

MY LIFE AS A SPY

**INVESTIGATIONS IN A
SECRET POLICE FILE**

Katherine Verdery

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Frontispiece: The anthropologist in the field, 1993. Author's photo.

Cover art: Surveillance photo of "VERA" in her hotel room, 1985.

Courtesy of the Archive of the Consiliul Național pentru Studierea

Arhivelor Securității, Fond Informativ.

Prologue

25 SEPTEMBER 1973: a lovely fall afternoon in Hunedoara County, in the Transylvanian region of Romania. Long hair flying out behind me, I am riding my new Mobra motorbike south from the capital, Deva, toward the mountainous commune of Lunca Cernei in the westernmost branch of the Southern Carpathian Alps. From the highway, the scenery is spectacular and will become more so once I head up into the hills on smaller roads, beginning at the village of Toplița. Light plays on the water that flows into the river Cerna, sparkling in the sun; flocks of sheep and goats forage on the stony hillsides. I have an unwarranted sense of well-being as I enjoy the air rushing past me. Well, not “rushing,” exactly: at its fastest, the bike goes about fifty-five miles an hour, and I’m taking too much pleasure in my surroundings to push it.

Twenty-five years old and knowing practically nothing about Romania, I have come here from Stanford University to do research for my doctoral thesis in anthropology. The motorbike tour through the county is designed to help me choose a field site. I am to visit some thirty villages in this mountainous region and have so far been having a wonderful time, meeting and talking with people in my still-rudimentary Romanian. They are patient and try to help me express myself.

I've had the Mobra only a couple of weeks and am not used to it yet—nor to the trucks, belching foul exhaust, that repeatedly slow me down. Now the afternoon sky opens into dusk; I'm riding straight into the setting sun and find it hard to see. That is the only explanation I can offer for why I am unexpectedly stopped by a policeman for riding my Mobra into a restricted area, marked (he said) by a sign—I completely missed it—that prohibited entry to foreigners. My brilliant-red license plates brand me as precisely that.

Here is how one of the earliest documents in my Romanian secret police file reported the incident.

Military unit No. 01942 of Timisoara Region
Counterintelligence bureau
No. 0016102 of 03 October 1973

TOP SECRET
Copy 2

Report for the Record

On 29.09.1973 military expert USCATU GHEORGHE, officer on duty at Military Unit 01736 Hunedoara, discussing with some citizens from Lunca Cernei commune, learned from them that on 25 and 26 September 1973 there was an American citizen in the respective commune who was interested in their customs . . .

We specify that in the vicinity of Lunca Cernei commune is found Military Unit 01736 with a special profile. The access roads to the unit are marked with the indication "Entry prohibited to foreigners" . . . which the said VERGERY KATERYNE ignored.

"Special profile": in a word, I had ridden straight into a military base. Marginal comments confirmed that the report had gone from the military unit to the head of the county branch of the secret police, the Securitate, raising suspicion. Other documents revealed its upward path to headquarters in Bucharest.¹ I have been in the county barely four days and already it seems I am not who I think I am.

How had this happened, and what would be its consequences? The causes included the ignorance of a young woman hoping to learn something about life in a distant place, for which neither her training nor the atmosphere in which she was raised—those years we have labeled the "Cold War," with its associated conceptual blinders—had even remotely prepared her. Now here

I was, sitting bewildered and scared in a faraway police station up in the mountains of a communist country, while the policeman telephoned his boss for instructions. Why had my contacts in Deva given me an itinerary going right through a military base? Maybe that was what one of them was signaling with his cryptic advice to be careful when I got to Toplița. Or maybe even they themselves didn't know where the military bases were. How would I get out of this fix, with my barely adequate command of the language? Was my entire dissertation project already hopelessly compromised? (Would anyone care if it were?)

My field notes continue on from officer Uscatu's report:

Field notes, 24 Sept. 1973

The cop eventually put me in the hall, called his superiors in Deva, and asked what to do with me (he spoke so loudly I could hear every word). Suddenly—it seemed almost in mid-sentence—he shouted, “My respects!” and hung up. He now began to encourage me actively to go on, though I was disposed to give up the whole venture. He told me how interesting it was from an ethnographic point of view, while I continued to talk about whether I should stay or go home.

When the policeman returned with the happy news that I could continue my trip, I objected that this made no sense: How could I, a U.S. citizen, do research right on the edge of a military base in a Soviet satellite country? Since selecting a research site was the whole point of my tour through the county, I should simply go back down the mountain and look elsewhere. But now, more baffling still, the policeman became insistent, anxiously urging me to go on: it was beautiful up there, with very interesting folklore; the people were nice, they were expecting me; I should stick to my assigned program. . . . Unluckily, I let myself be persuaded—and as a result, military officer Uscatu heard of my visit to Lunca Cernei and wrote his report. It provided the wording a Securitate officer would later use in launching my surveillance file.

And so began my life as a spy. It contains several different threads, weaving together my experience of surveillance, the attempt to do anthropology in a communist setting permeated with secrets and fabrications, the work of Securitate officers and their informers, and lastly, serendipity, as officer Uscatu's memo blew up to take over my dissertation research because I had made a stupid mistake. It would not be the last time.

The Doppelganger

June 2008. I am perusing my secret police file in Bucharest and come upon the following document.

Ministry of the Interior
Cluj County Inspectorate
Service III [counterespionage]

TOP SECRET
[5].xii.1984

Report with proposals for finalizing the case of "VERA."

VERDERY KATHERINE, 36 years old, professor in the Department of Anthropology of "JOHN HOPKINS" University in Baltimore, U.S.A., benefiting from an I.R.E.X. grant, came to the Romanian S.R. in August 1984, settling in Cluj-Napoca.

From the complex informative-operative surveillance measures undertaken concerning her, it has resulted that her proposed research is merely a cover for unfolding an intense activity of collecting socio-political information that has no connection whatever with her research properly speaking. . . .

From photocopies [of her field notes] it results that the information obtained by "VERA" has a hostile character toward our country, as she constantly seeks to bring out the dissatisfactions and resistant attitudes toward the politics of our Party and state on the part of those she exploits for informative purposes. . . .

Bearing in mind that her presence in our country is aimed at collecting tendentious information of a socio-political character and is at the same time of a nature to stimulate the activity of hostile elements, we consider it necessary to put a stop to this activity and in this sense we propose . . . that her stay in this country be interrupted.

[signed by the heads of the Cluj County Inspectorate, Securitate, and Service 3 (counterespionage), and the heads of the counterespionage division for Bucharest and for all of Romania]

Reading this makes it suddenly clear: I have a secret double, a doppelganger—a being from folklore given this name in the late eighteenth century and often seen as an evil twin or challenger of the self's equilibrium. You can

see her traces in this report. She is a schemer who seeks to destabilize the regime. Her name is “VERA,” which means “true” in Latin; hence, she competes for reality status with me, KATHERINE VERDERY (KV). Actually, my double is multiple; each “self” has a different name, but they are held together by a single alleged occupation: spying on Romania for the United States. Different names accompany the different time periods and the kinds of spy the Securitate—the creators of my doppelganger—believe me to be. For instance, I am “FOLCLORISTA” (“The Folklorist”), spying for the military (1973–74); I am “VERA,” living in Cluj to spy for the Hungarian diaspora in the United States (1984–86); I am “VANESSA,” spied on at home in Baltimore for associating with Romanian dissidents (1987–88).² Evidently, spying meant several different things, which it is my job to sort out. For the first offense the Securitate drew up a plan for my arrest, for the second I was to be expelled from the country, and for the third they were preparing a penal action against me.

To my family, friends, and colleagues, these possibilities may seem surprising. The Securitate, however, perceives my doppelganger (to them, my “real” self) differently—more daring, more secretive, more deceitful—from the self known to my associates at home. I strain to glimpse myself in her, somewhat embarrassed if I succeed. Because my life as “VERA” occupies more pages than my life as the other nine pseudonyms in this file, for simplicity I will refer to my doppelganger as “VERA”—the capitals and quotation marks indicating a pseudonym, in the Securitate’s practice.

The acquisition of a double—of a new identity—will prove to be a central feature of what it’s like to be under surveillance.³ The customary Western self-concept would tell us that we have unique identities (though I will have reason to doubt that), which the states we live in stabilize and meticulously verify on paper. States we visit often do the same. In this light, “VERA” is nearly as real as KV: KV’s entire published oeuvre in 2017 is just slightly larger than her file. At the time of our actual paper rivalry, however, “VERA” was much better documented than KV and hence even more real, from state-makers’ point of view.

Was “VERA” a spy? I didn’t think so—indeed, I initially had the word “spy” in quotation marks in this book’s title but decided to leave things more fluid. When I first went to Romania in late July 1973, I imagined myself a nascent ethnographer, whose aim was to write about other societies and peoples—in this case, Romania. I was to spend seventeen months on a scholarly exchange grant from the International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX), gathering data for my thesis.⁴ In the proposal that the Romanian side had approved, I had presented a project I fully intended to do. That is, I did not



"Target 'VERA.'" Surveillance photo, 1984. Courtesy of the Archive of the Consiliul Național pentru Studierea Arhivelor Securității, Fond Informativ (ACNSAS-FI).

misrepresent my plans, although it would later seem I had, for my project would turn out to be undoable and would have to be changed. Having always considered myself a person of integrity, I felt I had nothing to hide; I believed that if I worked aboveboard, I would have no problems. Thus, in 2008, when I read my Securitate file, I was shocked to discover that they believed otherwise, having uncovered various secret doubles who definitely intended harm to Romania and should be thrown out.

I borrow this image of the doppelganger from others who have written about their Securitate files. I first encountered it in a 2009 interview with Nobel Prize-winning writer Herta Müller, who was born in Romania but eventually emigrated to Germany when the Securitate pressure on her family became unbearable. Here is how she describes being doubled:

In my file I am two different people. One is called "Cristina," who is being fought as an enemy of the state. To compromise this "Cristina" the falsification workshop of Branch "D" (disinformation) fabricated a doppelganger from all those ingredients that would harm me the most [in her new home in West Germany]—party-faithful communist, unscrupulous secret agent.

Wherever I went, I had to live with this doppelganger. It was not only sent after me wherever I went, it also hurried ahead. . . . It has taken on a life of its own.⁵

Our situations differ considerably, of course. Unlike me, Herta Müller is a world-renowned writer who was the direct target of Securitate harassment and persecution, meeting regularly with her oppressors face to face, as I did not. What joins us, however, is the experience of having been multiplied, turned into something we do not recognize as ourselves. We have been crafted, in a peculiar way, by an organization working presciently on the post-modern assumption that people's identities are unstable and do not unify us, but also on the modernist one that surface appearances are deceiving and reality must be sought beneath them. This combination gives the officers a number of powerful tools as they analyze the behavior of a target (their name for the people they follow) for signs of a hidden truth.

Another Securitate target, Romanian philosopher Gabriel Liiceanu, also has a doppelganger, an "evil twin." Asking himself why he should be so upset at finding in his file a copy of his life, he answers,

This cheap misrepresentation wasn't just bad and ugly. It was also dangerous, because—in the role of "target" that I had been assigned—it had been at the same time aimed *against* my life. It was my *Doppelgänger*, my double, ready to eliminate me. It was I, indeed, but an "I" that was negative, an "I-enemy," which in the end would *have to be* eliminated. . . . This Clone from the File recorded and reproduced the cells of the original, but commandeered them according to its own logic.⁶

In short, the clone worked much like a virus. Because the replica would resemble him, the Securitate could readily substitute its fabrication for his "real" self and change his destiny, making him appear guilty of things that might send him to languish in a Romanian labor camp.

My own reaction is less trenchant than Liiceanu's. Discovering that I have a doppelganger has left me befuddled. When I read their descriptions of myself as a spy, I begin to wonder whether I really *was* one. How much of the practice of anthropologists resembles spying? Then I ask myself whether the unattractive portrait they paint of me might actually be true, or at least have something to it. On the plus side, I find in the indomitable "VERA" some characteristics I would do well to incorporate into what I experience as my current, rather depressed and crotchety self; a bit of Lacanian "mirroring" of

the more striking “VERA” could do wonders for me. But, you see, the doppelganger is already having an effect: I had to rewrite that last sentence, adding “what I experience as.” Far from being intriguing additions to my repertoire, my doubles have unmoored my self-perception.

The unmooring commenced in 2008—shortly after I first began to skim through my file—because of the way it is organized. The documents in each of its eleven volumes follow no chronological order at all, and sometimes the dates on successive pages go backward rather than forward. Whole clusters of types of documents appear together without respect to date—multiple reports of my being shadowed on various days, sheaves of transcriptions of my telephone conversations or translations of my correspondence, groups of “informative notes” by friends and acquaintances who reported on me, and sets of reports from case officers or their superiors on up the hierarchy. It was chaotic, mystifying.

As I read the file more closely, my head began to spin. I was encountering something not written to be read by its subject (like many anthropology books, for that matter) and under no requirement to be intelligible to her. I could make no sense of the mishmash of times and places, the perplexing organization of the documents that made them usable to officers but impenetrable to anyone else. Because I felt I could not work as I intended with the file that way, I copied it and reorganized the copy in chronological order—as have others who have published their files.⁷ This helped to position me in time and space so I could better find myself and recognize my experience. Such self-assertion violated the Securitate’s way of rendering me, of course, and may have had the salutary effect of giving me some distance from this alarming mountain of paper. Its organization made clear, though, that the file represented not a personal biography but, at best, an incitement to one.

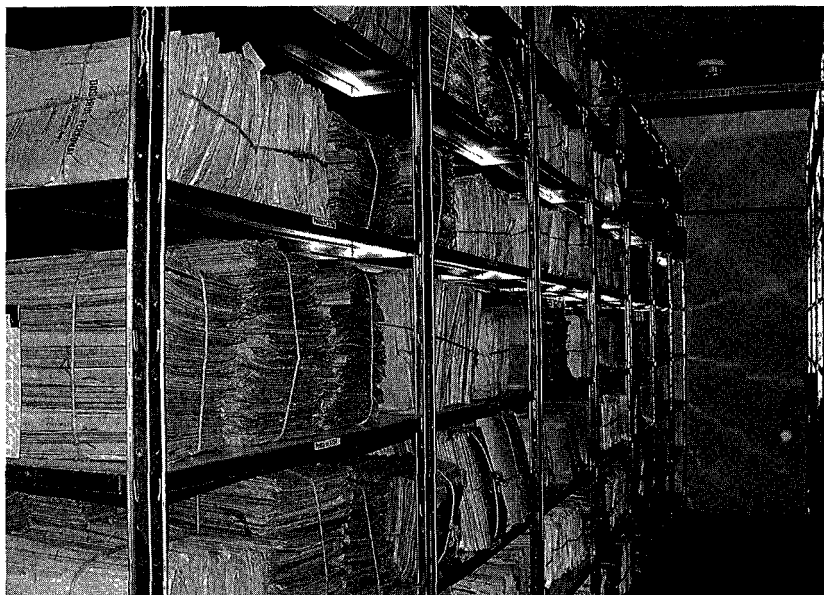
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How, after all, had I come into possession of my secret police file? This is not a normal feature of an anthropologist’s research.⁸ The answer has two parts and must be contextualized within the scrupulous and bafflingly prolific file-production characteristic of twentieth-century authoritarianisms. First, in 1999, a decade after the revolution that had executed communist dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu, who had ruled the country as a reluctant Soviet ally since 1965, the Romanian Parliament passed a law—as some other Eastern Euro-

pean countries had done earlier—granting people access to their surveillance files and providing for public identification of Securitate officers and informers who appeared there. After numerous and ongoing legal challenges, the law eventually began to be used in a process known throughout the region as “lustration” (purification), for vetting would-be politicians: their files would be checked for evidence of collaboration with the Securitate, in a startling parallel with the exposure rituals of the communist period. That process aimed to prevent beneficiaries of the communist system from holding power in the new one. Many countries chose not to open their secret police files in this way; some did so earlier, others later, others later still.⁹ My ability to write this book comes partly from having worked in Romania (which allows full access to one’s file), rather than elsewhere. The files have participated in lengthy attempts to revise the country’s past and consolidate an anticommunist hegemony, a subject I unfortunately cannot further explore here.¹⁰

Lustration was only one of the uses to which the secret police files could be put. Anyone who simply wanted to know what had been going on around them during the communist period, and especially the names of those who had informed on them, could request their file. In addition, accredited researchers like me could request any number of files for scholarly purposes. I therefore approached my file already bearing two identities: I was a “victim” (the term Romanians use) of Securitate surveillance, and I was researching the surveillance of foreign scholars during the Cold War, using my own case as an example of how it worked.

