenon in these countries too of forms of secret monasticism and the establishment of home-based communities of ex-monks and nuns witnessed earlier in Soviet lands (see Hesz Chapter 10, this volume; Kapaló, Chapter 12, this volume). In Moldova, the closure of all but one monastery in the republic in the period from 1958 to 1965 had the unforeseen consequence of breathing new life into already existing underground religious dissent movements. The mass arrest of Greek Catholic clergy in 1944-45 and the forced unification of the Church in Soviet Ukraine with the Russian Orthodox Church in 1946 was followed a few years later in 1948 in Romania and in 1950 in Czechoslovakia with the closure of their Greek Catholic diocese, in effect producing some of the largest catacomb churches and communities in the region.

Under these conditions, in order to secure the basic right to operate, Churches across the region were forced to make certain compromises with the state along the lines of Metropolitan Sergii's Declaration of Loyalty. Legal acknowledgment was granted in exchange for loyalty but as Köbel notes these "were technically contracts but served as political accords. Complete loyalty and political support were demanded from the religious leadership in exchange for their legality" (Chapter 3, this volume). The freedom to operate was severely curtailed and in relation to these concessions, as Köbel notes (Chapter 3, this volume), "every Church had an

opposing, nonconformist layer." The nonconformists could be found in a wide variety of forms. In the Soviet Union, the attack on the Orthodox Church produced numerous and widespread "reactive movements" such as those described by Vagramenko (Chapter 2, this volume), whilst in communist satellite states there were, for example, problematic and outspoken critics amongst the clergy in the Protestant Church in the Czech Republic (Matějka, Chapter 9, this volume) and "clerical nonconformists" in the Catholic Church in Hungary who refused to obey their bishops (Köbel, Chapter 3, this volume). In Romania, such non-conformist factions and tendencies were labelled "anarchist groups" by the state (see Pintulescu, Chapter 4, this volume). In some cases, dissent within officially recognised Churches led to actual splits with nonconformists forming their own underground organisations as happened with the Seventh Day Adventist Church in both the Soviet Union and Hungary (Köbel, Chapter 3, this volume) and the Pentecostals in Hungary (Povedák, Chapter 11, this volume).

Therefore, besides the formation of genuine catacomb groups, many of those who opted to remain within the officially recognised structures of legally operating Churches continued to conduct activities that were no-longer permitted according to new secular laws. Many forms of pastoral activity such as youth and community work, and catechism classes, as well as the distribution of spiritual literature aimed at transmitting Christian values were now forbidden (Fejérdy et al. 2018, 446) forcing leaders, teachers and youth workers into clandestine forms of practice and secret methods of communication (see Hesz, Chapter 10, this volume). We should add to this summary of groups that comprised the religious underground, the small number of alternative, non-Christian movements that were active during the final decades of communism, amongst which were Tibetan Buddhist groups, various Pagan movements and Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), all of which were closely connected to an existing broader "unofficial cultural field" that was receptive to alternative religiosities and spiritualities (see Pranskevičiūtė-Amoson Chapter 8, this volume).

The Soviet satellite states also later mirrored the policies and actions of the Soviet Union with regard to the so-called sects of protestant origin. In the Hungarian context, as Köbel notes from an Office of Church Affairs report, they were considered "more dangerous than the historical Churches, because they don't have a definitive dogma but instead talk about whatever they want to" (Chapter 3, this volume) whereas in Poland as they were associated with the German minority, they were dispossessed and marginalised as "anti-Polish" elements (Flemming 2009, 118-19). Despite the appearance of a more lenient approach to religious minority groups, even

after its break with the rest of the communist bloc in 1948, Yugoslavia also viewed sectarian groups such as the Nazarenes and the Seventh Day Adventists as "anti-communist and disloyal". They were seen as potential supporters of foreign intervention due to their international networks in the West and as a danger to the state due to their pacifism, which directly challenged a central doctrine of Yugoslav communism which considered all citizens as defenders of the state (Djurić Milovanović Chapter 14, this volume).

A further distinct aspect of the religious life of the underground took shape amongst believers who found themselves in the labour camps, prisons and penal settlements. Periods of time in detention, which could last years or even decades, gave birth to creative expressions of spirituality which as Petrás (Chapter 5, this volume) illustrates with regards to Jehovah's Witnesses in Hungary resulted in a devotional life "enriched and deepened by the persecution." Time spent in labour camps and in exile also presented the possibility for witnessing and proselytising amongst fellow prisoners and other exile communities, thus facilitating the spread of religious communities to far flung places. The religious underground, therefore, was characterised by an extremely diverse set of actors, communities and practices, the lived experience of which was shaped by state security operations, surveillance and imprisonment. In the broadest sense, therefore, authors in this volume use the term religious underground to refer to religious communities, agencies and activities that evolved to avoid detection and control.

The idea that underground religious activities, diverse as they were, constituted genuine resistance to communism has been questioned by some as an "idea made up by the regime" (Fejérdy et al. 2018, 445). Indeed, as Vagramenko argues (Chapter 2, this volume), the secret police, through their practices of documentation, 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 (see Pintilescu, Chapter 4, this volume) 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 emphasises the significance of faith as opposed to dissent in discourses of religious agency during the communist era 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).

As chapters in this volume demonstrate, the responses of diverse religious groups to repression and control were as radically different as the groups themselves. From the outpourings of popular Marian devotion amongst Catholics in Poland, discussed by Krzywosz in Chapter 7, and the use of blessed food as a spiritual weapon against the regime, outlined by Kapaló in Chapter 12, to clandestine meetings in forests, meadows and baptisms on a public beach, described by Petrás in Chapter 5, religious agency and creativity took many forms, some spontaneous, others intricately planned and executed. As Pranskevičiūtė (Chapter 8, this volume) argues, in the context of aggressive anti-religious operations, the activity of groups such as Lithuanian Hare Krishnas, despite the fact that it did not "emerge as an open opposition to communist ideology" nevertheless constituted a form of resistance against the Soviet regime. As she points out, "almost every initiative of the believers eventuated in interference by the Soviet apparatus" (Pranskevičiūtė and Juras 2014, 4 cited in Pranskevičiūtė, Chapter 8, this volume). We should consider, therefore, these diverse responses as forms of resistance in so much as the concrete actions taken undermined or disrupted 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 also to shape this world. Whether viewed as a positive act of building faith, Christian or otherwise, the realisation of a socio-cultural alternative way of living or simply as a defence of tradition, the phenomenon of clandestine forms of religion reflected both conscious and unconscious forms of defiance, resilience and creative agency in differing measures and in this sense, we argue that religious resistance as witnessed in the underground activities of these groups should not be reduced to a mere construct of the regime nor to a simple unintended consequence but rather should be seen as a reflection of the complexity of life under communism (see Blaive 2019, 7) and of the worldview and agency of believers (see Baran 2014, 49), as well as an important object of research for scholars of religion.

Particular representations of the religious underground featured in the discourse of both sides during the Cold War; these representations were produced and projected by the secret police, as described above, whilst also being promoted and popularised by Western media and

Christian dissidents. Through the titles of memoirs such as that of Romanian pastor Richard Wurmbrand's *In God's Underground* and of organisations such as *Underground Evangelism*,[1] 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 powerfully propagated by Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty. The religious underground therefore represents a co-construction that -- it can be argued -- served an important function for both sides. This discursive construct, however, also points to a complex, multidimensional, material and tangible 'reality' that has become more visible in its diversity since the opening of the archives of the secret police. By approaching the problem of religious repression through the frame of the religious underground, rather than seeking to establish a stable concept or fixed category, we hope to encourage an interrogation of the boundaries between the regimes of truth operative during the Cold War and the lived realities of religious communities. In so doing, we highlight the "the borderline between collaboration and resistance, constructive criticism and subversion, culture and politics" (see Blaive 2019, 7) and encourage reflection on the moral dilemmas, pragmatic choices, emotional impulses and faithful actions of religious individuals and groups. There is enormous potential for further research on the alternative cultures, material and economic life, ritual practices, leadership and social organisation in the underground as studies in this volume hopefully demonstrate.

