



**The Secret Police and Study of Religions:
Archives, Communities and Contested Memories in Central and
Eastern Europe**

Thursday 18th and Friday 19th March, 2021



**Closing Conference of the European Research Council Project:
Creative Agency and Religious Minorities: ‘Hidden Galleries’ in the Secret Police
Archives in Central and Eastern Europe (project no. 677355)**



This project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme No. 677355



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University College Cork, Ireland



Keynote Lectures

Truth and Memory: The Twin Perils of Secret Archives
Lavinia Stan (St. Francis Xavier University, Canada)

For centuries intelligence services have collected information on individuals, but differences in surveillance among democratic and dictatorial countries have emerged more clearly only after World War II, as this talk explains. Throughout their existence communist countries have conducted “wide” repression and mass surveillance, to use Tina Rosenberg terms, compiling huge collections of documents, manuscripts, photographs, smell jars and other items. Since the 1990s some parts of these vast archives, more or less extensive, depending on national legislation, have been made available to ordinary citizens as well as historians interested in piecing together the recent past. File access has offered a number of benefits, including the forceful end of secret operations, the retirement of secret agents and informers, as well as a better understanding of the chain of command within repressive institutions, of the methods and agents of repression and persecution, and of the ways in which victims’ lives have been affected. However, as this talk argues, the opening of these secret archives has also underscored the perils associated with the effort of reconstituting the memory of communism and of finding the truth about the recent past.

Archival Hybridity
Cristina Văţulescu (New York University)

In the course of my research, secret police archives never ceased to surprise me with the hybridity of their holdings. Forensic logic often trumped archival preservation best-practices that mandate medium separation. As a result, secret police files can present a bewildering variety of mediums: photographs, drawings, films, x-rays, maps, wiretapping recordings, a wide range of print and handwritten materials, as well as confiscated material evidence of all kinds—guns, clothes, various objects related to the practice of religion. Indeed, I argue that secret police archives make meaning, and wield power, not within one medium, and not even in neatly separated multimedia, but rather intermedia, in the crafted collusion of different mediums. This poses a real challenge to our specialized—often discipline and medium specific—methodologies. In its attempt to develop methodologies for this intermedia challenge, this talk takes cues from recent archival theories and practices, as well as from the work of Eastern European visual artists and filmmakers who engage with the visual component of these archives.

Anthropology and the Religious Imaginary of the Past
Catherine Wanner (Pennsylvania State University)

There is a new emotionality arising in public domains in many parts of the world. It is remaking understandings of neoliberalism, citizenship and rights, and even personhood itself. This new era is characterized, not only by nationalism, populism and patriotism gaining ground, but also by dissolving the lines of division that used to clearly separate politics from popular culture, public from private spheres, and historical studies from memories of the past. In such a moment, the Hidden Galleries project makes a particularly valuable contribution to our understandings of the past in Eastern Europe and to the clandestine lives so many citizens in socialist regimes led. Many religious minorities in the region, whose existence was largely underground and yet vigorously pursued by state authorities, now have a legal status and can assemble with a degree of ease that was unimaginable in the past. However, when these communities continue to exist it is often through adaptation to dramatically new social and political circumstances. The collapse of socialist regimes poses a challenge for all scholars: how can we know what inspired and motivated socialist-era religious minorities to take such risks to live an unauthorized life? When our own religious imaginary is not up to the task, where can we turn for clues as to what animated these communities and lent meaning to the individual lives of their members? This talk will analyze why memory studies has become so tremendously fashionable in Eastern Europe and what anthropologists through their study of material culture can add to our understandings of the past and specifically the insight offered by the study of processes to “other” non-conforming religious communities.



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Programme
(Times are all GMT, add 1 hour for CET)

Thursday March 18th

09:30 – 10:00 Introduction and Housekeeping - James Kapaló and Anca Şincan

10:00-11.40 Panel 1 – Beyond the Archives: Community Sources

Ágnes Hesz - Writing as an act of resilience. The archive of a Calvinist Church Choir in Ceauşescu's Romania.