The second answer to how I got my file is that shortly after the Securitate archive was opened, I had begun using it for a research project with UCLA sociologist Gail Kligman on how the communists had created Romania’s collective farms. The research produced our book *Peasants under Siege*. We worked with the institution set up to administer public access to the archive, the National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives, widely referred to by its Romanian acronym CNSAS (cheh neh SASS). Because Gail and I found that the CNSAS archive held a lot of useful material, we spent two weeks or so there every summer for several years, getting to know the employees and copying documents for our book. During my 2006 visit, the by-now-familiar supervisor of the reading room asked me why I hadn’t petitioned to see my own file. Since I had had no idea that non-Romanians could do so, it had never occurred to me to ask for it; now I learned that the law permitted file access to citizens of any NATO country. When I told her that I wasn’t at all sure I wanted to know



Files in the CNSAS archive. Courtesy of Cristina Anisescu.

what was in it, she replied that if I requested it I might never get it, or finding it might take a long time. If it finally came, I could decide whether I wanted to read it or not.

So with some trepidation I applied for the file, and in late fall of 2007 (after, I assume, a close reading and possible culling of its contents) I was told that it was ready for me. The next May, I arrived in the reading room to see on a table three huge stacks of yellowing dossiers plus a fourth small one. There were eleven volumes in all. Each stack contained multiple volumes of 300–400 pages apiece, covered in cardboard and bound with string. I began to read, spending several hours going through them and completely forgetting about lunch. When I finally came up for air, I looked at the people around me and found myself thinking they were all secret police informers rather than objects of surveillance reading their files, like me. How seductive is this secret world of the file! How it sucks you in, quietly insinuating its categories into your thoughts! (A colleague told me then that she had stopped her research in the archive for a while because she was feeling poisoned.) Having seen enough of the file to be both intrigued and appalled, I ordered a copy of the whole thing—and had to buy an extra suitcase to take home its 2,781 pages, which filled my new brown carry-on entirely.

For the next two years the file sat menacingly in a box in the corner of my study while I finished another book. Then I dithered for some time about whether I really wanted to know what was in that box. Finally I read the file with care in the autumn of 2010. That reading aroused very complex feelings: outrage at seeing photos that a hidden camera had taken of me in my underwear; despair and anger at learning of people whom I had considered close friends yet who had given nasty informers' reports on me; terrible remorse at learning how I myself had delivered friends to the Securitate by being careless; amusement at how officers had garbled important facts; indignation at the ugly picture of me that surfaces in these pages (cold as ice, manipulative, scheming); and above all, like other readers of their files, astonishment at the remarkable extent of the surveillance—the sixteen- and eighteen-hour days of following me around, the intercepted correspondence, the eavesdropping and wiretaps. . . . My surveillance engaged the visual and the auditory almost equally, enriched by their interplay with the text and with my own sense-making efforts. I found the variety and force of the conflicting emotions all these aroused—along with the sensation that the Securitate knew absolutely *everything*, down to my most intimate thoughts—quite exhausting.

These emotions form one of the challenges to my telling this story of surveillance. I must try to sort them out, learn something from them, domesticate them, domesticate the file itself. I must move from rage and depression at what the officers did to fascination with how they did it. Another challenge concerns how much of my private life to reveal—a scruple my officers did not observe, as they festooned their pages about me with nearly-nude photographs, the names of lovers, and other intimate details, sending some upward for the delectation of their bosses. If the Securitate had no concept of privacy, what hope have I of retrieving any now? Yet other obstacles lie in whether to reveal the names of people who figure in my file, or rather to protect them in exchange for their willingness to speak with me about it (I chose this path), and whether to “correct” things in the file that are outright misrepresentations from my point of view (I mostly decided not to). These are all complex challenges.

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Responding to my file engages me in a complexly layered chain of research. First, I conducted my fieldwork—participating, observing, and talking with people—and stored the results in field notes. These form the first layer of

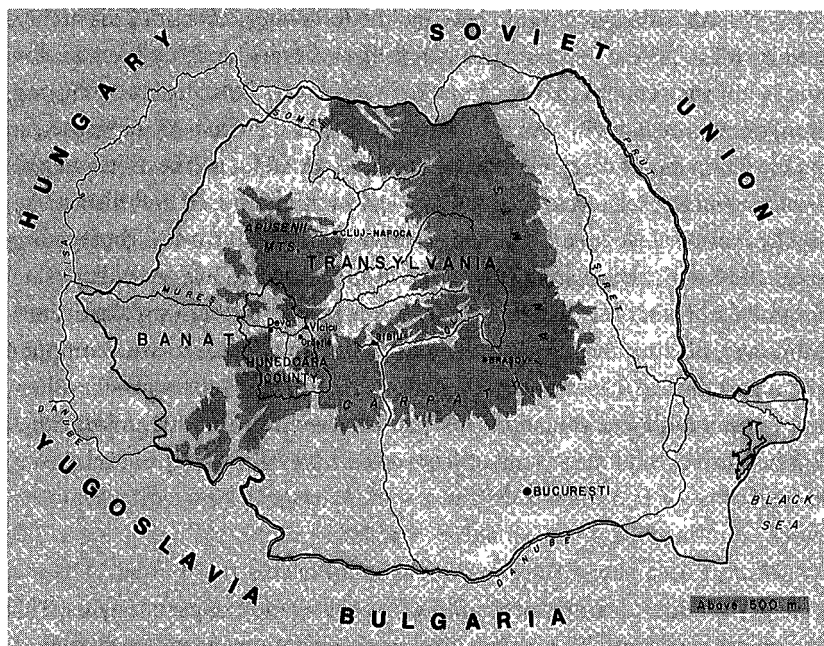


My Securitate file. Courtesy of CNSAS staff.

the research chain. Alongside this, the Securitate conducted research on me conducting research, using their conversations with Romanian informers, my movements, my phone calls and correspondence, and my own field notes and intimate journals; they stored the results in dossiers of officers' and informers' reports. That is the second layer. Now I conduct research on their research on me conducting research; I use their notes and some conversations with their informers and even, as we will see, with some officers themselves. This is the third layer. And I have plenty of reason to think the successor organization to the Securitate, the SRI (Romanian Information Service), is laying down a fourth layer of research, as my writing offers them new "data" in the form of publications (such as my 2014 book *Secrets and Truths*),¹¹ as well as through talks and interviews in Romania that show them what I am up to. This time, however, I do not have access to their "research notes": my file access stops at 1989.

Characteristics of the Files

Between July 1973 and November 1988 I conducted forty months of research in Romania, staying for greater or lesser amounts of time in four places and thus posing problems of coordination for the Securitate. I spent the most



Map of Romania with locations mentioned.

time, during the 1970s, in the village of Aurel Vlaicu in the Transylvanian county of Hunedoara. Next were the cities of Cluj in Transylvania's northwest and, briefly, Iaşi, in Moldavia, in the northeast—both in the 1980s. Throughout these two decades I periodically went for my mail to Bucharest, in the south. Although there are some things I would have expected to find in the file and do not, on the whole it represents my life in Romania well, both spatially and temporally. Whether or not it has been “cleaned up,” as some would claim, I cannot say.

Because the problems of particular concern to the top Securitate generals in Bucharest varied significantly by region and time period, the language and the issues addressed in the file vary as well. Each of its eleven volumes bears one of four identifying numbers and represents one or another of the places where I lived. The files for Cluj (the largest file by far) and for Vlaicu each have different numbers. A third number contains some duplicates from those two and also material from Bucharest and Iaşi. The fourth small volume (ninety-four pages) covers only 1987–89; it was created by the Foreign Intelligence Service (CIE)—Romania's CIA—rather than the domestic branch, source of the other volumes.

My CNSAS colleague Virgiliu gave me the following account of the archive and its files: "The CNSAS archive is not like a library, and the life of a dossier is not the same as that of a book between covers. It's constantly shifting; things are thrown out by the case officer or the person who puts it together, so no file has in it now everything that was ever destined for it. The officer has his own exigencies, related to justifying or legitimating himself and his activity, but he is also subject to other pressures from above." This means that reading one's file is a bit like an archeological excavation. One knows one will get only fragments of what was there and will have few clues concerning what is not. Moreover, files are shaped differently according to the officers who compiled them and the archivists who periodically culled them. A person's file, then, has considerable individuality—not just because it deals with an individual but because each of the several officers contributes differently to each case.

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One of the oddest features of the file is its proliferation of pseudonyms. This is a function of something all intelligence organizations do: compartmentalize their different tasks and services by walling off each sector of activity from the others, so as to protect their secrets. The people who shadow me use one pseudonym for me; the people censoring my correspondence use another—and different ones for the different places where I lived; the people eavesdropping on phone calls or conversations in restaurants may use yet another; and the various case officers who receive all these reports use still others. (Targets do sometimes appear in documents with their own names, especially in the early stages of an investigation.) Officers create a target's pseudonym based on something specific to the person (such as the occupation "Folklorist") or, very commonly, by taking a letter or syllable of their first or last name and creating a new name from it. Hence, I am "VERA," based on "VERdery" with an added a. I am also "VIKY," "VALY," "KORA," "KITTY," "KATY," or (for the Foreign Intelligence Service) "VANESSA," "VADU," or "VERONA": ten different characters. In Romania a person who baptizes another becomes their "godparent"; therefore, I am multiply blessed by having so many godparents to watch over me.

The people who informed on me, with a few exceptions, had pseudonyms as well, and so did many of the places in which they met their officers. Informers' pseudonyms are generally created in the same way as

the target's. An informer who is employed only on occasion for a specific problem, however, without being recruited and signing an oath of confidentiality that could entail more extensive reporting, might receive no pseudonym; rather, the officer would use the person's name (perhaps enclosing it in quotation marks, to indicate informer status). In general, the only people in a given set of files who do not have pseudonyms are the Securitate officers themselves (known popularly as *Secus* [SEH kooz] or *securiști* [seh koo REESHT, singular seh koo REEST]—terms I will use interchangeably). The files therefore create a world of their own, in which the officers are “natives” and thus require no new names, while everyone else has to be re-baptized.

Typical of this world is the use of an idiosyncratic language, including terms like “element” and “target” or “objective” (*obiectiv*) in the sense of a military objective—their words for the people they follow. Once a target becomes sufficiently suspect to have a full investigation, a specific kind of file is opened: a DUI (*dosar de urmărire informativă*) or “dossier of informative pursual.” Eight of my eleven volumes form two DUIs, one each from Hunedoara County and the city of Cluj. Two more volumes fall into a different kind of file: those set up around certain “problems.” The “problem” might be religious sects, or Romania's German or Hungarian minorities, or foreign students and researchers, by country. The “problem” file for “Lecturers, doctoral researchers, and students from the USA” consists of twenty-six weighty volumes including pretty much every U.S. scholar who ever went to communist Romania, sometimes with a few pages only, sometimes with several hundred. I occupy two enormous volumes of those twenty-six—more than any other U.S. scholar by far. We will see a number of reasons for this, among them the number of forms of spying of which I was suspected and the variety of places in which I spent time.

When I first read my huge file I felt very important, but I was chastened when I looked through that twenty-six-volume file. Nothing in my graduate school training had prepared me for this. Virtually every one of the scholars was assumed to be a spy; I was unique only in the number of pages I commanded. Many had been declared *personae non gratae*, refused reentry, and/or tossed out of the country, as was recommended in my case too.¹² A former Secu officer explained it to me in 2014: “There were a lot of foreigners around in those years. We had to see what you were up to. It was, after all, the Cold War!” In these texts, I and other Americans are regularly referred to as “CIA agents.” Therefore, in the Securitate's view, “spy” was the default identity for Western scholars.

For officers to assume that “VERA,” my spy doppelganger, was my “true” self was, indeed, not far-fetched. Many embassy personnel, particularly the political attachés, likely had intelligence connections, which some of the scholars going to the Soviet bloc might have had as well (one of the Fulbright lecturers himself told me that he did). Recent research shows that numerous U.S. organizations, especially cultural ones, were CIA fronts. Most of the people involved in their activities had no idea that the CIA was their backer—that CIA funds supported work by USAID, and that the CIA regularly approached scholars preparing to go on the exchanges.¹³ Although individual scholars protested this treatment, there was nothing like the backlash that arose in the early years of the twenty-first century, with the attempted integration of anthropologists into the Human Terrain System in Afghanistan, for instance. David Price discusses numerous anthropologists accused of being spies, as well as examples of intelligence officers using anthropological cover for their work.¹⁴ These sorts of CIA connections were precisely what the communist secret police suspected. They noted time after time in the files relating to U.S. researchers something like, “We have data showing that Americans in the exchange programs are under the patronage of the CIA, and their research themes are part of a general plan to collect information about our country.”

We should not be surprised by this: after all, our own intelligence services made exactly the same assumption about scholars coming from the Soviet bloc. In 1983, a Romanian returning from a trip to the United States informed his handler about an interview given by William Casey, then head of the CIA, in which (in the words of this informer)

he called the public's attention to the danger represented by the scientific and technical specialists from socialist countries in programs of cultural and scientific exchange in universities, research institutes, and other American institutions. In the CIA's opinion the great majority of these specialists have technological and scientific espionage as their mission. Especially dangerous are the Fulbright grantees, who almost without exception have such missions. On behalf of the CIA, Dr. Casey . . . recommended avoiding close personal contacts with these specialists from socialist countries.¹⁵

Tit for tat. Indeed, the exchange-grant agency IREX, my sponsor, had itself been formed by scholars who wished to prevent the chairman of its precursor from using it to promote spying rather than scholarship.

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Reasons for my appearing to be a spy—that is, for my doppelganger to be not a double but my true self—are all over this file. To begin with, I came to Romania in 1973 claiming to be an ethnographer interested in folklore, a discipline familiar to any Romanian having a university degree (and most *securiști* hired after 1970 had one). For decades prior to the communist regime and to some degree after it began as well, Romanian ethnographers had done first-rate research in rural areas. They tended to do it in a particular way, however, which distinguished them from U.S. anthropologists: a team of scholars would descend on a village for a couple of weeks, each asking about specific things (customs, dress, folktales, rituals, dialect) and each usually concentrating on a small number of village “experts.” After that they would pool their results and write them up, often collectively. No one came alone and settled in a single village for over a year, as I did. No one talked with many if not most people in the village, or asked all kinds of questions about everything, from village history under the Habsburg Empire to the way Germans and Romanians raised pigs and cows in the 1930s to intermarriage in the 1970s. The fact that I did so meant I must be going beyond the bounds of the project I had come with, and that made it even more likely that I was lying and spying rather than doing ethnography. In any case, what I was doing bore scant resemblance to anything *securiști* would have recognized as such. More pertinent, according to Romanian sociologist Nicolae Gheorghe, they didn’t really see the difference between ethnography and espionage, something he spent countless hours trying unsuccessfully to explain to his Securitate handler.¹⁶

Second, the way I carried myself was suspect. At least, so it seemed to my friend Emilia, who told me that when she met me in 1990 she immediately thought I might be a spy: “You were dressed very modestly, you didn’t hold yourself above us. Your style was to reduce the difference between yourself and Romanians, under-communicating it.” In short, my manner of dress was a form of hiding. Eventually she came to see it as my way of trying to form good relations with villagers, but her first thought was, “Maybe she’s a spy. Instead of seeming like someone from a totally different world, you seemed to be one of us”—that is, she thought I had been specifically trained to fit in.