The Secret Police

We have used the expression 'secret police' in the title of this volume as a catch-all term. The nomenclature of the Soviet political police, and later that of the satellite states, presents a bewildering set of inaccessible names and acronyms. As Cristina Vățulescu (2010, 3) has noted, these included organ, agency, authority, service, section, commission, and administration. These are all terms that shrouded rather than revealed the nature of the activities the secret police carried out, which were in fact ones we much more readily associate with policing such as "surveillance, investigation, arrest and detention" (Vățulescu 2010, 3). In the Hungarian case, although numerous changes of name did not indicate a change in the methods of the secret police, nor indeed a change in their personnel; more often than not behind them lay a conscious political decision which might impact the future operations, power, and status

[1] 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.

of the secret police (Müller 2012, 9-10). Following Vățulescu's lead, we have selected the term secret police as the most appropriate because of the role that the "idea" of secrecy played in their activities and operations. The secret police were never truly 'secret' of course as everyone knew of their existence; they presented what Vățulescu has called a "visible spectacle of secrecy" or a "histrionic secrecy" (2010, 3). Anthropologist Katherine Verdery has also challenged the stereotype or assumption of the secret police's invisibility; she characterises 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 (see for example Krzywosz, Chapter 7, this volume) was designed to have a prophylactic effect, acting as a deterrent and constant reminder of the watchfulness of the state.

In both the early Soviet and satellite contexts, the secret police were the key weapon in the pursuit of revolutionary social change with newly established secret police forces in Eastern Europe, modelled on and under the close supervision of Soviet advisers. Indeed, control of the secret police by local communist parties, with Soviet help, was the critical means by which they could eventually take control of the government and the state. The degree to which these new security organs exercised freedom of action was determined, in part, by how secure and trustworthy Moscow perceived the communist leadership to be in each country (Verdery 2014, 8). Across the occupied states, the secret police were directly subordinated to the communist party rather than the government, with Soviet advisors and agents determining the structure, ideology and practical operational aims and methods of the newly established forces. In the German Democratic Republic (GDR), as in the Soviet Union, the Ministry of State Security and its secret police considered themselves "the sword and shield of the party", not defenders of the people or even of the state (Heidemeyer 2015, 10).

The brutal methods of the secret police were first employed in the interest of establishing the new ruling order and then in maintaining it. In the satellite countries, once the communist regimes had dealt with the immediate threat from the enemies of the past, including "fascist elements" and political figures from the previous regimes, they turned their attention to dealing with the future enemies of the new "democratic order." A statement in 1947 by a captain of the recently renamed and unified Hungarian secret police, the Államvédelmi Osztály (ÁVO), captures the significance of this change, "the difference lies in the shift in our priorities from

the past to the future, that in the first place we no longer have to track down the past political enemies, regardless of the seriousness of their crimes, but the prevention of the realisation of the aims of those attempting to destroy the democratic state order" (cited in Müller 2012, 23-24).

Amongst the categories of new social enemies to be targeted by the secret police were the so-called clerical reactionary forces as the manifesto of the Hungarian Workers' Party (MDP) openly declared that "clerical reaction is political reaction painted in the colour of religion, and thus the fight against it is political in nature" (Köbel Chapter 3, this volume). Religion was regarded by the communists as a façade or mask behind which political enemies were cloaked. From the late 1940s on, secret police agencies began to establish units dedicated to pursuing, surveilling and countering the activities of the clergy and Churches categorised as reactionary forces. In Soviet Moldavia, as Cașu describes (Chapter 6, this volume), in March 1946, when the MGB of the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic (MSSR) was created, as in other Soviet Republics, the special department dealing with religion was named department "O" and was responsible for operations against the clergy of legally registered religious denominations as well as anti-Soviet elements amongst adherents of sects, Jewish spiritual leaders and Zionists. In Hungary, following the creation of the Államvédelmi Osztály (ÁVO) in 1946, the 3rd Sub-department was dedicated to the surveillance of the Churches with its tasks described as "the gathering of information related to Churches, dissemination of information and prevention of the spying operations of Churches" (Müller 2012, 29). Such sub-departments at the central level, as was the case in Romania, were often mirrored at the regional level (Pintulescu 2018, 131).

Depending on context, the relative danger projected onto various religious groups differed but communities that refused to participate in social and political life, that rejected civic duties such as the military draft, or whose members refused to compromise in terms of their proselytising activities were considered high priority enemies. In rural contexts, the religious enemy was often assimilated with the principal class enemies in the countryside, the wealthy peasants or kulaks, who were targeted for opposing the collectivisation of agriculture or for resisting grain requisitioning. In Hungary, especially following the Hungarian Revolution in 1956 (Kiss et al. 2012, 38), and in Czechoslovakia (see Matějka, Chapter 9, this volume), the danger of so-called "clerical reaction", was first and foremost associated with the Catholic Church. Nevertheless, the category could be and was expanded to include also other Churches.

The Protestant Church in Czechoslovakia considered loyal by the regime until the late 1950s (see Matějka, Chapter 9, this volume), was later targeted as a reactionary force in society, as were the so-called dangerous sects across the region (see Petrás, Chapter 5, this volume). Indeed, terms such as "Clerical reaction" were extremely elastic and could be applied to any religious group depending on ideological or political need at any given time (see Kiss 2012, 38).

Once the communist regimes had established their hegemonic positions, the role and operational priorities of the secret police shifted away from revolutionary change to the maintenance of the new status quo. One aspect of this was policing the new legal basis of Church-state relations. Based on principles adopted in the Soviet Union, policy towards religion was designed to appear to separate religious institutions from the state but in effect also aimed to control them from within. This "hostile separation" model, gave legal guarantees of freedom of conscience and equal treatment for all recognised religious institutions whilst placing them under the supervision of state offices or councils of religious affairs. In tandem with these other government bodies, the secret police were tasked with achieving total control in the religious sphere (see Köbel, Chapter 3, this volume; Șincan, Chapter 15, this volume, and Djurić Milovanović Chapter 14, this volume).

The system introduced in the Soviet Union, and later in the communist satellite states, carried echoes of the strategies employed earlier in the Russian and Habsburg Empires (see Werth 2014). In Tsarist Russia, co-opting the Orthodox clergy to police itself, as well as wider society, was later employed rather effectively in some communist states. In Romania, Orthodox churchmen continued to police religious practice in line with the state's expectations, much as they had done in pre-communist times (see Vasile, Chapter 13, this volume). In order to secure near total reach in terms of information gathering and influencing the religious portions of the population, the regime recruited agents from amongst the clergy and leadership (as illustrated in Chapters by Krzywosz, Vasile, Cindrea-Nagy and Cașu in this volume); this practice was widespread, with collaborative priests' loyalty to the regime rewarded in various ways including lucrative leadership positions, career opportunities for family members, and places in university for their children.