Ionuţ Biliuţă - "Dreams of Terror" and Divine Visions: Legionary Encounters with the Inner-Self and God in Communist and post-Communist Romania

Elena Vorontsova - The True Orthodox Christians (TOC) of the Tambov region in KGB archives and local narratives

Anca Şincan - Chronicling the underground: the diary of an Old Calendarist monastic brother

12:00 – 13.40 Panel 2 – Secret Police Operations and their Files

Iemima Ploscariu - Bolshevik Baptists: The Siguranţa and the Chişinău Israelites of the New Testament

Cristian Vasile - An Underground Survival in communist Romania: the Case of Greek Catholic Bishop Iuliu Hossu

Maciej Krzywosz - The Secret Police and the Marian Apparition: The Miracle of Zabłudów as a case study from Communist Poland

Corneliu Pintilescu - Securitate's Hermeneutics: Assigning Meaning to Religious Activities in the Everyday Practices of the Romanian Secret Police

14:20 – 15:20 Keynote Lecture: *Truth and Memory: The Twin Perils of Secret Archives*

Professor Lavinia Stan (St. Francis Xavier University, Canada)

15:40 – 17:30 Panel 3 – Landscapes of Memory: Visual and Material Cultures

Ksenia Pimenova - Hybrid spaces: secular and religious entanglements in museum space

Lana Peternel, Filip Škiljan and Ankica Marinović - Abandoned Sacred Places: Case Study of the Russian and Serbian Orthodox Churches in Croatia



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Gabriela Nicolescu – From secret archives to intimate flats: Exhibitions as devices

Kinga Povedák - Tracing images from the religious underground: Photo-elicitation with secret police photography

Iuliana Cindrea-Nagy - When absence comes to matter: the Old Calendarist Church's strive for survival

17:45 – 18:30 **“The Underground” Digital Exhibition** – Selma Rizvic, Tatiana Vagramenko, Dumitru Lisnic and James Kapaló (Collaboration between Hidden Galleries and Laboratory for Computer Graphics - Sarajevo Graphics Group DIGI.BA)

Friday March 19th

9:00 – 10:00 **Keynote Lecture: *Archival Hybridity***
Dr Cristina Vătulescu (New York University)

10:20 – 12:00 **Panel 4 – Shaping Identities**

Nadezhda Beliakova - In the Shadow of the KGB: The Role of the Soviet Secret Police in the Construction of the Evangelical Baptist Identity (late 1960's – early 1980's).

Johannes Dyck - Jakob Görzen as a Member of a Middle Rank Group within the Soviet Underground Baptist Community: A Case Study

Ondřej Matějka - “He was always on the margins”: The trajectory of a Czech pastor – secret police collaborator

Éva Petrás - Contested narratives: Jehovah's Witnesses and State Security in Socialist Hungary (1948-1965)

12:20 – 13:50 **Panel 5 - Religions, Ideologies and Histories on the Move:**

Aleksandra Djurić Milovanović - Religious Minorities Experiences and Contested Memories in Socialist Yugoslavia: Understanding the Concept of “borders in motion”

Roland Clark - How Charismatic Religious Leaders Responded to the Rise of State Socialism in 1940s Romania

Pavlo Yermieiev - Condemnation, apology, concealment: descriptions of religious persecutions in Russian historiography (the first half of the 19th century)

Gašper Mithans - Catholics and deconversion: processes of State-imposed atheization in the Socialist Republic of Slovenia (Yugoslavia)



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14:30 – 15:30 **Keynote Lecture: *Anthropology and the Religious Imaginary of the Past***
Professor Catherine Wanner (Pennsylvania State University)

15:50 – 17:30 **Panel 6 - Materialising Religion in Secret Police Archives**

Tatiana Vagramenko - Police ethnography and performance: Religious charisma through the prism of a KGB file

Konstantinos Giakoumis - Underground Spirituality & Its Materiality: Religious Culture under Surveillance & Persecution in Communist Albania, 1967-1990

Dumitru Lisnic - The making and unmaking of the synagogue in Birzula: materiality, textuality and agency in early 1920's Soviet Union

James A. Kapaló - Fasting, Feasting, and Famine: Making Foodways Evidential in a Secret Police Operation

17:30 – **Closing Words and Thanks – The Hidden Galleries Team**



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