I hid in other ways, too. Often when I took the train, I would not reveal my U.S. identity up front but would participate in the conversation as long as possible until someone would finally ask, “But where are you from *really*?” This sometimes enabled me to avoid tedious talk about life in America and to see what people had to say when my foreignness was not the focus of the conversation. Such hiding and listening, I now realize, made me a lot like a *securist*. Indeed, as we will see, the officers draw a parallel between my ethnographic practices and those of intelligence work. They recognize me as a spy because I do some of the things they do—I use code names and write of “informants,” for instance, and both of us collect “socio-political information” of all kinds rather than just focusing on a specific issue. So what are the similarities and differences between these two different modalities of information gathering: spying and ethnography? When I read in the file that I “exploit people for informative purposes,” can I deny that anthropologists often do just that, as Securitate officers do? Isn’t this part of the critique of my discipline that likens it to a colonial practice?

In fact, as I read I begin to feel my doppelganger taking over: I find myself becoming a spy, or at least I see the reasons for the Securitate’s pursuing me as one. Our aims and methods differ, of course. But reading the file does make me begin to wonder: Was I a spy, and in what ways? Can I get close enough to the Securitate now to find out?

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What benefit is there to reading one’s file? It is a painful process, one that has ruined friendships and even marriages. Consonant with my initial hesitation, I asked for mine without having a specific agenda for it. I’d had a vague idea of writing something from it but no clear sense of what that would be. Once I started to read it, the numerous reactions that washed over me gradually coagulated into the idea of using the file as a way to understand both the communist regime and the experience of surveillance in it. My file would help me recapture my history in Romania; through that, I could approach these larger themes.

To describe being spied upon would also permit me to explore how surveillance affects the process of trying to learn about another way of life—of doing ethnography—in the face of efforts to prevent it. The question my file raises is, what does the presence and intervention of the secret police do to that process? How does one negotiate a relation with “another” in a Cold War cli-

mate? Even though I did not fully realize it at the time, constant surveillance substantially shifted the terrain of field research, which relies on that fragile relationship, trust. Although ethnography is possible in its absence, our best work rests upon it. In a context of surveillance, a constant current of mistrust and doubt eats away at trusting relations. Every conversation with someone becomes anchored by the presence of a third, often hidden—a third of whom I was at first largely unaware and with whom I could develop no relationship: the Securitate officer. That third affected all relationships, maintaining a continual drag on the growth of new ones, pulling each of them off center, just as an illicit affair decenters a person's marriage. Sometimes that hidden third was actually involved with my respondents; sometimes he (rarely she) was just a hidden possibility they might fear. He might be undermining the relations I could negotiate with others by spreading rumors that would affect people's vision of me or their sense of safety, and he did so under a regime of secrecy that I could not combat. By emphasizing this, I can use my file to bring global power relations into the intimacy of the field encounter, complicating a certain style of anthropology that focuses mainly on interpersonal negotiation and dialogue.¹⁷

Secrecy and States

Trying to grasp another way of life is always challenging, but especially so under conditions of secrecy. What is fieldwork like when done in the context of secrets and lies? How did the culture and apparatus of secrecy affect me, my research, my writing, my relationships?¹⁸ In the United States, the concept of transparency has a fundamental place in ideas about personal behavior, as well as in notions of democratic practice (though not, unfortunately, in the practice itself). This made living in a forest of secrets especially fraught for someone like me, at the time an unreflective believer in “telling it like it is.”

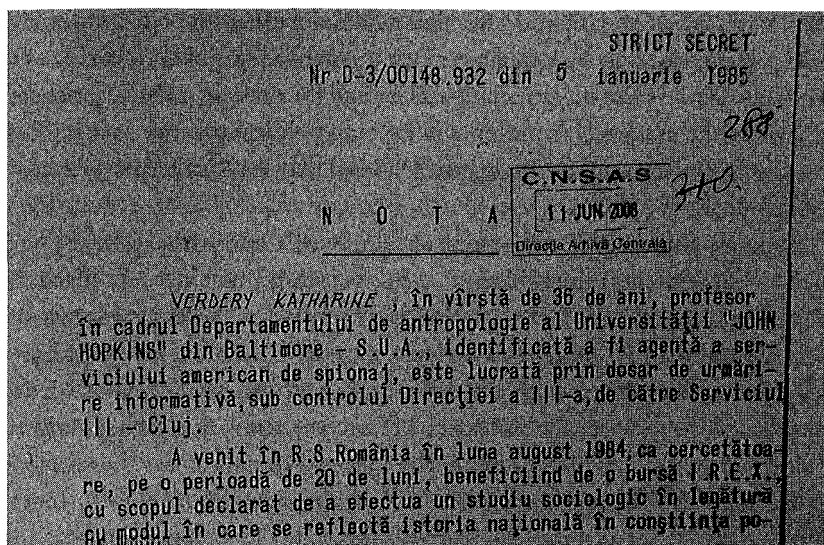
Secrecy was the essential medium of Securitate practices. It was also pervasive in all spheres of 1980s Romania, under the “wise guidance” of the Communist Party led by Nicolae Ceaușescu, whose rule had by then become an ugly dictatorship. Legislation governing the “state secret” prohibited revealing that secret but said almost nothing about its content. By making it an abstraction, in the words of philosopher István Király, the law “opened the way for a proliferation of the category of the secret unimaginable in other conditions.”¹⁹ In the Securitate specifically, both the identity and the work of many officers were secret except to those whom they recruited to inform—and those people were ordered not to reveal what they knew. Because the



Surveillance photo of
"VERA" loaded down
with sacks, 1985.
Courtesy of ACNSAS-FI.

officers assumed that my true purposes were hidden, to discern my intentions they themselves must be hidden as well. They were obsessed with other hidden things too: for instance, my shadowers always mentioned in their reports the bags or sacks I was carrying, in which something could be hidden. They were dying to know what it was. In addition, they were distressed not to be able to get into my locked suitcase to discover its secret contents.

The fact of surveillance itself was not a secret: it was known to all, at least in theory. Cristina Vatulescu observes that secrecy in the Soviet Union became a spectacle, as the NKVD/KGB carefully orchestrated a public cult for itself. During show trials, one could see huge piles of police dossiers on the table, visibly representing the secrets buried within them.²⁰ Most of the documents in my file are classified TOP SECRET (STRICT SECRET) in the upper right-hand corner (the more lowly designation SECRET appears very seldom). Does this



"TOP SECRET" document recommending my expulsion, 1985. Courtesy of ACNSAS-FI.

represent the actual presence of a secret, or is it rather the spectacle of one? Or was putting it there like applying a stamp with the place and date, a routine symbol of their work?

The secrecy I will describe here permeated Romanian society, but it was rooted in a specific social location: that of the state apparatus, occupied by the Romanian Communist Party. To invoke "the state" is to enter a conceptual minefield, which I will not attempt to clear; I merely lay out some of my working assumptions. The term "state" refers to something that has organizational, territorial, and ideological aspects. On the one hand, it has a very material existence in buildings, in institutions such as legislatures, and in bureaucratic practices, all linked to specific territories. On the other, extensive ideological work by groups within it goes into creating the impression that a state is a real actor, which "does" things. A more useful approach would see it as a fiction, an imaginary, which presents the appearance of unitary action. Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu defines states first by their possessing a monopoly on legitimate physical and symbolic violence, then as "a principle of orthodoxy, of consensus on the meaning of the world," "a collective fiction and well-founded illusion," one of whose basic functions is "to produce and canonize social classifications." People, he suggests, are coded by the state, which produces legitimate identities.²¹ Sociologist Philip Abrams pursues a similar line, following Foucault, seeing the state as "an ideological power,"

“an imaginative construction.” Because it does not exist, “our efforts to study it as a thing can only be contributing to the persistence of an illusion. . . . The state is not the reality which stands behind the mask of political practice. It is itself the mask which prevents our seeing political practice as it is.”²² If readers find themselves resisting these ideas, that testifies to the power of statist ideology.

Secrecy (which I have explored at greater length in *Secrets and Truths*) has been a fundamental ingredient of those masking processes. Its place in state practices has proliferated in Western countries with the appearance of security states and comprehensive electronic surveillance of citizens. Ethnographies of security in both historical and comparative dimensions have blossomed, joining earlier discussions of secrecy and a flourishing anthropology of the state, which began in the 1980s.²³ Abrams states the connection concisely: “The real official secret . . . is the secret of the non-existence of the state.”²⁴ Secrecy therefore serves “the state” by helping to create its illusion. This aptly describes the Securitate’s job, which thrived on masking the actual situation. The Securitate, while committed to assessing objective threats, often produced instead “highly speculative visions of covert dangers” that turned inconsequential persons into “powerful agents of global intrigue,” both necessitating and empowering the existence of a secret police.²⁵

If *secrecy* is easily made visible, it nonetheless works in tandem with the hiding of *secrets*, which often requires that those who work with secrets be invisible. The Securitate’s job was to contain enemies, including us foreigners, by discovering our secrets but not being seen to do so. Toward this aim, they recruited informers, who might help them discover the target’s basic secret: whether he or she was an “enemy” and how that enemy was doing his or her evil work. In practice, though, they assumed that foreign researchers were enemies, so it was no secret. For me, by contrast, followed by legions of informers and the multiple officers who handled my case, the paramount secret is the rudimentary one of my pursuers’ identities—*Who were they?*—and, in the case of officers, their actual physical presence. What did they look like? How did they sound? Which of my friends might be reporting to the Securitate on my activities? Which of the people who sought me out did so from simple curiosity or liking, and which were tasked with doing so by their officer? During my fieldwork, especially in the 1970s, I tended to think about this rather seldom, for three reasons. First, constantly wondering who was trustworthy would make it impossible to work; second, I had a wholly inadequate concept of the magnitude of my surveillance; and third, I thought I

would win the Securitate's confidence by being transparent and aboveboard. What remarkable naiveté!—and what ethnocentrism, to imagine that “transparency” would be a value for a communist intelligence service! How little I knew.

I worked, then, surrounded by secrets, many of them contained in my file. The fate of the secret differs, however, in how one approaches it. Some people think secrets exist below the surface, to be unearthed through a dialectic of secrecy and revelation. These people will read the file—and this book—to uncover secrets and their content. For others, by contrast, there is no secret truth to be revealed under the surface, only a collection of fragments too disparate to be read for such a secret. Do I have a secret to reveal or merely the succession of small fragments in which (reflecting the composition of my file) I have composed this book?

Identities

Anthropologists in the field play a variant of the role of “foreign visitor.” We go to some place, usually different from our home place, and hang out with the people we meet, trying to learn something of how they see and act in the world. In the process, we present them with the challenge of how to account for our presence, how to understand who we are and what we are doing. There is much room here for reciprocal identity-creation. Sometimes we are seen as missionaries trying to convert the locals, sometimes as poachers on their sacred knowledge. In many places, we have been viewed as spies and kept under surveillance for that reason.²⁶

If my file indicates multiple identities, with “spy” among them, the Securitate is not their only source. Romanians I met created them for me as well. For example, one day I went to the university library in Bucharest to do some reading. The librarian filed a report indicating what I had checked out and in addition told the reporting officer that I am “from a family of Hungarian Jews” (surprising, to someone from a family of French and British Protestants). In a positive vein, whereas the Securitate elaborated my qualities as an enemy, many Romanians in the villages and towns where I lived came to regard me as a friend—or at least as someone who was relatively harmless, if not indeed a likable sort of person who might become a friend eventually. Some sought to make me a resource in local quarrels or perhaps saw me as a kind of trader, a possible source of foreign goods (high-quality coffee, blue jeans, Kent cigarettes, maybe even dollars). After I finished my PhD, still others saw me as simply “Mrs. Professor,” holder of a respected title that

made me seem out of reach. And a few offered to accept me as a kind of kin, the most precious identity of all—the one that keeps me going back to Aurel Vlaicu even now, just to see “my family” there.

In a sense, we are all multiplied by those we meet, who create versions of us that may not much resemble our own versions. Although this process is universal, it is particularly intense when major cultural boundaries are crossed: when a person from one cultural tradition enters into a very different one—the common situation of anthropologists—and especially when those boundaries are significant politically. Why, then, am I making so much of my presumed identity as a spy?

The difference—and it was huge—between most anthropologists and those of us working behind the Iron Curtain between the 1960s and 1989 is the towering importance of the Cold War. The Cold War environment virtually required that people from the United States be anticommunist and be seen as such; it shaped the identities that anthropologists doing such work could try to assume; it plunked us down in the heart of the great superpower stand-off; and it made our possible spying a virtual certainty, from the viewpoint of intelligence services on both sides. The meaning of any behavior in this setting was not subject to the usual ways of interpreting behavior but became something quite different. Talal Asad has argued that because national security politics makes the entire range of social conduct potentially suspicious, all behavior becomes a possible sign. Thus, “ordinary life becomes the domain of a search for hidden meaning that then points to hidden danger.”²⁷ I believe this was not true—or was less true—of anthropologists working in other places during the Cold War.

As a result, doing fieldwork in a communist country inserted the researcher directly into a global context, giving things a significance they might not have had elsewhere. An anthropologist in the field “behind the Iron Curtain” was a point at which global political forces intersected; anything she did could be interpreted in that light. To take a trivial example, in 1988 an officer in Bucharest, learning that I had made a phone call to the city of Cluj, assumed that it was to a woman named Doina Cornea, who was then among Romania’s handful of well-known dissidents. For that officer, an American suspected of being a CIA agent would naturally want to make contact with Doina Cornea (whom I have never met), though I’d actually called a historian colleague for a chat. But the officer’s assumption turned my friendly phone call into a politically suspicious act.

Aside from the Cold War context, there is another important difference between the kinds of identity accrued by the anthropologist working in Soviet bloc countries and those working elsewhere: the communist secret police themselves specialized in just such identity-creation to an unusual extent. The doppelgangers they fabricated acquired a consistency and a degree of elaboration, the product of intense labor, far greater than the identities created elsewhere for the researcher suspected of being a missionary or other sort of person. Thus, although all anthropologists are “produced” to some degree by the environments in which we work, those of us who worked in the Soviet bloc during those years were “produced” much more thoroughly than most.

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When a U.S. editor approached Freud about publishing his autobiography, Freud reportedly answered, “What makes all autobiographies worthless is, after all, their mendacity.” Deceitfulness is definitely a trait of this book (though perhaps not entirely in the way Freud meant), for it is based on my file—a fiction generated by the Securitate. My challenge here is to create something partway between fiction and fact. One form of “mendacity” is that I often use quotation marks for people’s speech that I did not in fact record (many people had bad feelings about being taped in that society of hyper-surveillance), so the version I provide is actually approximate, rather than exact.

A second form is that I have chosen not to reveal the identities of most of the people I write about—some at their express request, others because I think that is what they would want or because my professional ethics indicate it. Therefore, just like the Securitate, I am compelled to use pseudonyms for my friends, informers, and the officers I interviewed, and to disguise their biographies—particularly those of the people who informed on me. But if I am not to use their real names, I have the problem of making up pseudonyms for them. I cannot simply use the pseudonyms that are in my files, which are recognizable to at least some researchers and former officers. So I must create new ones. When I am dealing with informers or Secus themselves, my pseudonyms take the form used by the officers—surrounded by quotation marks. In other cases I indicate that it is a pseudonym by placing an asterisk before the name at its first use. With some of my friends, I use their own names without special punctuation, and I have their permission to

The 1970s

"The Folklorist" as Military Spy

Certain death with a cobra,
But more certain with a Mobra.
—Romanian jingle concerning
the Mobra motorbike

In keeping with the file's casual attitude toward chronology, mentioned earlier, the document indicating when I crossed the border into Romania for the first time is numbered page 234. It says I arrived on a tourist visa on 22 July 1973 and would stay for a month with Mrs. Jana Cionila (the mother of my Romanian tutor at Stanford). During that time I would receive my research visa for the year. Then I would settle on a field site, return to Bucharest for further preparation, and finally establish myself in some village by November. But although there would be plenty of Securitate activity around me during that time, I did not officially acquire a surveillance file until March 1974, eight months after my arrival. My ill-starred adventure with the motorbike would contribute to that.