The avowed desire to eliminate religion from society was balanced by a pragmatic realisation that in certain contexts religious actors and institutions that had the potential to be suitably

disciplined or had proven sufficiently tractable could be useful instruments in the pursuit of the regime's longer term strategic goals, particularly in the post-war arena of Cold War global politics. The Romanian Orthodox Church, as Vasile explains (Chapter 13, this volume), benefited from the state's suppression of the Greek Catholic Church in 1948, whereby more than one million believers were coerced into changing their denominational allegiance. This move "amounted to a successful but paradoxical proselytism carried out by a self-avowed atheistic regime" (Vasile Chapter 13, this volume) to the benefit of the majority Orthodox Church, which the state considered easier to bend to its will. Some majority or mainstream Churches in the region enjoyed unrivalled access to the higher echelons of the party, whilst dissenters were increasingly marginalised and repressed. Indeed, repression by the state might have been the result of simultaneous charges of anticommunist activity and alleged heretical practices (see Vasile, Chapter 13, this volume). This model of Church-state relations adopted across the region, as Köbel (Chapter 3, this volume) describes in the Hungarian context, facilitated a "flexible praxis" allowing the secret police to operate against individuals or groups at any given time based on low level orders and instructions, or "backstage legislation", rather than on the basis of comprehensive laws that theoretically would protect freedom of conscience and religious practice.

In the post-Stalinist era, the secret police transformed from a violent repressive force into a highly effective "preventive institution" (Verdery 2018, 285) based on fear and intimidation rather than the overt terror of the past. But as Blaive (2019, 2) has explained, fear was not only an instrument of "political submission" utilised by the regime, but also a dimension of the relationship between those in power and the population, since the authorities "feared their people too" and had to take account of the changing external context. Pressure generated by the activities of dissidents and international appeals by members of the religious underground to international bodies contributed significantly to the pressure that the communist leadership experienced to relax its anti-religious operations and grant new freedoms.

As a result, as Köbel (Chapter 3, this volume) demonstrates, the legal status of Churches and religious communities could and did change over time. This often came about due to "changed external political conditions", which in Hungary coincided with Hungarian membership in the United Nations, the signing of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights in 1975, and, in the final years of communism, the state's desire to curry economic or political favour with the West and other important international trading partners. On the whole, policies

towards religious groups from the late 1950s onwards balanced a range of factors, ensuring that the outward appearance of religious freedom was maintained whilst multiple forms of pressure were applied on institutions, clergy and believers.

Secret Police Operations

As the chapters in this volume demonstrate, the numerous shifts in state policy towards religious institutions and communities resulted in extremely diverse secret police operations. Whilst it would be impossible to capture the full scope of secret police operations employed against the religious underground, the chapters in this volume illustrate a range of operational methods and goals from their inception in the early Soviet context in 1920s Ukraine (Lisnic, Chapter 1), to the Stalinist-era mass repression from the 1930s to the early 1950s (Vagramenko and Cașu, Chapters 2 and 6 respectively) through the anti-religious campaigns of the Khrushchev-era (see Kapaló, Chapter 12 and Krzywosz, Chapter 7) right up to the closing decades of communism in 1970s Hungary (Povedák, Chapter 11, this volume) and 1980s Soviet Lithuania under the renewed anti-religious policies of Yuri Andropov, a former Chairman of the KGB (Pranskevičiūtė-Amonson, Chapter 8). The objectives of these diverse operations also varied tremendously, from the elimination of so-called enemies of the people and the "destruction of the prestige" of religious leaders to the suppression of local religious enthusiasm and the infiltration and manipulation of international networks and Churches. Although many studies exist on the organization, recruitment, operational methods and changing role of the secret police in various national contexts, the specific means by which these were applied or mobilised against the religious underground has remained understudied, particularly in a comparative frame.

As a number of the chapters in this volume demonstrate, the secret police's operational role combined the generation of information and the production of knowledge about the enemy with the implementation of policies designed to undermine, eliminate, or control their targets. These two distinct dimensions of their work were present from the very beginning of the institution. As Lisnic outlines (Chapter 1, this volume), in the early 1920s before the Cheka, the first Soviet secret police force, had built the capacity to generate information at the local level, the authorities relied on subordinate networks of County Departments of Secret Informers for their intelligence. As the secret police evolved, the information gathering and operational roles of the secret police were mutually dependent, "gathering information was shaped from the very beginning in order to produce evidence to legitimate future repressive measures" (Pintilescu,

Chapter 4, this volume). This involved the ascription of political or anti-social, and therefore criminal, meaning to religious practices and beliefs through a "rhetoric of unmasking" (Vățulescu 2010, 24) that applied to all classes of social enemy, not just religious ones. Stalinism, as Vățulescu describes it, propagated a way of looking, a "watchfulness", or an "omnipresent call for vigilance" (Křišťál 1985, 108 cited in Matějka, Chapter 9, this volume), that required a peeling back of "the surface of reality in expectation of the worst" (Vățulescu 2020). The secret police were the main instrument through which this compulsion to unmask hidden hostile elements in society was achieved.

Until the late 1920s, significant differences might have existed between how enemies were perceived, unmasked, and constructed depending on where they were being viewed. In the first few years after the Bolshevik takeover, as Lisnic demonstrates (Chapter 1, this volume), conception of precisely which religious groups constituted the enemy could differ significantly between the political centre and the various layers of the bureaucracy, with officials associating "the idea of enmity with a set of obstacles which hindered the implementation of the policies they were in charge of." These agencies, Lisnic concludes, saw the "formation of different images of the same religious group at different levels of administration" (Lisnic, Chapter 1, this volume). This situation changed, however, as War Communism gave way to the period of the New Economic Policy in 1921.

By the 1930s, the means of construction of knowledge about religious communities had become much more sophisticated and centralised. Taking as her case study the model criminal files that were compiled on the True Orthodox Church, Vagramenko (Chapter 2, this volume), demonstrates how internal top-secret publications produced by the GPU, the State Political Directorate as the Soviet secret police were known at the time, were compiled and disseminated. The construction of the ecclesiastic-monarchist underground in these model cases, which succeeded in unmasking simple peasants as 'agitators' or 'spies' in a highly organised underground network implicated in the machinations of "foreign intelligence agencies," illustrates the process by which "an alternative reality" could be created "where people and social relations got new roles and meanings" (Vagramenko citing Melley 2000, 42). Diverse pieces of information, both visual and textual, were systematically "dislodged from their initial context, *estranged,* and then re-assembled in a new way" in order to produce criminal evidence.

As the secret police vision and production of serviceable knowledge about religious leaders and groups became more sophisticated, study manuals and operational guides were produced that outlined Marxist historical critiques of religion and Church history based on the regime's idea of scientific atheism. These manuals supplied officers with the conceptual tools and vocabulary to enable them to 'rewrite' religious meaning, actions, and lives in their reports. These resources, which generally represent a synthesis of empirical experience gained in real operations with heavy doses of ideologically inspired fantasy, often bore inflated titles such as the manual authored by two Romanian secret police officers in 1983 entitled "Aspects of the hostile activity conducted by autochthonous elements incited by emissaries of reactionary religious centres and organisations abroad. Measures taken by organs of the state security for the prevention and counteracting of enemy actions conducted under the cover of religion."[2] In 1960s Poland, as Krzywosz notes (Chapter 7, this volume), the continued prevalence of miracles and apparitions, which were said to be caused by reactionary elements amongst the Catholic clergy, were deemed dangerous enough to warrant the production of a special manual dedicated to combating these forms of political insurrection allegedly disguised as popular devotion.

