



## 'Hidden Galleries' Annual Project Workshop

### Materialising Religion in the Secret Police Archive: Methodological, Ethical and Legal approaches to the Study of Religions in Secret Police Archives

September 11, 2017, ÁBTL  
Budapest, Hungary



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## **Creative Agency and Religious Minorities: 'Hidden Galleries' in the Secret Police Archives in Central and Eastern Europe**

(ERC Starter Grant 677355)

### **Project Outline**

Principal Investigator: Dr James Kapaló

This Hidden Galleries project concerns the role of religious minorities in the transformation of Central and Eastern Europe societies in the 20<sup>th</sup> century seen through the prism of the secret police archives in the region. The project re-examines and re-contextualises the holdings of secret police archives in three countries; Romania, the Republic of Moldova and Hungary, with the aim drawing scholarly and public attention to alternative uses and meanings of the archives in relation to the study of minority religions in the region.

The secret police archives, in addition to containing millions of files on individuals and organisations monitored by the state, also constitute a hidden repository of religious art, publications, photographs and the ephemera of religious life confiscated by the secret police. Many religious communities, but especially religious minorities, were repressed and persecuted in the twentieth century under both fascism and communism and their visual and literary creative responses to authoritarian rule have remained concealed in vast storehouses of secret files. The aim of the project to retrieve examples of this visual and literary material from the archives in order to shed fresh light on the role that local and minority religious groups played in challenging the hegemonic order through their creative artistic and cultural production and better understand the power of these art works to materialise the sacred, transform beliefs and create new subjectivities.

The project, through its application of a range of approaches including archival historical and ethnographic studies and a public exhibition, offers a perspectival shift on the value and uses of the secret police archives away from questions of historical "truth", which have proven politically controversial and have given rise to numerous public scandals. This project shifts the emphasis away from high profile political leaders or religious actors to the "grass-roots" experience of ordinary citizens and their cultural and religious creative products.

The potential of these controversial archives as sources for the history and anthropology of religion in the region remains virtually unexplored. Although most religions experienced varying degrees of state interference and repression under both fascism and communism, religious minorities, which were in many ways the most troubling and difficult to control for state authorities, faced much more concerted oppression and persecution. This was in part due to their creative and unpredictable responses to power and repression. In this sense, they stand out from other repressed political and social movements. The secret police archives represent an incredibly important, and untapped, resource for researching the agency of religious groups that otherwise left little public trace.

This project constitutes the first comparative research on the archives from the perspective of the history and anthropology of religion in the region and it draws attention to the heretofore unexplored creative agency of religious movements under fascism and communism. Finally, in the contemporary context, it explores the significance of these movements in the formation of religious pluralism, the ongoing controversies over state regulation of minority religions, the question of cultural patrimony of confiscated materials and the question of intolerance towards religious minorities.

### **Workshop Outline**

#### **Materialising Religion in the Secret Police Archive: Methodological, Ethical and Legal approaches to the Study of Religions in Secret Police Archives**

This interdisciplinary workshop explores alternative perspectives and approaches to research on religions in the holdings of the secret police archives with particular attention to methodological, ethical and legal questions associated with the research on religious minorities. The contributions from historians, anthropologists and scholars of religions from Hungary, Romania, Moldova, Lithuania, Serbia and Ireland explore diverse topics including the material and visual cultural dimension of secret police archives dealing with minority religious communities; ethical questions relating to research on religious groups through the archives; the legal context, including the informal frameworks within which religious activities and events were classified as legal, illegal or 'semi-legal'; the national institutional frameworks for research in the secret police archives; as well as contextual historical and case studies from around the region.

## Materialising Religion in the Secret Police Archive:

### Methodological, Ethical and Legal approaches to the Study of Religions in Secret Police Archives

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#### PROGRAM

**9.00** Welcome and Opening Words *GERGŐ BENDEGÚZ CSEH, Director General of ÁBTL*

Introduction to the Hidden Galleries ERC project, *JAMES KAPALÓ, Project PI*

**9.30-11.00** **SOCIALIST LEGALITIES** (chair: *Kinga Povedák*)

Legal context of religious activities in Hungary between 1945 and 1989/90—*SZILVIA KÖBEL*

Turning Religious Practices into Political Guilt: Jehovah's Witnesses in the Narratives of the Securitate Files  
*CORNELIU PINTILESCU*

The ambiguities of Socialist Legality: Religious groups in Soviet Moldavia under late Stalinism, 1944-1953  
*IGOR CAȘU*

**11.00-11.30** **COFFEE BREAK**

**11.30-13.00** **HISTORICAL CONTEXTS and CASE STUDIES** (chair: *Anca Sincan*)

The State and the Problem of New Religious Movements in Interwar Hungary—*CSABA FAZEKAS*

Jehovah's Witnesses in the era of state socialism in Hungary, 1948-1989—*ÉVA PETRÁS*

Acting in the Underground: Life as a Hare Krishna Devotee in the Soviet Republic of Lithuania (1979-1989)  
*RASA PRANSKEVIČIŪTĒ*

**13.00-14.00** **LUNCH BREAK**

**14.00-15.30** **METHODOLOGY and ETHICS** (chair: *Ágnes Hesz*)

If sex were a factor... The Securitate Archives and issues of morality in documents related to religious life  
*ANCA SINCAN*

The Appearance of Saints: Photography as incrimination and religious justification in Secret Police Archives  
*JAMES KAPALÓ*

"Campers": Methodological and ethical thoughts on the research of minority religions based on ÁBTL archival sources  
*KINGA POVEDÁK*

**15.30-16.00** **COFFEE BREAK**

**16.00-17.30** **MINORITY RELIGIONS AND STATE SECURITY ARCHIVES**

(chair: *James Kapaló*)

Religious Movements in the Archives of Romanian Repressive and Secret Services (1919-1944). The Evangelicals  
*DORIN DOBRINCU*

The Possibility of Research on Religious Minorities in the Secret Police Archives in the Former Yugoslavia  
*ALEKSANDRA DJURIĆ MILOVANOVIĆ*

Studying the Postwar History of Religious Denominations in Romanian Archives after 1989  
*CRISTIAN VASILE*

**18.30** **DINNER**