Arrivals and Misadventures

Arrival in Bucharest

I had headed for Romania by train via Greece and Bulgaria, stopping in Sofia, where I would have to wait several hours for a connection to Bucharest. I spent that time walking around town with a cheerful Libyan fellow who had shared my compartment in the train. We also sat in a park and watched

grandmothers babysitting their grandchildren while the parents were at work. Darkness fell. As we stood waiting on the platform, I noticed all at once a sleek locomotive that had slipped almost silently into the station, pulling a long train behind it. Written on a placard on the engine in large Cyrillic letters was “МОСКВА”—“MOSCOW.” I felt a sudden shiver of fear, having not realized until then that I would be on a train heading into the heart of the Soviet empire. I still remember that feeling, a visceral sign of the Cold War environment in which I had grown up.

It is worth reiterating my ignorance of the country I was coming to—partly an effect of that same Cold War. There was no literature on Romania in English in my field; virtually no Anglophone anthropologist had worked there yet. I had read the few volumes in French, based on work in the 1930s (which helped me little, four decades later), and a handful of articles in French and English by Romanian sociologist Mihail Cernea, but my Romanian at the time of my departure had not been up to reading works in that language. I was virtually a *tabula rasa*.

Bearing a large bouquet, Jana Cionila met my train and took me to her tiny apartment (a single large room stuffed with furniture and tchotchkes). She chattered constantly in rapid-fire Romanian I could barely make out. A diminutive round woman with short white hair, she had a gold tooth that flashed when she smiled. I tried to be as amusing as possible so I could see it often. Without her warm welcome I would have felt even more desperate than I already did at entering this frightening new country where I knew not a single soul.

It didn't take me long to begin experimenting with who I was, creating my own double even before the Securitate did so. In Bucharest, at Jana's suggestion and seconded by a couple of other people, I decided I would have an easier time in Romania if I were married. This would help me fend off unwanted attentions (which had already begun with the ticket collector on the train). It would also ease prospective visits from my companion at the time, anthropologist Bill Skinner (“Wm,” below), if I presented him as my husband. Jana had a few wedding rings—her “savings plan”—and was happy to lend me one, which I would then wear home and give to her daughter at Stanford. I was gradually to discover that Romanians in general and Romanian men in particular had completely different attitudes to young unmarried women and young married ones. It seemed that being married conveyed greater importance and gravitas than being a young single woman, and I found I liked the contrast quite a lot. If only my too-large wedding ring hadn't been constantly falling off, giving me away.

Letter to Wm, Sept. 73

Sitting at dinner I suddenly realized that—perhaps through this ruse of being married—I find I’m considering myself more a woman than a girl, and that’s a switch of massive proportions in self-conception. Something to do with not being condescended to, being taken seriously as someone with a task to accomplish, however incomprehensible it is to most of these people. But more to do with my self-perception than with any objective behavior directed at me (after all, I believe I’m taken seriously in the US too). I feel myself a status equal, in opposition to men especially, rather than being a step below.¹

If being in Romania was to involve “becoming” a spy in the Securitate’s eyes, then my identity was already in a state of flux.

One other thing contributed to my new self-perception: height. At the time, I was five foot four, slightly on the short side for women my age in the States. In Romania, the average for both sexes was much shorter than at home (partly, no doubt, from malnutrition during and after World War II). Now I was relatively tall, and it made a difference in how I felt in my relations with people. I could look more people in the eye, or even down at them, giving me an advantage in some social interactions. I felt that somehow I’d gained authority, become more of a “grown-up” (always a struggle for me). When I went home, I was sad to become short again.

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Officer’s Note on Informer’s Report, 1974: Aspects concerning her connection with the U.S. Embassy awaken special operative interest. Instructions to informer: inform about her doings, especially concerning the support of the Embassy.

My IREX grant was partly administered through the U.S. Embassy in Bucharest, which entailed certain privileges (most importantly, ordering from a duty-free shop and use of the diplomatic pouch for mail) but also connected us with embassy personnel, especially the cultural and political attachés. Fulbright fellows were even more tied to the embassy than were IREXers. Like the other grantees, I accepted this arrangement without questioning it. Unsurprisingly, however, I would learn from my file that these connections aroused the

Securitate's suspicions. Why hadn't I anticipated that, you ask? Because, first, I wasn't really thinking that much about how things would look to the Securitate, and second, I probably thought they knew about our arrangements, since our grants had been approved through Romanian government organizations. (Indeed, my case officer for 1974 mentions them in one of his reports.)

My Cluj Secus would find very suspicious my occasional meetings with the embassy personnel who came through town (and who would take my field notes back to Bucharest for mailing, saving me two full days of traveling for that purpose every month or so). One of the cultural attachés, Merrie Blocker, was a college classmate of mine, and another, Kiki Munshi, a marvelous woman with whom I still correspond; I was happy for these connections, which often proved not just pleasurable but very helpful. Although it puzzles me now to recall how little I questioned the arrangement then as I see its consequences in my surveillance, the relationship with the embassy was on balance beneficial, and I took it for granted as a condition of my fellowship.

Another reason for my not giving more thought to these arrangements—and to my inevitable relations with the Securitate—was, I suspect, a shortcoming of my graduate education, whether of my training or of my absorption of it. As early as his 1919 letter to *The Nation* entitled “Scientists as Spies,” famous anthropologist Franz Boas raised a prescient warning about the linkage of anthropology to state power. He wrote: “A person . . . who uses science as a cover for political spying, who demeans himself to pose before a foreign government as an investigator and asks for assistance in his alleged researches in order to carry on, under this cloak, his political machinations, . . . forfeits the right to be classed as a scientist.”² Although his warning fell on hostile ears, the discipline's later history included several broader critiques of anthropology's political connections, such as the 1960s furor about anthropologists working in Southeast Asia.³ I remember reading about that but dismissing it as irrelevant because I did not intend to work for the CIA, as some of them did. With the exception of Bill Skinner, my faculty advisors knew too little about conditions for fieldwork in Romania to caution me, and the main lesson I took away from Skinner's experience of having all his field notes confiscated in Mao's China was to be sure I had multiple copies of my notes in different locations and to send them out regularly through the diplomatic pouch. But I remained vulnerable to surveillance, whether through innocence or conceit.

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Although my filter in these pages will be how the Securitate, its apparatus, and its culture of secrecy shaped me and my work, I should first introduce some of the friends who made life in Romania so often delightful. Most will also have some connection with my surveillance, even if only for their response to my thinking about this book. I begin with Silvia and Marina.

At the end of my first week in the country, Angela, the embassy employee in charge of IREX grantees, invited me to go to the Black Sea with her and a number of other friends. One of their group had just dropped out and they had an extra space (which they needed someone to pay for). There were seven people plus me. Two of them, Silvia and Marina, remain my friends to this day. We enjoyed a number of adventures at the Black Sea, including the fun of trying to slip me unnoticed past the hotel reception desk every day, since if they asked for my identification papers and saw my passport, I would have to pay much more for my room. This launched my occasional habit of hiding my identity, trying to “pass” as a Romanian.

A style maven to the hilt who was always well turned out and always on the lookout for Paris fashion magazines, Marina was a very talented seamstress (her regular job was teaching art) and made me several wonderful dresses during that year. After she fled to the United States in 1990, this talent helped her move up from sewing clothes in Milwaukee’s garment district to becoming a top buyer for Saks Fifth Avenue. My friendship with Silvia—also an art teacher—began to blossom more fully after Marina’s departure, as Silvia and her husband put me up whenever I came to town and she ceased to be just a casual friend. Moreover, she has given me many a valuable reality check in my writing and will appear in that guise in these pages. A truly gifted storyteller with a pixie face and a mordant wit, she has delighted me for twenty-five years with stories, such as those in her wonderful book *Marvelous Aunts* (*Mătuși minunate*) about the fates of the old privileged classes from which she hails, as they learned to paint radiators for communist enterprises after they got out of prison.

From these friends I learned how Romanians sought to protect themselves from the Securitate and the consequences of being in contact with foreigners, something that was technically against the law unless reported to the police (though few Romanians I knew then obeyed that law). During the 1970s, whenever I came to Bucharest from the countryside, Marina would invite me to dinner with the others on Saturday, asking me to get out of my cab or other transportation a few blocks from her house, then walk the rest (the Secus were not fooled). I was never to call from my hotel room in Bucharest



Silvia, happy to have found toilet paper to buy, ca. 1980. Courtesy of Silvia Colfescu.

but only from pay phones—which, I was to discover from my file, were just as closely monitored. When we were all assembled, they would turn on the TV or phonograph very loud, making it impossible for any eavesdropping Securitate officers to understand what we were saying. My documents show that this strategy was successful, though unfortunately, it at first prevented me, with my barely functional Romanian, from understanding anything either. But the message was clear: my new friends routinely behaved as if an unseen and unwelcome presence was part of our gathering.

With this training, I am surprised to recall how dismissive I was—along with most of the other grantees—of the orientation the embassy personnel provided, which informed us of the multiple sources of surveillance to which we would be subject. We regarded them as paranoid, stuck in an old Cold Warrior mind-set that saw conspiracies and surveillance everywhere. Quite full of myself, I dismissed it all as a Red Scare exaggeration. Although my project was not about “communism,” I and some of the other grantees were nonetheless sure that our work might change the way the communist system was understood at home, creating a more “realistic” and less “paranoid” view. Reading my file many years later, though, I discover, to paraphrase Lily Tomlin, that no matter how paranoid we became, it was never enough to keep up.⁴

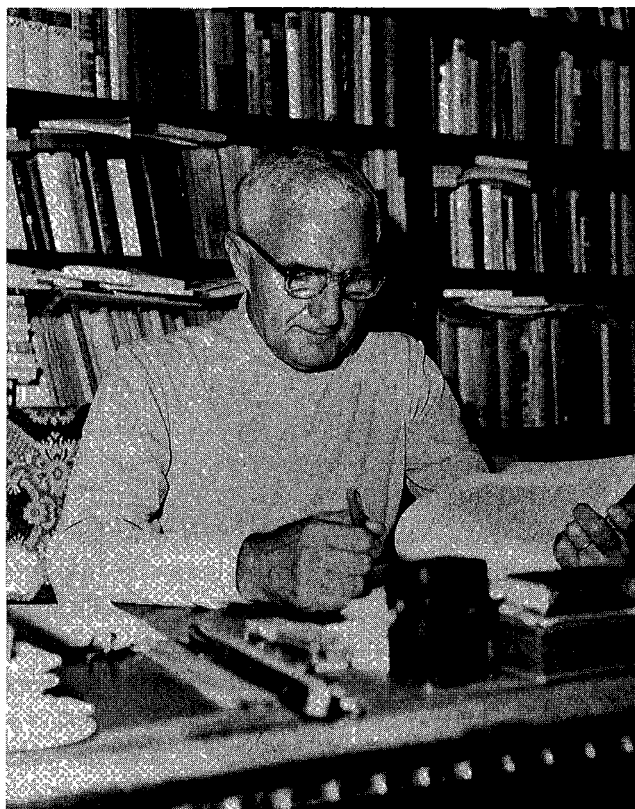
Professor Mihai Pop

I returned from the Black Sea to meet the person who would be my research supervisor, Professor Mihai Pop. A robust, imposing man, very handsome with wavy white hair, heavy black glasses, and a near-perpetual smile, he was Romania's most eminent specialist in ethnography and folklore. He had agreed to take me on as a personal favor to the head of IREX, Allen Kassof, for although IREX had ranked my proposal first on the U.S. side, the Romanian side had trouble finding an institution to assign me to, for Western-style anthropology did not exist there. The sociologists said I was too much a folklorist, the folklorists said I was too sociological. As a result, my application was rejected. Only Kassof's intervention got me in: he knew Professor Pop well from the early years of the exchanges and simply asked him to take me into the institute he headed, the Institute of Ethnography and Folklore. Professor Pop agreed. He was used to protecting assorted scholarly misfits in his institute and had the political skills and connections to do so.

I was extraordinarily fortunate, for Professor Pop was a remarkable mentor. He regularly invited me to his office and his home, where he would tell me all kinds of fascinating things about social organization and social processes in the countryside. He made the study of contemporary Romanian life sing, without much mention of the impact of the Communist Party. He introduced me to people he thought I would find interesting, took me on a couple of trips to folklore festivals in the most beautiful parts of Romania, and when I got into trouble, went all the way to my proposed field site (an eight-hour train ride) to try to set things right. I cannot say I have done the same for my own students. In addition, he provided a wonderful example of someone who loved life, enjoyed himself and his work, and knew how to play the system to the benefit of those in his circle. A sign of his political adroitness is that he appears in my Securitate file in only one place, with a lengthy summary of my dissertation. We remained good friends until his death in 2000, at age ninety-three, and I am still in touch with his family.

Shortly after I met Professor Pop, I wrote the following appreciation to my partner at home:

Had lunch with Pop. What I really like is his talking about doing all he does in his life as if each thing were a game, with its own rules and rewards but ultimately to be taken as a form of enjoyment rather than a deadly serious business. He claims that's the route that allows him freedom in Romania, where many people don't find



Professor Mihai
Pop, ca. 1970.
Courtesy of Zoltán
Rostás.

freedom possible. It's not that he doesn't take serious interest in his work—he loves it—but the element of *geniality* is never lost.

“The Folklorist” Heads Off on Her Motorbike

After reading my research proposal and talking with me at length, Professor Pop decided that the best place for me to go was the county of Hunedoara, especially its southern part. There I would find the conditions my project required: a number of different ethnographic microzones (small areas distinguished from one another by differences in their costume, rituals, dialects, traditions—that is, their “folklore”). My project was to try to explain the distribution of these zones and why they differed in so small a space; my assumption was that it had something to do with patterns of movement, perhaps based on economic behavior. Therefore, I would be working not just

in one place but in numerous villages in a region. I would be a nightmare for anyone attempting to keep me under surveillance. Pop suggested that I take a trip out to Hunedoara County for some reconnaissance. Since local transportation was unreliable, I proposed to visit these villages on my new Mobra motorbike. It sported license plates with bright-red numbers—T.C. 2964 (T.C. is “consular transport,” used by embassy personnel)—that would help the authorities keep me in their sights.

My Mobra was a very special machine, worth a moment’s digression, for as we already know, it was to be the instrument of my first adventure as a “spy.” I had bought it in Bucharest from the Comturist (“dollar”) shop in what surely qualifies as the most grueling yet hilarious purchasing experience of my entire life. It involved over three days of my being shunted from one office to another, endless waiting, and deepening affection for several other hapless buyers immobilized in the same offices, as well as for many kind people in far-flung storage depots and auto-service shops who finally got me mobile by the end of the third day. At each step I would be told the next step, but no one would divulge the entire process, enabling me to plan. (Precisely the point?) Most important, to the intense mirth of any Romanian who found this out, I had bought the bike with precious hard currency. The Mobra was renowned as a lemon—the subject of a jingle, “Certain death with a cobra, / But more certain with a Mobra”⁵—and I had paid for it with *dollars*! When they learned that, the men who gathered around me as I finally took possession of it roared with laughter and shook their heads in disbelief at the same time.

Before loading it onto the train for Hunedoara I bought a fancy helmet at the duty-free shop, bright blue with sparkles and a snappy plastic visor that clicked sharply into place. For the next sixteen months I was besieged by would-be buyers—of the helmet, not the bike. Wearing it along with my yellow rubberized raincoat (for protection and visibility) and my long hair streaming out behind, I cut quite a memorable figure, one that some villagers remember with amusement even now—and one that made me easy to recognize for the police, as well. I became very fond of my Mobra, even though its fifty-five-mph maximum speed could only be achieved downhill with a tailwind. But like my wedding ring and my newfound height, it gave me a different feeling about myself: I could defy the erratic public transportation system by simply getting on my bike whenever I wanted to go to town. It gave me a sense of mastery, especially once I figured out how to drive it.

Professor Pop had given me the names of two former students who worked in Hunedoara County's education department, S. and C.; he phoned them before I left. When I arrived in the capital city, Deva, I learned from S. that C. had been demoted. The person who greeted me frostily in his place, R., bore the pseudonym "Slimy" in my subsequent field notes. Aside from being a bit creepy, he was walleyed, which hampered connecting with him. Working behind the scenes, S. and C. came up with an itinerary for me that included villages out to the western border of the county, then doubled back to a number of villages in the south and west; there were thirty villages in all, and the tour was scheduled for a bit more than two weeks. My comrades gave me the names of people I could stay with in each village and called ahead to notify them.