Such manuals supplied officers with political interpretations of religious history, terminology and expressions. In the example offered by Petrás (Chapter 5, this volume), terms that appeared in Jehovah's Witness literature such as the 'realm of the Satan' and 'This world is condemned and its days are counted!' were given political meaning. Such translations, however, in overwriting their original eschatological meaning, had the potential to mislead Hungarian secret police agents and so, despite the production of expert specialist materials, a lack of genuine theological and practical knowledge of religious practices sometimes directly hindered secret police operations. This was the case when Hungarian secret police officers failed to recognise the significance and incriminatory nature of a confiscated photograph of Jehovah's Witness believers seemingly enjoying a bathing holiday at Lake Balaton, which was in fact a photograph taken on the occasion of an illegal mass baptism (Petrás, Chapter 5, this volume).

[2] Aurel Zapodean and Nicolae Bordeianu (1983), *Aspecte din activitatea ostilă desfăşurată de elemente autohtone incitate de emisari ai unor centri şi organizaţii religioase reacţionare din străinătate. Măsuri întreprinse de organele de securitate pentru prevenirea şi contracararea acştiunilor duşmănoase desfăşurată sub acoperirea religiei* (ACNSAS D008712 vol. 1, 12).

Mistaken interpretations and false constructions composed and disseminated by acting secret police officers shaped the education of future officers. The highly flawed interpretation and characterisation by the Czechoslovak StB (*Státní bezpečnost*) of the so-called New Orientation within the Czech Protestant Church described by Matějka (Chapter 9, this volume), which constructed a group of progressive left-leaning pastors and believers as "a second power centre" was "so persuasive that it became a pedagogical resource for students of the StB faculty of the Police University" and was reproduced in a number of master theses at the Police University. The manuals and theses composed about clerical reactionary forces, as Matějka points out in relation to the Czechoslovak case, may also have served as powerful tools of "self-legitimization" offering a platform on which to provide "arguments explaining the ongoing importance of the StB" and to justify "its relevance and raison-d'être in the context of *perestroika* and *glasnost*."

The specialist secret police publications discussed in this volume document the powerful imperative for all underground religious groups to conform to the image of an enemy constructed by the state, whether this reflected reality or not. By the 1930s, as Vagramenko illustrates (Chapter 2), the Soviet secret police characterised the religious underground as highly organised, politically motivated, and internationally connected and the secret police went to great lengths to visualise and materialise the invisible networks that constituted the underground according to their understanding and ideological need. In relation to some groups, such as the Jehovah's Witnesses (see Baran 2014, 49), the Soviet authorities were dealing with genuine underground networks as complex and organised as the state's projections but secret police understanding of other groups such as the extremely diverse groups of Orthodox dissenters (discussed by Vagramenko, Lisnic, and Kapaló in this volume), bore little relationship to reality, indeed secret police documents demonstrate how the regime got "caught up in its own internal falsifications" (Șincan this volume citing Kotkin, 2002: 36). This was the case with regard to the operation described by Matějka (Chapter 9, this volume) in which the Czechoslovak StB looked so feverishly for "a unified hostile headquarters" and firmly believed in the existence of "a second power centre" inside the Czech Protestant Church that their actions paradoxically contributed to its very formation. As Matějka concludes, the StB constructed the enemy so effectively that it "succeeded (at least partly) in creating it."

The repertoire of discursive strategies available to the secret police in unmasking religion was diverse but nonetheless highly formulaic. Anti-religious rhetoric across all of the communist

states was based on the Soviet model with propaganda and operational campaigns following the shifts in policy in Moscow quite closely. One of the most significant means of producing or amplifying political guilt during the Cold War, was to accuse religious actors of being in league with the external enemies of the communist world, particularly with imperialist Western powers. Jehovah's Witnesses in Romania were charged with being members of a "conspiratorial group intent on subverting the regime, that was controlled directly from the United States, the centre of the capitalist world" (Pintulescu, Chapter 4, this volume), while in Yugoslavia, Nazarenes and Adventists were accused of enemy activity including "propaganda and espionage for foreign agents" (Djurić Milovanović, Chapter 14, this volume). As late as the 1980s, during a period of renewed concern over ideological decay within the Soviet Union, one leader of the Krishna Consciousness movement could be declared an agent of the CIA "specializing in ideological diversions, including subversive activities of imperialism against the socialist system" that were designed to "destroy the country from the inside" (Pranskevičiūtė-Amonson, Chapter 8, this volume).

The Catholic Church was also regarded as one of the main external enemies of communist governments. This was based on a number of factors including the highly centralised character of the Catholic Church led from the Vatican, over which communist regimes had little control, the ideological influence the Church wielded globally, but not least the Church's economic and social power in some satellite countries such as Poland or Hungary. As Árpád von Klimó relates with regard to Hungary, before the establishment of the Communist system the Catholic Church was the country's largest landowner, overseeing thousands of schools and controlling dozens of publishing houses and newspapers. It also enjoyed the support of lay organisations and associations counting hundreds of thousands of members (Klimó 2016, 51-52).

Central to the construction of knowledge and of political guilt of religious actors, as both Pintulescu and Vagramenko point out in their studies (see Chapters 4 and 2 respectively), was the wider network or set of social relations. People could be understood and incriminated "sometimes by simply invoking their membership in a 'counter-revolutionary organisation'" simplifying legal or bureaucratic procedures because, "instead of compiling individual criminal investigation files, they compiled group files" (Pintilescu, Chapter 4, this volume). The production of knowledge, therefore, in regard to the unmasking of the hostile activities of the clerical reaction, served a number of functions and produced a range of responses and significantly it could serve as a means to justify the perception that the work of the secret

police continued to be necessary, thus shoring up its preeminent position as the defender of the people.

Religions and members of religious communities were targeted as part of a much wider process of identifying anti-Soviet or counter-revolutionary social elements, a process that reached extraordinary proportions in the mass repressions of the late 1930s to the early 1950s. In this period, entire social categories or portions of the population became targets of the NKVD, including former kulaks, "national elements" or untrustworthy ethnic groups, and petty criminals, with the aim being the total "excision from the body politic" of these population cohorts (Hagenloh 2009, 8). This approach, as Hagenloh concludes, eroded the distinction between civil and political crime and between civil and political policing (Hagenloh 2009, 10). Religious groups could therefore be routinely classified both as a political enemy and as a social, moral and even medical threat to society.

As Lisnic demonstrates in his case study of ethnic-Moldovan Inochentists in 1920s western Ukraine (Chapter 1, this volume), a "socially dangerous element" might combine suspect class identity with political, geographical, ethnic, and behavioural layers of guilt. Recidivism, or vagrancy, was one such suspect behaviour that was associated primarily with criminal activities (see Hegenloh 2009, 81-83) but formed also part of the construction of an image of certain religious groups as dangerous, such as wandering ex-monastics and preachers of various sects. In the case of Inochentism, the mobility of elements in the underground led to accusations of kidnapping and the sexual exploitation of young girls who had "disappeared" into the sectarian underground (see also Kapaló 2019, 229-237). Indeed, the invisible or secretive nature of the religious underground, which was in most cases, but not all, a consequence of the repressive policies of the state, enabled the shocking accusations based on secret police case files that appeared in anti-religious propaganda to appear plausible to the public, including accusations of child murder amongst Jehovah's Witnesses (see Baran 2014, 73). The charge of so-called "anti-human" and "anti-social" behaviour, and especially the risk this posed to young people (see Djurić Milovanović Chapter 14, this volume), remained a central element of secret police discourse on the dangers of the religious underground. Even in the final years of the Soviet Union, KGB reports and the propaganda press represented members of the Krishna Consciousness movement as "antisocial people who used various drugs, organised orgies, and so on" (Pranskevičiūtė-Amoson, Chapter 8, this volume). As the chapters in this volume demonstrate, a religious identity as defined and constructed by the secret police had the

potential, at various times and in different contexts, to weave together layers of political, class, ethnic, geographic, medical, and social behavioural guilt in the construction of a total enemy.

Knowing and representing the enemy was a necessary and integral part of direct repressive operations, which took various forms and could combine a range of measures or methods. Mass arrest and deportation to Siberia and other remote and inhospitable regions of the Soviet Union for resettlement and forced labour was one of the earliest instruments of mass terror employed by the Soviet state and is associated primarily with the Stalinist-era. This approach was applied widely to other cohorts of the population such as kulaks and suspect ethnic groups but religious communities also were sometimes the explicit target of such mass operations. An early example of the deportation of a religious community is discussed by Lisnic (Chapter 1, this volume) who demonstrates that the operation against Inochentists from Odessa Oblast in 1923 required the kind of top-down centralised planning that could be achieved only once communications had improved between various layers of the administration and the Joint State Political Directorate, or OGPU, as the Soviet secret police were called during 1922-1934.

From 1929, the same year that the Law on Religious Associations was introduced heralding the mass, systematic closure of Orthodox Churches and religious institutions, OGPU was entrusted with running the entire Soviet penal system, the so-called Gulag, or Main Camp Administration (*Glavnoe upravlenie lagerei*), making such mass operations easier to co-ordinate. At the height of the Gulag system, Orthodox clergy, monks and nuns, members of the sects and underground religious communities were subject to extrajudicial arrest, sentencing and deportation usually involving a simple decision by *troikas*, headed by the local NKVD chief (by this point the NKVD taken on the role of the secret police). In 1944, around 1,000 members of the underground True Orthodox Church were exiled in a single operation (Baran 2014, 59) but the largest mass deportation of a religious group, and also the final one before Stalin's death, targeted Jehovah's Witnesses. Labelled "Operation North" and planned and executed by the MGB (Ministry of State Security) officers on 1 April 1951, this operation deported more than 16,000 Witnesses to Siberia and Central Asia from Western territories of the Soviet Union including Bessarabia (today's Moldova), Northern Bukovina in Western Ukraine and the Baltic Republics. Operation North coincided with operations against Jehovah's Witnesses across the communist satellite states that took various forms, including house raids and show trials (see Petrás, Chapter 5, this volume). Decisions by *troikas* or, as in the case of Operation North, by the Special Board (*Osoboe Soveshchanie*) of the MGB were, as Cașu

points out (Chapter 6, this volume), extrajudicial and therefore technically illegal, according to Soviet legislation and exemplify the flexible praxis employed by the communist state.

Stalinist-era repression of socially harmful elements also entailed the mass surveillance of targeted suspect populations. From the 1930s, following the OGPU's takeover of civil as well as political policing, surveillance, agent infiltration, and the registration of the population and its movements, became part of a top-down plan for a preventive system of population control. Although early attempts at covert operations and undercover surveillance had limited success in some areas (Hegenloh 2009, 13), the recruiting and implanting of undercover agents for surveillance and information gathering became an important element in secret police operational work targeted at religious communities. This policy resulted in a majority of leaders of Protestant groups in the Soviet Union engaging in some form of collaboration with the KGB (Vagramenko 2021, in production).

Immediately after the communist victory in Yugoslavia in 1945, secret police operations against religious sects with international ties combined surveillance work, or counter intelligence, with covert infiltration and intelligence work. As Djurić Milovanović recounts (Chapter 14, this volume), "During counterintelligence work, the agent had to be familiar with the teachings of the particular 'sect', have detailed information on their organisational structures and methods of religious propaganda, follow closely the work and networks of the religious leaders and control religious activities and rituals that preached activities against the government." In the course of their intelligence work, the agent had to "influence the sect's leadership towards working for the benefit of the country and being a model organisation." In Operation North, the Soviet MGB engaged in extensive agent infiltration (Chapter 6, this volume) and at the height of Hungarian operations against the Catholic Church following the Hungarian Revolution in 1956, 197 Catholic priests had been recruited as undercover agents (Kiss et al. 2012, 35) who succeeded in infiltrating "themselves into every organizational and functional aspect of the Church" (see also Köbel, Chapter 3, this volume).

The embedding of agents, as Cașu's case study (Chapter 6, this volume) illustrates, served a number of purposes. In the case of JWs in Soviet Moldavia, they could be used to determine whether targeted communities were aware of their impending fate. The use of several agents in a single group could also guarantee the accuracy of information gathered as well as assure the reliability of individual agents and informers. In the case of Operation North, infiltration of

the community was part of a strategy designed both to facilitate the smooth realisation of the deportation and to shape the behaviour of the community going forward. As Cașu suggests, the ultimate goal of the infiltration of the community, and the intentional omission of some JWs from the deportation, "was not to destroy the whole organization but to bring it under the control of the state security organs" and ultimately create the possibility to infiltrate JWs' international networks, thus extending the reach of the secret police beyond Soviet borders (Chapter 6, this volume, this volume). This case demonstrates that a combination of approaches by the secret police could be aimed at achieving more complex outcomes, in which control was deemed more useful than outright elimination.

Reliance on large numbers of informers, some highly trained and dedicated, others informal, irregular and unreliable, was characteristic of the post-Stalinist era. In Romania, for example. the number of informers rose from 73,000 in 1968 to 144,289 in 1989 (Stan 2013, 62). The operation against the Inochentist-Stilist community described by Kapaló (Chapter 13, this volume) describes the contribution that came from significant numbers of religious insider-informers that new the group they were informing on intimately and hence understood very well the beliefs that lay behind their practices. As the secret police operation against the pilgrimage to the Marian apparition site at Zabłudów in Poland in 1965 (Krzywosz, Chapter 7, this volume) shows, informers comprised a vital component of a complex operation that lasted over a period of two years. This multifaceted approach was applied in a remote rural context and, in contrast to the operation launched against Jehovah's Witnesses in Moldavia, was reactive rather than proactive. By the end of the operation the secret police, in collaboration with the Provincial People's Militia, included the surveillance of pilgrims arriving at the site of the Marian apparition, warning talks (so-called *profilaktika*), surveillance and intimidation of the visionary and her family, a propaganda press campaign, road blocks to quarantine the local area, mass perlustration of correspondence, special radio links to headquarters, and direct violent intervention by the Citizen's Militia against those who gathered at the site. Local public sanitation authorities were also mobilised by the secret police in order to emphasise the personal health risk to pilgrims who were drinking the local spring water. The operation described by Krzywosz represents a total mobilisation of every possible human and technological resource at the disposal of the secret police to put a stop to a spontaneous manifestation of religious devotion.

The success of the operation, as Krzywosz demonstrates, hinged on the ability of the secret

police to recruit a wide range of informers from every segment of the local population, from amongst the pilgrims, from the local town, from amongst the priesthood and even from within the religious visionary's immediate family, thus ensuring that "the secret police had a full picture of married life, family and social relations of the Jakubowski family at their disposal." The ability of the secret police to "colonise" all significant relationships (see Verdery 2018, 183) and to intimidate and use to their advantage local relations, rumours and rivalries relied on the invisible work of the secret informers. The secret police agents in this case were, in contrast, known and visible to the residents of Zabłudów. They were conducting, as mentioned earlier, a performative operation that was designed to be both threatening and preventative (see Vațulescu 2010, 3).