Having barely arrived in Hunedoara, I was already being watched.

Source "Iulia"

13.09.1973

Informative Note

... In room 120 [of hotel Sarmis, Deva] was housed the said Verdery KAHTERINE MAUREEN from the U. S. A. who is currently a student at the university of Bucharest, possessing study pass no. 159 of this aforementioned university. She has come to town and to our county for problems of folklore, being under the guidance of the Center for Popular Creation and Folklore in the city. The length of her stay will be approximately a month.

Passing over the misinformation in this account, let's go to the Officer's Note ("N.O.") at the end, where he gives "Iulia" (a hotel receptionist) her assignment:

To establish the activity and behavior of the American student MAURICEN KATERINE in the period of her stay in the hotel, noting in particular:

- the times when she comes and goes from the hotel
- by whom she is accompanied
- whether anyone asks for her at the hotel
- whether she creates relations in the complex of the "Sarmis" hotel with its personnel or with persons from outside (Romanian citizens)
- discussions she carries on.

["Iulia"] was told to seek to get close to the student on the pretext of wanting to speak English and in this way to establish more data with respect to her. Measures will be taken through means for eavesdropping. . . .

Maj. Lung Vasile

Other hotel receptionists enrolled in keeping track of me during that period found potentially suspicious patterns:

Source: Plopeanu

Date: 21.09.73

Source informs you [concerning] the American citizen Katherine Verdery . . .

In the time that has passed so far, absences from the hotel were noted at late hours (22:00–23:00), the room key remaining at the reception, and her motorbike was not parked in front of the hotel as usual. Source does not know at the moment where she might be at that hour.

In addition, Securitate officers minutely informed police in each settlement I was to visit, to find out the following about what I discussed with people I met. It was an extensive list.

Ministry of the Interior
Hunedoara County Inspectorate, Service III

TOP SECRET
[24.ix.73]

NOTE

In the informative supervision of the American citizen Verdery Katherine, we request that the following aspects be kept in mind:

- concretely what data interest her in the localities she visits;
- with whom she makes contact and how she leads the discussions;
- how she intends to use the material collected;
- what she says about the localities visited, how she assesses the material and the persons with whom she spoke;
- where she has been besides Hunedoara County and her opinions;
- what she says about her familial, material, and professional situation;

—with what persons in the country she has relations and with whom she proposes to correspond;

—how and with whom she spends her free time in Deva.

These aspects are to be obtained from the heads of local police from discussions with the persons with whom V.K. has made contact, as well as from the [informer] network.

Informers are to be placed in the localities she has not yet visited.

Maj. Andreșescu Cornel

There followed detailed reports by the local police from each of the villages I visited, which provided a comprehensive view of what I was up to. I was wholly unaware of all this activity.

My “Spying” Commences

Most U.S. scholars came to Romania either to teach as Fulbright lecturers or to do research in libraries, meaning that they generally lived in large cities where they would not have much chance to discover military or other secret installations and to engage in espionage in them. Not this anthropologist. If they thought I was a spy, they had good reason. The adventure I recounted in my opening pages and fill out now is an excellent example of how ignorance blossoms into folly (or so I see it), with consequences that affected my research for many years thereafter.

My tour of Hunedoara circled around a mountainous mass in the west, taking me up some of its valleys. I would soon learn that in recommending this area, Professor Pop had not considered the importance of its massif, the farthest mountainous area toward neighboring Hungary and Yugoslavia, both of which were Romania's enemies at one time or another after World War II. That these mountains might hold military bases would have been a reasonable guess. My letters and field notes of the time reveal my progress toward that discovery.

Letter to Wm, 28 Sept. 73 [Mailed through the Romanian mail]

Have for the moment brought to a close my 2½ week madcap run through western Hunedoara, closed two days early by rain. Motorbike has been an utter godsend; I raced through 30 villages, eventually not even going back to Deva but staying in people's houses overnight. Although I particularly liked the Cerna valley, I may not be able to work there because despite my having been programmed from Deva to go there, I was stopped by a cop in the town of Toplița and told that there's a sign at the

entrance to the valley saying "Entry Prohibited to Foreigners." I swear there was no sign. But I had to sit there while he called Deva and made a full report, "arrested in a prohibited zone while driving with foreign license plates," and eventually they told him to let me through. TopSecMilbase in the most critical settlement for the project.

(You might ask yourself: What the hell was she thinking, sending all this through the regular mail? Clearly I was oblivious of the likelihood that my letter might be intercepted. How could that not cross my mind? Hadn't I been briefed by the embassy about the Securitate's practices? I had, but I'd blown it off.)

A few days later I mailed Wm (this time through the diplomatic pouch) further evidence of how badly I had botched my meetings in Deva:

Made a possibly fatal error at the beginning. . . . Pop had told me to put a question to his main friend, C., regarding Gurasada, one of the villages I was interested in going to [and possibly in a restricted zone]. So in the course of planning my trip around the county, I put the question, but to "Slimy," rather than C., asking point blank whether there was some sort of military installation in that village. The electricity in the room in that instant was blinding; then he smiled a sinister smile, and he and S. replied, "We don't know." At this point the phone rang, and the sinister guy went out for it; S. meanwhile put his finger on that village on my map and said, "Keep away from there, your question was right." . . . I made a great effort to be good after that, but getting stopped for going into the prohibited zone a week later no doubt did not help. My friend Bear [sociologist Mihail Cernea, who gave me significant help with my research] says I should expect to be under closer watch than I might be in other circumstances.

That was certainly an understatement.

Here was my innocent belief in transparency at its most damaging. Evidently I imagined that by clarifying the status of Gurasada, we could make an efficient choice of what village to settle me in: let's get the military bases out of the way, then we'll talk about the rest. But I asked it of a distrustful apparatchik completely uninterested in an efficient solution toward scholarly ends. This episode erased all doubt that I was completely clueless about politics in communist Romania. It also reveals how convinced I was of my own rectitude and that others would value it as I did.

But there was more, as in the follow-up to that meeting:

Field notes, 13 Sept. 73

S. came to my room very tipsy, justified his unexpected visit by saying he works on instinct and sense of smell about people at first sight. He wants to help me. Said I had

created a certain situation, not entirely favorable to future progress, since “Slimy” was now suspicious as all hell. So I sure blew it wide open with that question about Gurasada. . . . Then giving me advice: make sure all my questions are exceedingly clear, in intent and form. Be especially careful at Toplița because many people there work in Hunedoara, which is a very important city in national development.

I remember being confused about what he meant, but I would soon find out, when that truck bearing the Toplița cop pulled me over. This was the incident reported by officer Uscatu of Military Unit 01736, with which I opened: my accidental motorbike ride toward a military base and my ersatz spying.

Arrival in Aurel Vlaicu Village

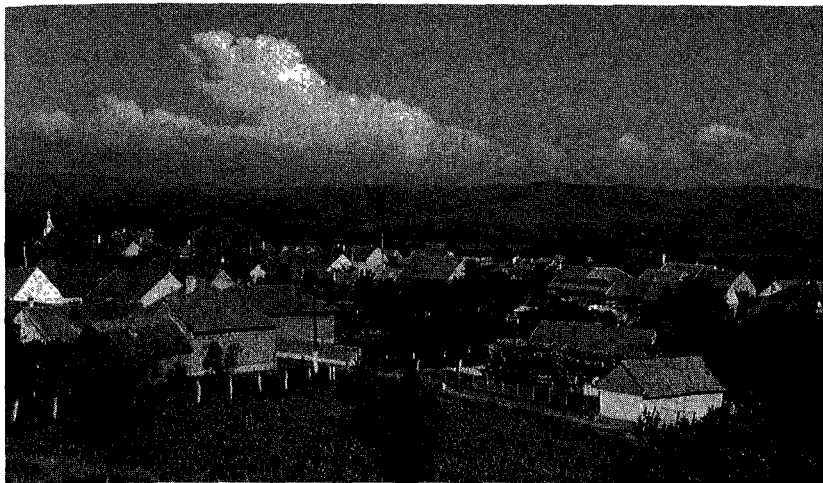
Following this debacle, how was I to continue to work in Hunedoara? A letter to Wm tells how I was eventually settled there, after Professor Pop took the lengthy train ride out to Deva with me to arrange it:

Letter to Wm, 21 Nov. 73

Pop spoke for some two hours with a couple of county officials in Deva and came out to tell me where they'd decided to send me—after I'd spent 10 hours on the train beating my brains out, writing down questions to ask in order to clarify and better choose . . . all to no avail. Thus I am to go to Geoagiu commune, near Orăștie. Its two ethnographic zones spill over into Alba County, about which I had read absolutely nothing in preparation, and it bears no relationship whatsoever to the project design I came here with.

This location would guarantee abandoning my original project, whose requirements it did not fit, though it did not occur to me that I needed to tell anyone but my PhD committee members and Professor Pop about that. The Securitate, however, would notice the discrepancy, observing that I kept asking questions beyond the purview of my officially approved project.

The person given the task of settling me in a village in her commune was Mrs. M., a functionary in Geoagiu, who was in Deva that day. A talkative, energetic woman in her midforties, well dressed and with coiffed black hair, she accepted this assignment with great trepidation (she told me many years later), fearful of its possible consequences for her job and family. She led Professor Pop and me to a decrepit green van that labored from Deva toward Geoagiu, some thirty kilometers distant. I peered furtively at the 1966 census of Hunedoara County that a colleague in Bucharest had given me (these figures were considered top secret but he hadn't seemed to care), which showed the total population of each village and its ethnic composition. Geoagiu, the



The village of Aurel Vlaicu, 2000. Photo by Karin Steinbrueck.

administrative center of the commune, had some 2,500 people and contained ten other villages. Only four were collectivized, and that seemed essential to me: Why come to a communist country and then avoid one of its most distinctive features, collective farms? Although it later emerged that county officials had assumed without telling Mrs. M. that she would settle me in the commune center, I did not want that: Geoagiu was too big, and it shared its collective farm with another village. I was hoping for something a bit smaller and more self-contained. Of the two remaining collectivized villages, one was tiny and somewhat inaccessible. The last one, Aurel Vlaicu, seemed just right: 915 inhabitants, 20 percent of whom were of Romania's German minority.⁶ So much the more interesting, I thought. Mrs. M. was surprised by my choice and opposed it vigorously but failed to talk me out of it, giving in with the words, "All right, we have relatives there you could stay with. They're very nice."

In fact, I was fated to choose this village, which had already been foreshadowed for me right after I arrived in Romania. One Sunday, my hostess Jana had taken me to some friends, with whom we watched TV. Among the programs was one about a Romanian named Aurel Vlaicu. Thus, even before I got to Hunedoara County, I knew who Vlaicu was. One of Romania's two geniuses in the field of aviation and the inventor of Romania's first airplane, Vlaicu was born in 1882 in this village to which his name would be given some years after he died in a plane crash in 1913. Like most villagers, I use the short form "Vlaicu" to refer to the village and "Vlaiceni" [vly CHENi, sing. "Vlaicean"] for its inhabitants.

My choice of Vlaicu was to have some unfortunate repercussions, however, for it lies twenty-four kilometers from the town of Cugir, site of several factories including some in the business of making armaments. Even as I left Deva, the politicians there had told Professor Pop to warn me never to head down the road toward Cugir, which sported that same sort of sign I had already missed once: "Entry Prohibited to Foreigners." A large number of Vlaicu's residents commuted daily to work there. The anxiety this aroused for the Securitate is evident in a group of documents from my file. They contain four undated lists from 1973, the first called "TABLE with persons who work at the Metallurgical Factory in Cugir" with 122 names, followed by other tables with the names of commuters to Cugir from each of three villages; Vlaicu had the largest number of commuters. Each entry on each list gives the names of the person's parents, his/her date and place of birth, and in a few cases, the further mention "Possesses a file in the Informer Archive." A formidable amount of work went into constructing these lists—gathering dates and places of birth, parents' names, and specific occupations—all with the aim of contacting every one of them and warning them about me. Added to the episode with my motorbike, my proximity to this town remained a source of deep suspicion throughout my times in Vlaicu, as everyone but me seemed to have forgotten that I had not chosen to work in that part of the county but been assigned there.

It would turn out that my doppelganger followed me out to this village. Despite many years of living or visiting there, I never succeeded in putting to rest the persistent rumor among some in the village that I was a spy. A number of my respondents told me, both before and after the regime fell in 1989, that everyone knew I was a spy, though they didn't really know what for. They just knew that everyone said I was one. Occasionally someone would say it to my face, but mostly the rumor circulated behind my back. After 1989, one friend told me that earlier, when she invited me over for lunch, others reproached her: "Don't speak with her! She's a spy! Why aren't you afraid to invite her over?" Another, whose son I had hired to do some interviews for me, was admonished by her brother-in-law, a military man: "Don't let him work for her! She's a spy!"⁷

My local reputation as a spy was partly a consequence of the Communist Party's efforts to spread information and disinformation, including through films and literature that, as in Western countries, popularized the notion of the spy. Indeed, the idea that I was spying was probably planted by the Securitate's "rumor factory." They did it first through the informers they recruited, who were taught how to recognize a spy. And they also did it through the local police, as I realized one day in 1985 when a respondent told me that a

policeman had been warning everyone to be careful what they said to me, since I was a spy and carried a concealed tape recorder.

I might have anticipated this had I been better informed about the Romanian educational system, which was preoccupied with spies and provided a significant socialization into spying as both adventure and source of worry.⁸ For instance, a children's book called *The White Spaceship*, published in the 1970s, includes a scene in which a group of children manages to decode a message critical for national security. It revealed that foreign spies were conspiring to steal an ancient treasure crucial to Romanian identity—and they arrived at this truth after going through preliminary suspicions in which foreign spies were stealing other Romanian valuables. The book was later made into a popular TV series with comparable scenes. Similarly, an associate told me that the schools were a vital center for instilling a concern with foreign spies: "Kids in school and everyone else were socialized into the idea of infiltration by foreign bodies as the cause of our problems. Now, with you, the police could say, 'This is what a spy looks like. Here she is, in flesh and bone.' You were a godsend for them." With this start, it is little surprise that in the village where I settled, many people might think I was a spy.

Meri, Moașa, and Moșu

Mrs. M., Professor Pop, and I drove into Vlaicu on the chilly wet afternoon of 21 November 1973. Unlike the more picturesque villages in the nearby hills with their view of the river Mureș and its floodplain, Vlaicu sits flat on that plain, bounded by the river on one side. Both the railroad and the highway connecting central Transylvania with Hungary to the west run right along the edge of the village, providing ready transportation out and accounting for all those commuters to Cugir and other towns. The main street into the village crosses the railway tracks, then runs past colorful houses—brown, gray, yellow, green, even orange, with contrasting trim—built on a variety of patterns. Winding past an old flourmill and then past the Lutheran church and the outbuildings of the collective farm, the road continues on toward aviator Aurel Vlaicu's natal house, the Romanian Orthodox church, and the elementary school.

Our van stopped just past the collective farm, and we piled out into the house of Mrs. M.'s relatives, whose meal we interrupted. The wife, Maria, was in her midforties, a warm and smiling presence with crisp curly gray hair (I was to learn that, unlike most village women, she almost never covered it with a headscarf except in the coldest weather). She had a way of slightly narrowing her eyes that somehow gave her an appealing saintly air, for which I baptized



Meri and Kathy, dressed
for Pentecost, 1974.
Author's photo.

her “Meri” (pronounced “Mary”) to distinguish her from her sister-in-law, also Maria. Her husband, Iosif (“Joseph,” appropriately enough), also in his midforties, was a robust fellow with thick glasses and a pleasant youthful face capped by a startling shock of snow-white hair, a feature his son would inherit. Iosif worked as a foreman at Cugir, and this would soon prove an impediment.

Professor Pop explained that I was from America on an exchange grant to do my doctorate, I had all the necessary support from Bucharest and the county authorities, and we hoped to find a good family to host me. Non-plussed, the couple stalled while the professor skillfully wheeled the conversation around to their recently married daughter in Bucharest, their relatives in Vlaicu, and so on, finally saying, “Well, what about it?” Meri looked at her husband and asked, “What do we say?” to which he replied, “I say, let’s take her.” Although I didn’t know it yet, I had just won the lottery.

The next day, at Professor Pop's suggestion, Meri invited her aging parents and the village schoolteacher, whom the professor interviewed deftly and at length about marriage customs and kinship, village history, the local elite, and other topics, providing me with a wonderful model of how to connect with these people. I had had very little training in field techniques, so his example was particularly valuable. That he was willing to take this long train ride from Bucharest and spend two days getting me settled won him my lifelong gratitude. When he left the next morning—after advising me to stay away from Cugir and not to look into the collective farm—I felt quite bereft.

The feeling did not last, however, for my new landlady took me in hand and spent the day chatting with me. I took an immediate liking to her, which was reciprocal; we became fast friends and remained so for over forty years. I had reduced the village to a stack of 3×5 slips, and we would spend hours on end together going through the slips as she told me where the people in each house were from, their local nicknames, their godparents (an important aspect of Romanian kinship), their jobs, and so on. If there was any interesting gossip about them she would tell me that, too, with relish. She sent me to several families who became my best respondents for my work, and she introduced me to her group of five or six women friends who would come together during winter evenings for knitting or doing needlework, eating cakes, and telling bawdy stories. I soon proved I could hold my own with all but the needlework and became an honorary member. In addition, I became and remain close friends with her son Florin and his family, who still live in Vlaicu, and with her daughter Angela in Bucharest. Won the lottery, indeed!

> > >

Unfortunately my living arrangements (though not my association with Meri) soon came to an end. A couple of weeks after I had settled in, Meri told me that she was moving me to her close friend Veca, just down the road, who often hosted the social evenings I attended. The reason she gave was that with her daughter newly married in Bucharest, she planned to visit there often and would not be able to host me properly. When I told Mrs. M. of the change in plans, she ordered me to wait until she could clear Veca's family with the mayor, who, it turned out, was adamantly opposed: Veca's husband had been an active fascist in the war (a common allegation, I learned much later, often baseless) and could not be trusted. What that doubtless meant



Moasha looking out from her bedroom, 1974. Author's photo.



Moasha and Moshu, ca. 1970.
Family photo.



My bedroom in Vlaicu, traditional style. Photo by Nicolae Mărgineanu.

was that they couldn't be certain of getting information about me from him, and that was, of course, crucial to the Securitate.

After much backstage maneuvering to which I was not privy, I was turned over to Meri's sister-in-law, known as "Moaşa" (MWAH sha, midwife) for her role in numerous village births before hospitals took over that function; this gave her a special ritual status with the infants she midwived. Although childless herself, she therefore had many "children" in Vlaicu of a ritual kind. Moaşa was sixty when I first met her at Meri's. With a youthful face, blue-green eyes, and always-rosy cheeks, she impressed me at first as rather cool and self-contained. She came from another village and, with her midwifery training and some years in a factory job, definitely thought herself a cut above members of the collective farm, where I never saw her work. Her husband, Lazar, known to all as "Moşu" (ancestor, grandfather) partly because of his wife's occupation, was recently retired from the same Cugir factory where Meri's Iosif worked. A portly, balding man also about sixty, Moşu was unfailingly good-humored and sociable (I had had a chance to observe this already) and loved to drink, which he did with anyone he could persuade to join him. This frequently included the vice president of the People's Council in Geoagiu and other local politicians. I was often to come home in the evening to find him conversing amiably if incoherently with the radio after an evening with his friends, of which he (in contrast to his less gregarious wife) had an extraordinary number.

Since there was nothing I could do, I accepted the new arrangement, but once I settled in, Moaşa and I gradually became very close. She was one of a handful of people I felt I could trust completely. Both she and Moşu seemed glad to have a "daughter" in their house.

Only after I received my file did I come to understand what had precipitated the move: rules concerning surveillance. As a result of a power struggle in the 1950s between Communist Party leaders and the Securitate, a law prohibited the latter from having Party members like Iosif under surveillance without first securing permission from Party officials. The relevant document phrases it thus: "In order that he not be under surveillance by the state organs, since he is a Party member, he managed to move the American citizen to his brother Lazăr." In my case, because Iosif worked in the armaments factory, they doubtless preferred not to seek permission but to move me instead. Thus, his Party and work connections led to his being insulated from both me and Securitate oversight. I did not realize this at the time, of course, but learning it now makes clear that there were limits to Securitate surveillance: they could not do absolutely anything they wanted, and this had been evident right from the start of my life in Vlaicu. Nonetheless, for local police who came later and did not know that my housing was initially arranged by Mrs. M. through her kinship connections, the suspicion lingered that I had purposely selected Iosif and his brother's family because of their relations to Cugir. My earlier misadventure with the Mobra, then, would continue to influence perceptions.

Moaşa and Meri were both from respected families in Vlaicu, and their affectionate disposition toward me offered resistance to whatever rumors the Securitate was sowing to scare people away from me. So did the openly welcoming opinion of the much-loved village schoolteacher and his wife, Ştefan and Mărioara Popescu, whom I visited often, and of my venerable neighbor, Petru Bota, to whom Meri sent me right after I arrived and with whom I sat for hours every week. I made friends among women of various ages: Helga the seamstress, her neighbor Dorica (my special pal), Maria lu' Relu, Mărioara lu' Pompi⁹—these last two became crucial contributors to my research over subsequent decades—and, among the Germans, the Schmidt, Schön, and Hellerman families in particular. Gradually my network in the village expanded, countering the invisible network of informers who were being recruited or deployed to keep tabs on me. How much overlap there was between these networks—one cultivated from below, the other from the political center—would remain mostly a mystery, one I did little to unravel. I realize now, however, that my arrival in Vlaicu (and the arrival of other U.S. anthropologists later in the decade) was a great boon to the Securitate: villages were not easy for them to penetrate, and we helped them get in, like fleas on a stray dog.

If the Securitate would come to provide me with multiple identities as a spy, Meri and Moaşa offered me an alternative and much more appealing

identity: that of kin. In an interview Meri did for a documentary film made about me in 2012, she explained something about our friendship that I had never realized: "From the moment I saw her I really liked her. My daughter had just gotten married and moved to Bucharest and in my heart I felt a sort of hole [lit., I was left with my heart fried] because she had gone. And so when [KV] came, I thought to myself that it was good to have someone here with me."¹⁰ Translating our connection into the kinship idiom so common throughout the world, she has often said that she loves me as if I were her own daughter—and indeed, for a time I took on her daughter's role. Moaşa too would come to treat me like a daughter, and my friends Maria lu' Relu and Dorica, as well as Meri's daughter Angela, would say I was like a sister to them. This is one of the greatest pleasures of ethnography: to be adopted into the relations most meaningful to our hosts.

Kathy

Let us stop for a moment and ask about this person who has finally arrived at her field site in socialist Romania, in November 1973, to begin a year's research. What do we know about her? She is twenty-five and is called Kathy; "Katherine" would come with her first job, in 1977, when she decided it was time to grow up. Unlike many her age, she did not take time during or after her studies to travel or simply hang out but went straight on to graduate work after college; she took off only the intervening summer to travel in Scotland and Wales on a kind of kiddie fieldwork. It mainly taught her to drink hard liquor—scotch. She'd never been big on spirits before, and this new habit would stand her in very good stead in Romania, where her fieldwork demanded drinking as part of building trust. On that trip she also learned to expect fieldwork to include some lonely times, a lesson underscored by two months' research in Greece the following summer, in 1971.

Although she thinks of herself as a bit of a rebel, having participated in actions against the Vietnam War, Kathy was well socialized as a responsible older sister in an Episcopalian family. She carries many unexamined and typically American assumptions—in which her anthropological training has not made much of a dent—such as a mistrust of communism, even though she is curious about it and is open to changing her views. Like many Americans, she thinks of herself as a well-meaning person of unquestionable honesty and integrity, and she expects others to see her that way. This expectation will get her into real trouble in Romania. So will her thoroughgoing commitment to sincerity, openness, and transparency, which we have already seen.

“mongrel,” she would sometimes say—but now considered herself mainly German. Their two adorable small children grew up speaking German, Hungarian, and Romanian with equal facility.

Ralf would appear on weekends during the summer, and I came to love him as well, despite his shorts. He too is a “mongrel,” though not as richly assorted as Ana. His mother’s family intermarried with Romanians, as did his sister, niece, and several cousins. For this reason if not more generally for his outgoing manner toward all, Romanians in Vlaicu always spoke well of him. With this couple, then, I had captured the essence of Transylvania’s once-celebrated multiculturalism. Perhaps their family’s broad embrace of ethnic difference helped to consolidate our friendship.

Ana would win my undying loyalty when, one day in 1987, she took the train from Deva to Vlaicu solely to tell me that she and Ralf were trying to escape to Germany and would have to ask me not to phone or see them anymore. They had told only one other person, their daughter, but not their parents, siblings, or son. After several attempts, Ana succeeded in 1988, with Ralf following in 1990. I have visited them in Germany numerous times since, and they me in New York.

The Securitate picked up on our friendship fairly quickly, from the informer’s note by my landlord, Moșu, reproduced above. The officers’ notes on that report show clearly that any important friendship I tried to develop risked bringing the Securitate down upon the friend in question. A scant two days after Moșu’s report there appears a note from his case officer with extensive details about the couple. Among other things, it shows that Ana, who, as the best teacher of German in Deva, had been giving lessons to the police department, lost that job on account of her friendship with me.

This would not be the Securitate’s last pursuit of the Biermans.¹²

The Securitate Launches My Surveillance File

Ministry of the Interior
Hunedoara County Inspectorate, service III

TOP SECRET
19 Mar 74

REPORT concerning VERDERY KATHERINE MAUREEN

At the end of the month of July 1973 there came into the Socialist Republic of Romania the American citizen VERDERY KATHERINE MAUREEN. In the context of cultural exchange with the U.S.A. she was assigned to Hunedoara

MINISTERUL DE INTERNE

Unitatea 124/020000

[Signature] SECRET SECUR

DOȘAR DE URMĂRIRE INFORMATIVĂ Nr. 1723

privind „*FOLCLORISTA*”
crima de neîncredere

C.N.S.A.S.
11 JUN 1975
DIRECȚIA ARHIVĂ CENTRALĂ

Deschis la data de 20.4.1974

Inchis la data de 8-03-1975

Arhivă nr. 36 *[Signature]* 36124 F-1

1972/5-55

Title page of newly opened dossier of informative pursual for “THE FOLKLORIST.” Courtesy of the Archive of the Consiliul Național pentru Studierea Arhivelor Securității, Fond Informativ (ACNSAS-FI).

county for documentation about problems of anthropology, ethnography and folklore. . . .

From communication of Directorate III in Bucharest,¹³ which has been watching her, it results that VERDERY KATHERINE MAUREEN is also occupied with collecting military information.

In view of this situation, I consider that active informative pursual of this person is necessary, in the form of organized evidence.

Maj. Iosif Pall

A person can be under surveillance for quite some time without becoming the subject of an organized "action plan." Only once officers ascertain that there is sufficient evidence to begin this more organized form of following with a "dossier of informative pursuit" (DUI) will the most formal kind of tracking begin. In my case, it has been six months since I entered the county appearing to be a spy, and only now is counterespionage officer Pall opening a DUI. This is four months after the Bucharest Directorate for counterespionage had "ordered measures of intense following as long as she is in range of our activity because she is occupied with collecting information from the military domain." A few days after his opening proposal, Major Pall presented his requested "action plan," referring to the trip I had made in his county in September. I quote him at length to show the language he uses and the measures employed.

Ministry of the Interior

TOP SECRET

Hunedoara County Inspectorate, Service III

1 Apr 74

ACTION PLAN

concerning the informative-operative measures that will be undertaken in the DUI "FOLCLORISTA" ["the Folklorist"]

On 20 March 1974 DUI no. 1723 was opened concerning VERDERY KATHERINE MAUREEN, born 9 July 1948 in Bangor, Maine, U.S.A. . . . [details of my arrival in Romania and in Hunedoara]

VERDERY KATHERINE MAUREEN, through her travels in the communes of Hunedoara county came into contact with numerous persons, the majority being intellectuals and teaching personnel.

On 25-26 September 1973, although in her program she was to travel to the communes of Demsuş and Rachitova, this person was in Lunca Cernii, near which is also found military unit 01736, with special profile. . . .

From the data our organs hold two hypotheses can be raised:

- I. VERDERY KATHERINE MAUREEN is occupied with collecting military information for which she travels in zones with special military units, discusses with the residents of these zones specific problems as well as with employees of the Mechanical Factory [UM] in Cugir.
- II. VERDERY KATHERINE MAUREEN collects information limited to the problems that are the object of her dissertation, in which sense she

contacts citizens among the intellectuals who can furnish conclusive data about customs, local folklore and problems of anthropology.

He lists a few items in support of the first hypothesis and then proposes concrete steps to clarify the situation. They include:

1. Use of the existing informers' network, thus:
 - a. "ȘTEFAN MIRCEA" . . . He will be oriented to discuss with the target about the data obtained so far, the way in which she has succeeded in synthesizing them, whether she has found competent sources from which to obtain conclusive data for her topic and what her future intentions are along these lines.
 - b. "SURTEA AUREL" and "BADEA VASILE," . . . who will have the task, within the limits of possibility, to observe the target's preoccupations and especially the trips she makes, where and with whom she makes contact . . .
 - c. Sources "MULER MARTIN," of German nationality, collective farm worker, "MOLDOVAN IOSIF," [REDACTED], and "AUREL," pensioner . . . will be used to signal her travels and the connections she makes, especially the identification of those among them who are employees at UM Cugir. . . .
2. The creation of new sources of information, such as [REDACTED] and [REDACTED], who was observed having intimate relations with the target.
3. Use of some occasional sources, thus:
 - a. B.—Lazăr, her host. He will be contacted and will discuss problems tied with possible interests manifested by VERDERY KATHERINE MAUREEN toward production at Cugir, the employees of this firm or other problems of a military order.
4. . . . A trip to Cugir will be organized in which . . . employees of this firm will be verified who are residents of the communes visited by VERDERY KATHERINE MAUREEN and even contacting them to establish:
 - if they work in sectors with special production . . . ,
 - whether among them are already informers who can be used with the target,

- recruitment as informers of those at the workplace who have come into contact with the American citizen,
 - study of the possibilities of interposing an informer who is unmarried.
-

Those measures would supplement the usual (intercepting my correspondence, shadowing me if I went somewhere, assigning me to hotel rooms with listening devices, etc.).

These documents, with their arrestingly cool, almost scientific tone, were the very first things I encountered when I opened my Securitate file in 2008: they had initiated my first round of surveillance. They spoke of a silent presence that had accompanied me, through the informers listed, from early in my research. If you had told me then that some forty years later I would be shaking the hand of one of those officers in Deva, offering him a bouquet of chrysanthemums, and engaging in friendly conversation for nearly two hours, I would have thought you insane.

Over the next nine months, officer Pall would pursue me methodically, without some of the exaggerations of his fellow officers but nonetheless thoroughly. His preparations included one that stunned me when I read it. In an undated document written sometime between 23 August and my departure on 16 December 1974 are the details of how to arrest me, if that proved necessary.

Ministry of the Interior

TOP SECRET

Hunedoara County Inspectorate

[Form filled out with personal information concerning Katherine Verdery.

Under the rubric “present position” it says:] In the context of the research she is doing in our country she is also occupied with collecting military information.

Under which organ or service is she being followed: Service III

[counterespionage]

Urgency of arrest: Top

Team that will participate in her arrest [and other details]: _____

Annexes to this document: 1. her close connections. 2. the manner of action for retaining her. 3. sketch of the building. 4. photo of the element
ANNEX 1. Close contacts of the said VERDERY KATHERINE MAUREEN where she could hide.

1. The American Embassy in Bucharest, Tudor Arghezi St no. 9.

ANNEX 2. the manner of action for retaining

VERDERY KATHERINE MAUREEN

Variant I—from her domicile:

The retaining team will travel to Aurel Vlaicu village no. 73 where it will penetrate the residence through the front (and only) entrance blocking the window of the respective bedroom, which has possibilities of evacuation.