The potential and methods used for recruiting informers differed, depending on the nature of the targeted Church or community. In Romania, as explained by Cindrea-Nagy (Chapter 16, this volume), the techniques used to recruit Orthodox clergy, who were offered protection or privileges against the threat of severe consequences if they refused to collaborate, differed from those employed when seeking to access the so-called neo-Protestant Churches, such as Adventists or Pentecostals, which could be infiltrated more readily by planting informers posing as new converts. In all cases, however, compromising information, especially relating to moral and sexual conduct was commonly used to blackmail and intimidate potential recruits (see Șincan, Chapter 15, this volume). Informers were often used to sow doubt and division within communities, especially amongst followers of the smaller Churches or sects (see Cindrea-Nagy, Chapter 16, this volume), as was the plan of the State Office in Hungary described by Petrás (Chapter 5, this volume) which intended "to split the loyal and reactionary segments within the sect" with the aim of offering legal recognition to the loyal wing of the Jehovah's Witnesses and make them join the Council of Free Churches. The secret police, however, were not always successful in recruiting informers as Matějka (Chapter 9, this volume) outlines in relation to the Czechoslovak secret police attempts to infiltrate the Czech Protestant Church. As this case demonstrates, attempts could backfire as they did when a group of Czech pastors publicly recounted their experience of being blackmailed to inform on colleagues. As a result, this operation failed and had the opposite effect instead encouraging "a new sense of loyalty and cohesiveness among Protestant opponents of the regime."

In terms of the chronology of anti-religious campaigns in the Soviet Union, the final phase came during General Secretary Yuri Andropov's term as General Secretary. As Pranskevičiūtė-

Amonson (Chapter 8) explains, a range of operational means were employed including undercover agents and informers tasked with uncovering and disrupting lines of communication amongst ISKON members within the Soviet Union, the application of "administrative legal and preventive warning measures", or so-called *profilaktika*, as well as house raids and arrests. Warning conversations or interviews were a common method deployed in Soviet Lithuania (see Harrison 2010), which as Pranskevičiūtė-Amonson recounts involved both intimidations, such as threats to expel them from an institute or other work place, and incentives. As a result of the operations "almost all original devotees had to quit educational institutions, and some of them lost their jobs" whilst others were imprisoned or committed to psychiatric hospitals where they were forcibly treated with psychotropic drugs.

In contrast to the picture created by the high profile cases discussed thus far, it is important to note that a large proportion of evidence from secret police archival sources, as Hesz (this volume, Chapter 10) illustrates, show us that a great deal of officers' time and attention was dedicated to documenting and prosecuting far less dramatic cases. Rather than uncovering complex organisations with ties to international centres, low level economic activity by clergy or the recording of simple religious rituals such as marriages or baptisms that in most states, at most times, was frowned upon but not illegal, was the day-to-day work of many officers engaged with the clerical reaction. Secret police operations, which were oftentimes violent, callous and brutal, like the operations that targeted other segments of the population, were intended not simply to dominate but also to shape the population (see Hegenloh 2009, 11). Critical to our understanding of the aims and implications of these extreme attempts at social engineering are the archival records compiled by the secret police themselves.

Secret Police Archives and the Politics of the Religious Field in Postcommunism

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 as well as 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 have 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. The opening of secret police archives constituted one of the most important aspects in the broad movement for transitional justice and remains the most contentious element in a "symbolic battle for the possession of the past" in post-communist Eastern Europe (Horváth 2008, 247). All the studies in this volume draw directly on secret police archives or engage with the critical questions that they provoke for researchers of the past and for religious actors in the present. As several chapters in this volume demonstrate, Churches, religious leaders and believers have become embroiled in the numerous controversies that surround the secret police archives in post-communist societies.

Access to communist-era secret police files coincided with the transformational influence of the 'archival turn' in the humanities and social sciences. The archive, under the influence of Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida, has come to be viewed as a critical mechanism of societal control exercised through the production and legitimation of historical memory. Viewed through these optics, aspects of human cultures are transformed, alienated, hidden and subverted through the mechanisms of the archive which in the process empowers some whilst divesting others of vital political, cultural and spiritual capital. In the context of post-communist Eastern Europe, historical memory, justice and truth seeking have become shackled to the fate of and uses of the secret police archives. The peculiar and paradoxical hold that the archives have results from an "enduring belief in the authority of their holdings" (Vățulescu 2014, 13) in post-communism which comes despite the recognition that the materials they contain are the product of the ideological and social engineering projects of regimes whose methods were often illegal and immoral. Similarly to the colonial archive, the communist-era archive, as Luehrmann alerts us, "never intended to be neutral or objective but to participate in transforming the reality it described" (2015, 32 cited in Vagramenko, Chapter 2, this volume).

Despite the vastness and incontestable richness of the secret police archives, access to previously classified archives does not necessarily bring with it deeper understanding or

conceptual advances (Kotkin 2002). In Kotkin's words, these emerge rather from our relationship to the archives and the "worldviews and agendas" we bring to them. In this sense, the architecture and ideological furniture of the institutions set up to govern the archives in post-communism, as well as the ongoing societal perception and uses of the archives that these institutions have wittingly or unwittingly facilitated, shape how historians, anthropologists and sociologists conceive them and work with and through them. Studies of religion during communism and post-communism, whether historical, ethnological, anthropological, or sociological in nature, have only recently begun to reflect on the complex relationship between the archive, the subjectivity of the scholar, the politics of memory, and the contemporary struggle for political (and religious) capital in the post-communist world.

The uses of and levels of access to secret police archival documents differ vastly from one national context to another. The process began in the early 1990s in Czechoslovakia and Germany with the introduction of so-called "lustration" measures designed to vet those seeking political office or key administrative jobs through an examination of their past using the archives. Later, a number of post-communist states passed legislation on access to secret files and opened specialist secret police archival institutions, as in Lithuania (see Pranskevičiūtė-Amoson, Chapter 8, this volume) or institutes of memory, as in the case of Poland, that are dedicated to uncovering the legacy and activities of the secret police in the search for an "authentic" version of the past. Some countries in the region, such as Romania and Hungary, have well established public institutions with almost two decades of experience of managing access to their holdings both by those who were targeted by the state and by researchers. Others, such as Ukraine and Albania, have only recently embarked on this process passing 'de-communisation' laws which have granted researchers access for the first time to secret police files. In Serbia on the other hand, as Djurić Milovanović recounts (see chapter 14, this volume), despite a request from the European Parliament for the Republic of Serbia to fully open its secret police archives as part of the EU accession process, a lack of political will and the failure to pass the necessary legislation means that access is extremely limited.

The various institutions that have been established as custodians of secret police archives have taken on a range of distinct roles. Although the mandates differ from country to country, alongside the preservation and safeguarding of documents, they include the pursuit of processes of lustration or vetting for public office, the investigation and exposure of communist crimes including the exposure of former agents and informers, managing access of targeted

individuals to their personal files as well as facilitating and developing research and education. The remit of these institutions, therefore, is oriented towards the future as well as towards the past (see Verdery 2014) as they form a central platform of projects designed to overcome the legacy of repressive regimes and to work towards justice and reconciliation in society. Significantly, as Vasile (Chapter 13, this volume) notes with regards to the Romanian case, such institutions were designed and intended to break the monopoly held by ruling elites "on the potentially toxic information found within political police archives" and to prevent, or at least reduce, the potential for blackmail and manipulation. Facilitating and producing research whilst also engaging in public education were also seen as important means of conveying "the moral complexities" of the holdings of the secret police archives which would in turn help "counter attempts at slander and vicious labeling of those who had, in fact, been victims of the Securitate" (Vasile, Chapter 13, this volume).