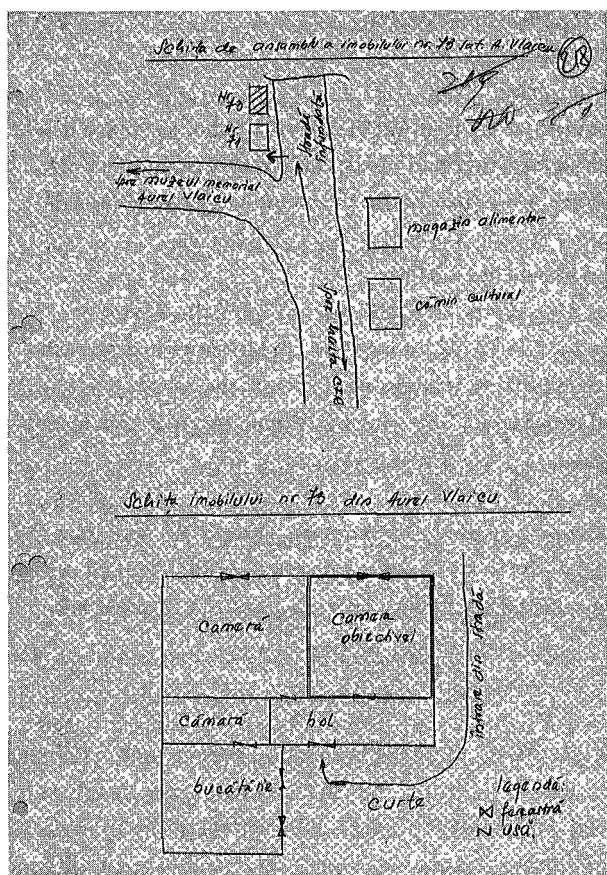
Variant II—when she leaves the locality:

When the target is away from the locality of her domicile the place where she is to be found will be established, an officer being sent who knows the respective locality, to make contact with the respective organ [of the Securitate] requesting their support with an eye to action toward retaining the target.

Variant III

The person in question being a foreign citizen, she can be invited to the passport office of the police, or to the commune People's Council, which supports her research activity, where it will be possible to retain her if needed.

Perhaps this document shows merely a bureaucrat executing normal job requirements, but I assume it indicates that the Securitate was deadly serious about my potential espionage, “proofs” of which were my motorbike trip into a military zone, my question about other such zones, and my suspicious “interest” in living near the weapons factory in Cugir. Although I realized the first two mistakes had created a problem, I somehow believed that my having been allowed to work in the county in a place selected by its officials meant that these mistakes were being overlooked. Moreover, it never occurred to me that a village located precisely in the area the officials had selected would be seen as evidence of my spying intent. I was blinded by two things. The first was my inability to imagine myself as a spy, which was connected with both my lack of political savvy and a too culture-bound sense of what “spying” could mean in this context—in short, I didn’t realize then that spying must be understood in culturally specific terms, involving particular kinds of social relationships. Nor did I understand “identity” in a sufficiently flexible way, as a series of precarious minglings of various possible dimensions (philosophical, political, gendered, social, etc.) that changed situationally. My self-concept was way too rigid for the context I was in.



Sketch of my residence and nearby buildings, 1974. Courtesy of ACNSAS-FI.

The second “blinder” was my understanding of how politics worked. I saw the socialist system as more or less seamless from top to bottom, assuming that officials at any one level knew what officials at other levels were doing. In fact, the political hierarchy was fissured at every junction, authorities at the commune level being potentially uninformed about significant aspects of my introduction into the county. This sort of disjuncture created a great deal of room for local officials to follow their own path, not necessarily dictated from above. In subsequent research in the 1980s, I would begin to realize this insight more fully, but it was a hard-won realization.

tions where I lived. According to my informer “Beniamin,” his officer repeatedly asked if he knew whom I was sleeping with, and when he said he didn’t know, the officer would tell him those whom they knew of, so as to impress him with their omniscience. “You see, we know everything about her, so you can’t try to hide anything you know.” My sexual habits were a way of giving them power over their own informer network, not to mention over the people I slept with, who could, like that first one in December, be targeted for recruitment. For this reason, the subject of sex leads us directly to the subject of informers.

Portraits of Informers, Part I

Anyone who comes into contact with the “target,” more or less by chance, is at once brought under surveillance, written up, shadowed. [Thus] any person on the territory of Romania who, through the play of chance or fate, becomes a “target” also becomes radioactive: he irradiates all those with whom he connects.

—Gabriel Liiceanu, *My Dear Snitch*

The murky world of Securitate informers was an integral part of doing fieldwork in the context of secrecy. From 1973 to 1988, at least seventy people in Deva, Vlaicu, Cluj, Iași, and Bucharest (only twelve of them women) gave information on me to the Securitate. Many were casual acquaintances who wrote a small number of notes, some were people I met only in passing (such as hotel receptionists), and some were colleagues and friends, even intimates. The CNSAS staff decoded a few of their pseudonyms for me; I identified most of the others from internal evidence in the file. Some remain unknown. Of all these people, only two told me before 1989 that they had been asked to file reports on me.

I’ve said that I found myself becoming emotionally attached to a much larger number of people than was true of me in my normal life at home. Although I have always had a proclivity for developing strong attachments, during my fieldwork and especially in the mid-1980s I noticed in myself an unprecedented emotional promiscuity, only some of it sexual. This habit left me wide open to being colonized by the Securitate through their use of informers. When they find I am growing close to someone, they are likely to try to recruit that person to inform, if he or she is not already in their network. Here are two of them; we will meet more later on.

Ministry of the Interior
County Hunedoara Inspectorate, Serv. III.
Source "Lazăr"

TOP SECRET
19 Apr 1974

NOTE

On 19 April 1974, at noon, contact with "Lazăr" was initiated [he had been recruited on 9 April, soon after my official file, the DUI, was set up], on which occasion he related the following:

Since the last meeting he was attentive to Verdery Katherine Maurer, so as to see what she does, where she goes and with whom she makes contact. From what Source has seen, she goes from house to house and makes contact with everyone.

She types her material in three copies. She sends one copy through the mail, takes one copy personally, and keeps one for herself.¹⁵ She said she does this because from discussions with other colleagues it resulted that they had had situations when the material sent was lost.

From the discussions carried on by Source with those who are contacted by Verdery Katherine Maurer, it results that she is not interested in other problems besides establishing genealogies. Up to now no one has found her to be interested in military problems, the Cugir factory, military units, etc. . . .

Source in this period discussed with Verdery Katherine Maurer about her family as well as her interests, establishing the fact that before university she worked as a waitress, since she needed money. [details—many incorrect—about the lives and work of my relatives]

When my file was opened in late March 1974, it meant recruiting informers to report on my daily activities. Although I had been unaware of it at the time, the discovery that my landlord, Moșu ("Lazăr," to his officer), had been filing regular reports on me during 1974 was not a surprise. He could scarcely have avoided being asked, given his friendships with the commune authorities who often came to drink with him—not to mention the fact that I lived in his house. (He had also, his niece reminded me, long been at risk of surveillance himself because of his expertise with guns, of which he had once

illegally owned several, at the cost of quite a few beatings.) What surprised me, rather, was the striking extent of his reporting. For example:

Ministry of the Interior
Hunedoara County Inspectorate
Source "Lazăr," Discussion taped

TOP SECRET
10 May 1974, 12:00 noon

NOTE

Since our last meeting (30 April 1974) the American citizen Verdery Katherine Maureen carried on her activity as follows:

On 1 May 1974 she was at P—S— and M—L—. Source spoke with both of them. She asked P—S— only about his kin. He works as an electrician at I.G.O. Cugir, is about 37–38 years old. She asked him if he's from Vlaicu, to which he replied that he inherited his house from his father-in-law, being himself from Bacainti. He has two sisters, one an engineer and the other at university.

M—L— is from Moldova, is elderly, deaf, and myopic. He has a daughter by marriage. The American said she couldn't get anywhere with him.

On 2 May 1974 she went to V—T—, who cleans up the stables. He is 74. The American said that he is mentally weak and she couldn't find anything to discuss with him. . . .

On 3 May 1974 she went to V—A—, brother of V—T—. He used to be a big nationalist. He's about 80, and walks with difficulty. Source spoke with him. He said the American asked him about his kin and whether he is from Vlaicu.

In the rest of his informer note—rather damning of my interviewing style, unless I was being purposely vague (as often happened)—Moșu went on to report on my activities and his follow-up discussions with my respondents for the remaining six days until his next meeting with the case officer who handled him, officer "Grigorescu," whom we will meet later. Moșu had come with notes; their conversation was taped and then typed up later in the office. Such meetings were repeated about every ten days. The previous week, the officer's instructions had been that when the American left home he should go into her room, see who had written letters to her, and read the ones in Romanian, retaining their content, and he should also observe where she went and whom she saw. When she came home in the evening, he should

discuss with her what she had talked about with them. Thus, he is to know what the American does every single day.

It is true that I often talked about my day with my hosts in the evening, but I never imagined that he was retaining what I said, noting it down, and perhaps checking it out with whomever I had visited. Once I saw these entries in my file, I began to think that few ethnographers have been so minutely recorded in their work. Starting with the next meeting with his officer on 28 May, "Lazăr's" reports are made day by day ("12 May 1974, she was at the German church at a baptism as well as at the feast after it. After this she went to L—M— and B—V—. 13 May 1974 she went to . . .").

In April, Moșu was new to this game (it seems he had not been used as an informer until now) and was still being broken in. The fact that officer "Grigorescu" used Moșu's real name (in quotation marks) rather than giving him a pseudonym indicates that he was what they called an occasional source, one with a single use: me. After a couple of months, the officer would ask him to come with his notes already written but then complain that they were superficial and incomplete. By September he had gotten the hang of it. On 20 September 1974, I threw a party for Wm, who had come to visit me again in the field. In Moșu's report of it, he listed every single person of the forty I had invited to the party and described what we had eaten.

They served a kind of biscuits with cheese from Holland and nuts, sandwiches with liver paté from Romania, store-bought *juica* (6 kg) and 2 kg liqueur. The wine was from California—12 bottles, with mineral water, and she thanked everyone for the hospitality with which she had been received in their homes.

Being mentioned on such a list could have repercussions, as we saw with his report of 30 August 1974, in which he told of my attachment to Ana Bierman. It had resulted in "Grigorescu" requesting verification of the Biermans and of her connection with me.

Moșu's reports made it clear that I could not have uttered a single throw-away line over breakfast or mentioned anyone in passing without my words potentially traveling on to the officer—generally in garbled form. In this way Moșu helped make me "radioactive," spreading my contaminating effects more widely. As I read his reports, however, I began to think that after the first month or so, he was not actually talking with everyone as he told the of-

ficer he was; maybe he got the gist in the first couple of weeks, then gradually narrowed the topics discussed to "She asked them about kinship." And though I winced at reading the notes, their cumulative effect was rather to exculpate me, for he repeatedly stated that I had not asked anyone about the armaments factory at Cugir or the work of people employed there. Because the Deva senior officer, Pall, was primarily concerned with my spying on military installations such as Cugir (which had gotten me into this pickle in the first place) and did not expand his inquiry into other areas when that seemed not to pan out, Moșu contributed a lot to the concluding report that absolved me of spying.

Following one report, the officer observes that this is "Lazăr's" first written note and is therefore pretty rough. He reminds "Lazăr" to write down everything he learns about VK's day. He has also checked out whether some of the people VK saw submitted the required statement about their conversation with her. He ends his report with the following:

It was arranged with the informer that when he finds that the American will leave the village, he is to telephone me so as to organize a search of her things. Noteworthy is that at present all her notes and other papers are locked in a suitcase whose lock is difficult to open. When she goes away for a short time her things are spread around her room, thus it is possible to proceed.

N.S.: Arrange with the informer to enable you to see the foreigner's documents.

An item following this says that on 5 June the attached material was photocopied and placed in "Folclorista's" file. The material consisted almost entirely of long and hilarious letters between me and Gloria, which I am delighted to reread now. The Securitate did not copy even one page of my field notes, for I had carried all three copies of this set with me to Bucharest while they were penetrating my room.

On 14 June, "Lazăr" produced another informative note, running day by day from 30 May to 13 June. This time, his officer admonished him for the poor quality of his notes:

The problems referring to Verdery Katherine Mauren are represented very superficially, for which reason it is not possible to draw a firm conclusion

with respect to the activity of the American citizen. He was instructed once again about the manner of drawing up these notes.

A couple of months later he was admonished again and called to give a “completion” to his earlier notes, which he did, in great detail. The relation of an informer to his officer was understood as “pedagogical.” We see from the progression of “Lazăr’s” notes how “Grigorescu” is trying to train him to be a better observer and reporter on the officer’s subjects of interest.

Moşu died before I saw my file. I would have liked to talk with him about it. Instead, in 2008 I asked Meri and Moaşa (his sister-in-law and his wife) whether they knew he was informing and how he had felt about it. Both said yes, though neither had ever breathed a word of it to me despite our supposedly close relations, perhaps suggesting the pervasiveness of suspicion and secrecy among Romanians as well as with me. Meri observed, “He knew which way the wind blew. But he liked you, so he wouldn’t have said anything harmful. It didn’t bother him much [nu l-a supărat], he liked going to the restaurant on the highway, getting something to eat, having a chance to ogle the waitresses—the reason he’d give for going there was ‘I’m giving my eyes a treat.’” Moaşa’s answer was similar: “You know how he was! He was always looking for company and a drink, and he enjoyed going out for a beer or a meal. The officer always met him at restaurants, and he had a good time.” Neither woman believed that it had been a terrible burden for him or a source of anxiety. I’ll never know.

“Jacob”

Field notes, 24 Nov. 74 [a year after I arrived and shortly before I left]. Friendships in the field.

Went to 258 for some photos; nothing new, except when I left he [“Jacob”] conducted me to the gate. I got partway home and then his wife caught up with me, going to her parents. When I asked why she hadn’t left with me, she replied, “I wouldn’t have deprived my husband of the pleasure of seeing you to the gate, since he seems to enjoy it so much.” But she still wanted to leave right after in hopes of catching up with me so we could keep on chatting. This led to our wandering up and down the street several times, gabbing for an additional 20 min., during which she tried to say that she really digs me, that she has feelings but can never “exteriorize” them, is crazy about her son but has never been able to cuddle him or express her feelings. She says this while hanging onto my arm and having spent our past three visits holding hands.

This family was one of my very favorites, and when I lived in Vlaicu I visited them often—both at their express invitation and on my own initiative—as well as several times after they moved to town to live with their son. The husband was an exceptionally bright man, who always caught the drift of any question I posed him and gave me lengthy, informative answers. His lovely wife, while less verbal, was equally engaging. I looked forward to every evening spent with them. In truth, I had something of a crush on them both and must somehow have communicated as much, given her approach to me that evening.

Ministry of the Interior, D.S.S.

TOP SECRET

Hunedoara County Inspectorate, Service III

22.11.1979

To Directorate 3, Bucharest

On 17.11.1979 there arrived in Hunedoara County the American citizen VERDERY KATHERINE MAUREEN, assistant at the University of "JOHN HOPKINS" in Baltimore. . . . On the evening of her arrival, she was well received by the locals, who know her since 1974, manifesting their happiness to see her again.

On this occasion, informer "Jacob," according to the instruction given him, invited her the following day to visit his family at home. Among discussions of a general sort . . . the foreigner asked if Source knew the date of the first documentary evidence of this locality, to which he replied no. VERDERY KATHERINE specified that she had read a book called "SIEBENBURGER URKUNDE," in which it says that the first documentary mention of the village dates from 1290. She also stated that in the Ottoman period these territories were depopulated, to which the informer presented counterarguments based on historical reality. . . . The informer related to her that in the locality of Aurel Vlaicu there was no Hungarian population in past or present.¹⁶

This report is based on the informer's note of two days earlier, to which the officer had appended the comment:

The informer furnished this material at our request on the occasion of a meeting effected to instruct him concerning the American citizen Verdery

Katherina. . . . The informer was instructed to maintain connection with the foreigner and to observe her preoccupations, what problems interest her, with whom she has frequent contacts.