The implications of access, or indeed the lack of access, to secret police materials for Churches and religious communities have in some cases been profound. As Vasile (Chapter 13) and Cindrea-Nagy (Chapter 16) highlight in the case of Romania, responses to the challenges posed by the archives have varied greatly, often determined by the relative access of Church leaders to the corridors of power in post-communist politics and their ability to influence and shape public perceptions. Members of some smaller Churches in Romania, once the opportunity arose, sought actively to uncover the uncomfortable past relationship to the secret police and the communist regime in what Cindrea-Nagy (Chapter 16, this volume) describes as an act of "purification" or of "healing the sins of the past." This process offered the opportunity for former collaborators to seek redemption through confession of their sins -- an opportunity that some but not all took up. This was made possible due to the approach unique to Eastern Europe of granting access to ordinary citizens, effectively democratising truth seeking (Stan 2013, 60) and allowing individuals and communities to determine for themselves how secret police reports were used and interpreted.

By contrast, the hierarchies of the Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches in Romania, have pursued a very different policy of attempting to prevent evidence of collaboration or collusion in communist crimes from coming to light by using their political leverage to hinder the work of archival institutions and researchers (Vasile chapter 13, this volume). At the same time, the Roman Catholic, Greek Catholic, and especially the Orthodox Church hierarchies in Romania have engaged in the promotion of martyrs of the communist repression, mainly victims of the

regime who suffered and died in prison (Cindrea-Nagy, Chapter 16), creating a "sacred narrative" of suffering in order to dominate public discussion and deflect attention away from revelations about Church leaders who had been secret police agents or informers.

In the case of the Czech Protestant Church, access to secret police archival documents, has been equally divisive. As Matějka outlines (Chapter 9, this volume), a 2004 publication of StB documents that was distributed to every parish in the Church with the aim of helping Czech Protestants "come to terms with their past" became the cause of division within the Church over competing understandings of the "epic struggle with the StB" that older generations like to portray in contrast to the much more complex picture of cooperation and accommodation with the communist authorities that researchers have uncovered. As Matějka concludes, the interpretation offered by a group of secret police officers of the "trajectory of Czech Protestants between 1948 and 1989 has not stopped producing painful conflicts inside the Church milieu to this very day" resulting in a generational fault line between older members of the community who accept at face value the StB narrative and younger colleagues who have "tried to offer more differentiated interpretations of Czech Protestant history during the Communist dictatorship based on critical work and utilising a vast array of sources (without exclusive preference for StB files)."

The activities outlined above carried out by or through the institutions in charge of secret police documents, rely on a "presumed credibility", on the part of researchers as well as the public at large, and of the archival documents compiled by the secret police (Pehe 2019, 208), which, as Apor et al. (2017, 4) point out, was reinforced by these institutions' claims "about their capacity to reveal the truth about the past based on their custody of huge amounts of material." The peculiar and paradoxical power of secret police archival documents, which continue to be viewed as sites of authenticity and credibility due in part to their once hidden and secret nature, makes them the quintessential means for legitimizing historical narratives and making claims about justice (see Apor ar al. 2017, 4; Blaive 2019; Pehe 2019, 207) as well as making them extraordinarily powerful instruments of political control (see Vasile Chapter 13, this volume). As the chapters in this volume by Vasile (Chapter 13), Cindrea-Nagy (Chapter 16), and Matějka (Chapter 9) demonstrate, the policies and agendas of the institutions that manage secret police archives have profoundly influenced how religious communities themselves have engaged with and conceive their past.

The dynamic that has emerged in the religious field in Romania, the Czech Republic, and elsewhere, as mentioned above, is the result of the broader phenomenon in post-communist societies that is linked to the de-communisation process as a whole, which has promoted secret police files as the vehicle through which to apportion blame to perpetrators and establish the innocence of victims. This highly polarised process, as Apor et al. (2017) argue, has produced a simplistic understanding of the moral complexity of the relationship between the secret police and those labelled as collaborators, and the ethical dilemmas faced by ordinary citizens who were threatened, blackmailed, or otherwise coerced into collaboration. Whether through attempts to prevent, delay, or restrict access to secret police archival documents or by embracing them as a potential source of closure and redemption, Churches, other religious communities, and individual believers have been forced to position themselves in relation to the archives. The various strategies pursued by religious actors have resulted, in some cases, in further internal strife whilst in others they have initiated a healing process. The absence of a clear "definition and epistemology of what constitutes both a victim and a perpetrator" has, as Blaive shows (2019, 3), perpetuated a culture of systemic blame of everything associated with the communist past and has obstructed more nuanced analysis of the moral complexities of individual cases.

Studying Religions through the Secret Police Archives

The peculiar significance and power of the secret police archives is in some senses amplified in the case of the documents relating to religious groups, which means that studying religions through them presents a number of distinct challenges as well as opportunities. Generally speaking, state and other archives, through their practices, establish their own authority by archiving that which is deemed worthy of preserving with the aim of determining how future generations should understand their past. Secret police archives, on the other hand, have systematically preserved a record of those whom the communist regimes judged as "unworthy", categorising and producing knowledge about them to suit their ideological purposes. Due to the nature of the way the state, through its model of hostile separation, sought to expel religion from public life whilst also controlling (and defining) religious institutions from within, secret police documents disproportionately preserve records of the uncomfortable margins of mainstream religions, religious dissenters, troublesome rebels, and the religious competitors of the more compliant religious hierarchies, that also judged them as "unworthy". Groups that most official state archives systematically excluded and which the state most

wanted to marginalise through its "knowledge" production and propaganda campaigns have been systematically and labouriously documented by the secret police.

The mass of documentation that exists is generally considered by historians to be more useful for understanding how the secret police "perceived individuals and groups and how the institution worked than for what historians usually consider to be their main task: reconstructing events" (Pintilescu 2018, 148). As Lisnic (Chapter 1), Vagramenko (Chapter 2), Matějka (Chapter 9), and others in this volume demonstrate, coming to grips with the discursive practices of the secret police is critical for understanding how enemies were perceived by the state and how the knowledge that was produced helped define operations and actions against these groups, thus shaping the daily activities of the secret police (see Pintilescu 2018, 126-7). The different categories of documentation produced by the bureaucratic processes of the secret police, however, offer opportunities for scholars of religions, and for members of surviving or descendent communities, to approach other questions that are specific to religious life.

In the absence of ethnographic data from the period, Hesz (Chapter 10, this volume) and Kapaló (Chapter 12, this volume) argue that secret police informer files have a particular value for research on everyday aspects of lived and material religion during communism. Despite the multiple voices, of the informer, the officer, the target, and the compiler, being layered together in reports, hints and fleeting glimpses of revealing everyday encounters and exchanges nevertheless offer insights into a range of aspects of religious life as lived in the period. Examples cited by Hesz demonstrate how, despite inconsistent and contradictory information being very common, the vividness of some reports helps us grasp the agency of individuals and groups in their strategies of avoiding attention from the authorities or organising their ritual life under the pressure of surveillance. In many cases, informers were themselves religious specialists who offered detailed and vivid accounts of religious ritual and belief in order to protect their targets whilst quietly fulfilling their duty to report. As Hesz outlines, approaching religion as a lived phenomenon and employing a vernacular religious lens to these bureaucratic documents, offer insights into how individuals navigated the strictures of the regime in the expression of their faith.

The vividness of informers' reports is sometimes matched by the visual materials that can be found in secret police files. As the chapters by Povedák (Chapter 11) and Vagramenko (Chapter 2), Krzywosz (Chapter 7) in this volume illustrate, in their attempts to incriminate and eliminate

certain religious groups, the secret police preserved or created valuable visual and material traces of otherwise invisible clandestine communities. Inserted into the kilometres of shelves stacked with case files, the archives contain a hidden repository of confiscated religious materials such as leaflets, brochures, hymn sheets, diaries, community photographs - the ephemera of religious life. These sit alongside photographic images, graphs, maps and tables created by the secret police in the course of their investigations (see Kapaló and Vagramenko 2020). Oftentimes, groups such as the Nazarenes, discussed by Djurić Milovanović (Chapter 14) or the Inochentists discussed by Kapaló (Chapter 12), that due to their marginalised status, underground existence, or ambivalence towards the act of historical documentation, preserved few records themselves, can be found represented in great detail in the secret police files. Secret police archives, therefore, represent an important resource for understanding both how the totalitarian state constructed religious "others" in order to incriminate and control them and how certain religious communities chose to represent themselves in times of extreme repression.

As the studies by Vagramenko (Chapter 2), Povedák (Chapter 11), and Krzywosz (Chapter 7) show, as well as gathering confiscated materials, the secret police employed various photographic and graphic techniques as part of their construction of knowledge about and incrimination of religious groups. Vagramenko (Chapter 2) illustrates in her study of Soviet model criminal files, how specific visual forms of documentation and representation helped establish truths about the religious underground. Photography in particular played an important role in reinforcing the textual message of the file. Crime-scene photographs, discussed by Povedák (Chapter 11, this volume), were produced according to highly formulaic specifications that were often intended to capture the illegal economic activities of targeted groups (see also Kapaló 2019; Kapaló and Vagramenko 2020). The corpus of images in the archives, however, also includes a significant number of confiscated photographs that offer the researcher unique access to the self-representational practices of groups during communism. As with all other materials found in the archives, the photos we find there present both interpretational and ethical challenges. Employing the method of photo-elicitation, Povedák (Chapter 11, this volume) explores the advantages and pitfalls of working with descendent communities to redefine and recontextualize the photographic holdings of the archives.

Drawing on informer reports from an operation targeting Inochentist-Stilists in Romania in which the foodways of the community formed a central aspect of the operation, Kapaló

(Chapter 12) explores the methodological potential of approaching the archives from a material religion perspective. Kapaló argues that certain secret police sources, especially those generated by insiders who acted as participants in the social and ritual life of communities, offer us an access point to the performative, material and somatic aspects of religious life. In response to the overwhelming tendency amongst scholars of communism to approach secret police materials from a solely discursive or constructionist approach, Kapaló suggests that when viewed through a material lens and situated within the broader religious context and lifeworld, the texts and images in the archives can reveal important, heretofore overlooked aspects of the transmission of religion in the underground.

Questions of morality, and especially sexuality, are also ubiquitous in secret police documents on religious life, as Șincan (Chapter 15, this volume) demonstrates in relation to Romania. Despite the communist regime's importation of a code of moral conduct from the Soviet Union, the moral standards that secret police officers used in policing religious groups betrayed a "hybridization" that drew on religious aspects and terms. The secret police, as Șincan's case studies demonstrate, were able to use information relating to an individual's moral conduct, whether genuine or fabricated, as a means of control with the Securitate officer acting "as moral censor and judge." The privacy of individuals targeted by the state was of course of no concern to the secret police but today, for the researcher of religion under communism, the protection of the privacy of victims, especially with regard to issues of health and sexuality, is enshrined in law and shapes the practices of archival institutions. As Șincan's study demonstrates, this situation presents the researcher with a dilemma, as something that was so central to the way the secret police operated against religious actors, namely the use of coercion and blackmail based on questions of morality and sexuality, is extremely difficult legally and ethically to discuss in academic publications. In the post-communist context, the "breaking of the secrecy" that surrounded the archives (Stan 2013, 75), whilst serving to guarantee the break with the past and reassure citizens that surveillance had stopped, also granted the contemporary reader of a secret police file a "power over the individual" (Șincan, Chapter 15, p. this volume) that in its ability to shame, blackmail, and destroy reputations was cruelly similar to the power exercised by secret police officers. Those of us who study religions that were under the prying gaze of the secret police are increasingly called to reflect on our positionality. Thus, Șincan asks, "as the current readers of these files, are we imposing similar personal definitions of good and bad, moral and immoral onto behaviours and narratives in the archival documents?"

The archives of the secret police, despite their enormous significance for researchers and religious communities alike, have their limits. The problematic epistemological and ethical nature of secret police archival documents (and in some cases the lack of access to them), encourages or demands the use of alternative sources. Several of the chapters in this volume engage the archival data in dialogue with the archives of religious communities (see Pranskevičiūtė-Amoson Chapter 8; Petrás Chapter 5; Matějka Chapter 9) and oral historical research (see Petrás Chapter 5; Pranskevičiūtė-Amoson Chapter 8; Matějka Chapter 9 and Povedák Chapter 11, this volume). The lack of access to secret police materials, as Djurić Milovanović (this volume, Chapter 14) outlines in her research on religious minorities in communist Yugoslavia, means that historians of religions have to glean as much information from the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Ministry of Religious Affairs, the Ministry of Justice, and other public administration archives and triangulate this with ethnographic research with individuals and communities. Djurić Milovanović shows that such research "reveals not only the richness of preserved memory but also their personal archival material…" including documents related to imprisonment or verdicts from the military courts, photographs, letters and books. In her case study of the KGB operation against ISKON in Lithuania (Chapter 8), Pranskevičiūtė-Amoson also identifies the inherent problems associated with KGB documents which render them insufficient as sources when seeking to understand complex sociocultural processes such as the success of ISKCON in Soviet Lithuania. As Pranskevičiūtė-Amoson asserts, only through the utilisation of interviews with individuals who were members of ISKON and were targeted by the secret police can we gain insights into the real motivations of members of the movement and the actual activities of the KGB, which are often masked in the official reports and accounts.

Conclusion

In this introductory chapter, we have only been able to address some of the important historical points, theoretical questions and methodological insights that appear in the chapters of this volume. The challenges of working with the multi-dimensional and politically charged secret police archives, as this volume seeks to illustrate, are both epistemological and deeply ethical in character. Interpreting files, reports and images that are antagonistic towards their subject, couched in ideological language, formulaic, and misinformed or intentionally misleading, incomplete (or selectively withheld) has become the business not only of trained historians and lawyers but also of journalists, politicians, and the general public who have pursued vigilante actions (Stan 2011) in the search for justice, truth or redemption. As such, overreliance on

secret police materials can, and has, produced extremely distorted views of the past that have in turn shaped historical memory, political discourse and conceptions of justice and truth in post-communist society. The religious underground, which both constituted the object of secret police operations and was produced and defined by them, however, was no mere mirage, metaphor or discourse but a lived experience bound by a material existence, social bonds and individual agency. It is the aim of this volume to encourage further scholarly reflection on the complex intersection of the secret police, and their archives, and the meaning and lived reality of the religious underground.

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