Maj. Crăciun Viorel

The officer's note from a later report by "Iacob" states: "The source has the task of cultivating further his relations with the respective citizen."

When I read these notes, I was devastated. Although "Iacob's" six or seven reports in my file were on the whole inoffensive, including positive comment about me along with mentioning my "historical errors," the thought that some of those happy evenings with them had been an assignment from the Securitate disturbed me deeply. Only in 2013 (five years after I first saw the reports) did it occur to me that maybe it was precisely his informer status that enabled him to invite me so often, because it gave him cover. Surveillance, after all, is often just a form of socializing. Until that point, I had felt wounded. And it took me even longer to realize that his reporting appeared to be confined to my second field trip, not the first (when our friendship was formed). With these thoughts, I could try to return to the belief that our friendship might have been real, not opportunistic.

It can take time to develop perspective on a friend's informing—in this case, five years. Gradually I remembered that after all, I had cared for these people and wanted to keep doing so. Such perspective is easier to achieve if the informer is still alive and willing to talk. By the time I read his notes, however, both "Iacob" and his wife were dead—the case with a number of the people who had informed on me. One of "Iacob's" kinsmen is my friend *Nico, with whom I had been discussing my file for some time. Asking him first if he would want to see reports written by his kin, I took him one of "Iacob's" notes. Nico was, like me, very distressed to see the note, and for that day and the next he, his wife *Sofi, and I talked at length about how we might explain "Iacob's" informing. Given his job (related, inevitably, to UM Cugir), it was possible that "Iacob" had come up short on classified inventory at some point—that often happened—and been given a choice between jail and informing. Maybe he was caught coming home with "too much" corn from the collective farm and given the same choice. Maybe his influence in the village made him especially desirable for recruitment, so they would have put a lot of pressure on him. Then Sofi says, "and he was a fearful person. For this reason it's possible that . . . But I'm convinced that doing it, he suf-

ferred.” Later she uses the same word to describe another person everyone suspected of being an informer: he was very fearful, cowardly.

The next day I ask them if there was any fallout from that discussion: Nico has had a few thoughts but pushed them away, and both had dreams about it. In his, he was being followed by the KGB, who lost track of him and then found him again. Nico and Sofi emphasize their certainty that “Iacob” must have had some sort of vulnerability enabling his recruitment. Then he notes how much time we’re spending trying to exculpate “Iacob,” to uncover the excuses that will help us understand his behavior—which we all find troubling. They feel a desperate need to explain their loved and respected kinsman to themselves, a man who had been a moral exemplar for them. And so begins the nuancing of the informer: we can make excuses for some; some are not as bad as others because they didn’t write ugly things about their target; even though he did it he probably suffered for his informing; and so on.

Later, from “Iacob’s” informer file, I learned that he had been recruited in 1964 when he was on the church council, which the Securitate needed to penetrate. His reports then largely concerned church business. But information concerning him goes back to 1943—that is, to the pre-communist secret police, the Siguranța, whose reports the Securitate had preserved in their pursuit of active supporters of fascism, of which it seems “Iacob” was one. (In the 1940s there were plenty of people in Romania—both Romanians and Germans—who were interested in one or another indigenous fascist organization.) Indeed, the instructions for a number of these intelligence services after World War II, such as the East German Stasi and the Securitate, urged recruitment of members of the Gestapo, SS, and Wehrmacht, as well as indigenous fascist groups such as the Iron Guard, from whom it was feared the Western intelligence services would try to recruit; better to get them first.¹⁷ Moreover, “Iacob’s” real name closely resembled that of another Vlaicean who had also been an active fascist, and some of the information on “Iacob” from the 1940s is wrong: it actually concerns this other person. It seems likely, then, that he had been vulnerable to recruitment by the communist secret police for his wartime activities (partly confused with those of his co-villager) and had remained in the informer “reserves” for later use, concerning special cases like me. But this is just a guess.

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Discovering people who had informed on me was the most painful aspect of reading my file—I will give further signs of that later—and trying to come to terms with it the most difficult. My reactions varied wildly from case to case, moving from rage to despair to bewilderment, always underpinned by wondering what made them do it. Fascinating to watch in myself and others I have discussed this with is our intense effort to explain the informing, to exculpate them somehow, as Nico, Sofi, and I did with “Iacob.” It is easier when the reports are largely neutral, as “Iacob’s” were, offering little that incriminates. But when they provide information that is damaging—information that is precisely what the Securitate is looking for to classify someone as an “enemy”—then the work of exculpation becomes more demanding. The matter of informers will become even more intense during the 1980s.

Aside from my personal feelings about them, in a broader sense informers’ reports raise the important and sobering possibility that I, along with the several other anthropologists who came to Romania during the 1970s,¹⁸ served as new points of entry for the Securitate into rural areas, where it had been sorely underrepresented. In those years, approximately 15 percent of informers were to be found in villages, where 50–60 percent of the population lived.¹⁹ Any change in the village’s social configuration—and the arrival of an anthropologist was certainly that—could serve as an opportunity for drawing more people into the informer network. At least two of those regularly used to report on me were recruited precisely for that task, as was another friend who was often questioned about me but did not write reports. Moreover, keeping track of me brought the local police force into closer relations with villagers, whom they would ask about my doings without formally recruiting them as informers.

Thus, the Securitate used us foreign anthropologists to further subject the rural population, enabling them to penetrate spaces and groups they might otherwise have had difficulty entering into. This suggests that although we might assume that the ethnographer would be largely a nuisance to the socialist state, as its secret police dithered at first over what to do with her, over time the Securitate became practiced at leveraging her presence. In a word, anthropologists brought some benefits to the police.²⁰ “Radioactive,” indeed.

Betrayals

Did I feel betrayed by those who informed on me? That is certainly how many Romanians and others in the former Soviet bloc feel about their friends who provided reports on them, rousing some to a fierce quest for retribution—if

only by revealing their informers' names. The stance to take toward informers is a complicated question, perhaps best left until I have introduced more of them in chapter 3. But some idea of the complexities transpires from my own behavior in the field.

Given how little I understood about Romania throughout much of my first stay, the irrepressible and highly responsive person I became made me a danger, a source of betrayals of my own. Consider the following report from a man I had met while copying documents at the notary's office in 1974. After we worked together for several weeks, during which we had begun to flirt a bit, we went out for a beer and flirted some more. Then I offered to drop him at his house en route to my next appointment, asking him if he knew the location of the building where I was going next. In my superficial way, I felt that he and I were becoming good friends, so I told him whom I was going to visit, thereby breaking the cardinal rule for foreigners in Cold War Romania: *never mention one friend to another unless you are certain they know each other and you have their permission*. His report concerning me covers two closely typed pages, among which is this paragraph:

Mrs. Verdery has a "Mobra" motorbike with a red license plate on which I went to the Gojd quarter of town to [address], where I left her since not knowing the city, she asked me to show her where it was. She told me that in that building live her friends, the Schilling family (I don't recall the name exactly).

The case officer's subsequent report corrects the final sentence: "She went to the Bierman family, with whom action will be taken in the manner ordered by the leadership of the Counterespionage Service."

What on earth possessed me to give their name to someone I hardly knew? I was a loose cannon! With this kind of carelessness, the closer I grew to the Biermans (and others like them), the more dangerous I became to them. It's true that the Securitate held Romanian scholars under surveillance too, but since they were less likely to be considered spies than foreigners were, the consequences of contact with them were likely to be less severe for their friends and associates.

My "radioactive" quality grew more malignant in 1984–85, when contrary to my previous practice of not keeping a personal diary, lest it be found, I began

writing personal observations on the facing pages of my field index (where I kept each day's discussion topics and the corresponding pages in my field notes). At first the notations were fairly innocuous, indicating changes in my moods. But then, as my emotional promiscuity began to flourish, the notes became a telegraphic record of moments of intense connection with the various people I had fastened onto, as well as of the occasional dreams through which I was processing all this. It seems that I needed to preserve my memories of the rich emotional life I was having, in the hope that they might later help me resolve some perennial difficulties in my psyche. Imagining that I might not be the only person interested in the notebook, I carried it with me at all times. Nonetheless, the Securitate obtained it and translated the first few months (happily for me, before things had fully heated up). With that, my potential for betraying my friends increased even further. The changed circumstances of Romania in the 1980s would bring it fully to fruition.

In summer 2012 I launched a conversation about informers with my friend Silvia. What position should I take toward them? I'm hoping I can get some informers to talk with me, I said—that is, I will take an ethnographic approach to them, not an ethical one. She replied, "They're ashamed," implying that my sample might not be large. I said that I don't feel I have the right to judge, because I wasn't put in the situation my informers were in; I'm not from here, and I didn't have officers compelling me to inform. Silvia objected: "I find this a stupid opinion. Of course you have the right to judge. You spent a lot of time here, you've had a significant engagement with this country, and people did this to you, some of it quite harmful." In twenty-first-century Romania, informing remains an urgent moral question, pressing one to take a position that I at this point find elusive.

Identities in Flux

In the fall of 1974, when I had been in the field for almost a year, I climbed onto the train in Deva and headed for Vlaicu. A man behind me in the ticket line had overheard me stating my destination, and once we embarked he approached me to talk. He said he worked for the railway and had been stationed for some time at the Vlaicu train stop right after the war, and he was wondering if I could tell him anything about some of the people he had come to know in the village. We talked for almost the entire forty-five-minute ride, as I answered his questions about one or another person, what had happened with this or that one's children, who had moved away to town,

"If anyone had told me of even a single case . . . my attitude would have been different." It seems it was indeed possible to refuse—and some people *did* know of a single case. Fortrightness, lack of fear, craftiness: these are among the ways people could stay out of the Securitate's informer network and avoid the creation of a doppelganger, even though (as with Herta Müller) it might indeed cost them their job or bring other difficulties down on them. Other examples of refusals appear in Mihai Albu's book *The Informer*,¹¹ which also tells us that in every recruitment plan drawn up by Secu officers, there was an escape hatch in case the recruitment was not going well. Thus, although the people approached might not know they could refuse, the officers certainly did. But it seems that on the whole, they managed to convince most people that refusing was not possible. People could not always find escape routes; they assessed their options and the costs of refusing, and they imagined that they could comply in a way that would not be too harmful.

With their intensive psychological training, officers also had a flair for detecting people who were fearful and were thus especially vulnerable to recruitment. One such person was my dear friend Mariana, introduced in chapter 2.

Mariana

He had given up [reported on] neighbors who had wished him a happy birthday every year of his life. And still he believed himself the victim as much as the perpetrator of his crimes.

—Informer in Anthony Marra's *A Constellation of Vital Phenomena*

The informer was used in the informative pursual of the American researcher "VERA" about whom she furnished informative material of operative interest. She manifested conscientiousness in fulfilling her tasks, punctuality at meetings, and care in preserving confidentiality. In the future she will be used again for informative pursual of the American researcher "VERA." Given that her meetings with "VERA" take place at the informer's home, by the time of "VERA's" arrival in the country measures will be taken to introduce T.O. means at the informer's residence.

Like "Beniamin," Mariana agreed to discuss her informing with me on the condition that she not be identifiable; I have left out important details of her life and invented a few others. Our developing closeness during 1984–85 had

not escaped the Securitate's notice. As I learned from her informer file, they baptized her "Elisabeta," following careful study and a grueling six- to seven-hour recruitment that spring.

When I returned to Romania in 1987 for a month, I went to see her and, to my dismay, found her strangely distant. We managed a visit or two but she was very stiff and wouldn't say why. Though I felt baffled and hurt, this was not sufficient to drive me away for good as she seemed to want. Then, when I went to Romania again the following year for three months, I got a message from her asking me to visit. She'd changed her mind and now wanted to spend time together. Eventually, after two months of frequent visits, she told me what had happened the previous year. From shortly after our friendship began, she had been asked to file informer's reports on me and had done so. She told me how terrible it made her feel, describing it as "devastating"; how after every visit of mine she would wait in dread for her officer's call to set up a meeting; how she would lie awake all night with stomach pains when she had an appointment with him the next day. She hated it so much that she concluded not even the pleasure of our friendship was worth this anxiety. Therefore, she had decided to cut me off the next time I came, and she did.

This confession overwhelmed me and cemented our relationship. We did not go into detail then about how she had been recruited or what she had said; that would come only later, after I read my file. It contained a number of reports from her, some lengthy. I was also able to read her informer file, including the report of the officer who recruited and then managed her, officer Ținca. According to him, she had submitted over twenty informer's notes; five of them are preserved there, and in mine are another seven, all of them fairly innocuous. Of the seventy or so people who informed on me, only she and "Alex" told me before the communist regime fell that they had been asked to report, and only she confirmed that she had actually done so. In consequence, I have chosen to remove the stigmatizing quotation marks from the name I have given her.

Once I had read through my file, we got together with the understanding that her experience with the Securitate would be our main subject. She told me a lot about how she was recruited, her state of mind, and her feelings after the fact. For me these conversations were riveting. They showed at close range the effects on self-concept and identity of being drawn into the Securitate's orbit and of feeling compelled to keep that relationship secret.

Field notes, 9 June 2010

After lengthy small talk and catching up, I finally ask if we can talk about "the event." Can I take notes, or tape record; which would she prefer? She says taping makes her freeze; better take notes, adding that she's giving me a great gift with these confessions.

Her recruitment had happened soon after I began spending time with her. She was going home one day around 3 P.M. when a rather distinguished man addressed her: "We must have a discussion." He'd already been in her apartment and found her aunt there, so he'd waited outside. Now he says, "Let's go up, leave your bags, and tell your aunt you're coming with me." Her aunt asked when she's coming back, but she didn't know. Getting into his waiting car, they drove to the Securitate building near the train station, and then she knew what this was about; until then she hadn't been sure. People were always trying to avoid this building, and now she's going in!

They were joined by another man—she can still see them both in her mind (I can tell her now who they were: officers Vulcan and Tinca). They were very ceremonious, polite. "We have to establish some coordinates. You have traumatic events in your past, your grandfather.¹² . . . Our Securitate now is different, but we still have to guard our country. You have a connection with a person from the U.S. We're not asking for much, just a few notes. We'll have to see each other from time to time." They asked her about my research, which strikes them as justifying their suspicions that I have "other tasks." So just in case, it's best that they know what I'm up to, and she'll help them.

Their discussion lasted seven hours, until 10:00 P.M. Before leaving, they ordered her not to tell anyone anything that had happened. I ask how they had done that: "through tone, context, firmness, atmosphere," suggesting that if she revealed it, something very grave would happen to her. "It was less what they said than the context: extraverbal communication, and my own nature, which they knew: fearful. They had said it right at the start: 'Let's be clear from the outset that this system of Securitate has nothing in common with the 1950's [when her beloved grandfather had been arrested and shot]; you don't have to be afraid. Fear is pointless, the relations are completely different. This new Securitate has a different style, different consequences. You would be doing something important for your country.'" But of course she continued to be terrified, and they knew it. Their talking about it had made it worse.

She has no idea what took them seven hours—some of the conversation was quite ordinary, things about her work. She was very stressed, kept drinking water; they kept telling her to relax. No, they weren't aggressive; made small talk, little politenesses—"and this disturbed me most of all! I felt they were enveloping me in a method I couldn't see. I kept thinking, 'I have to manage, to outsmart them.'" They made no threats, though she began to worry about keeping her job because they

kept asking about specific ideas she had promoted in her sociological research, saying they'd heard those were *passé*—"so they called my practice of my profession into question, very subtly. But I couldn't refuse them! Things were going on in my job right then, and if I refused, I might lose it. I had already lost one career to this system for being the grandchild of a political prisoner; I couldn't lose another. So I decided I would do it and I would simply have to be smarter than they. They're smart, but I'd have to outsmart them somehow." After the recruitment meeting, she was distraught for several days, insomniac, depressed. "I couldn't talk to anyone. Whenever I would think about it, I would freeze, then start to shake. I had awful nightmares."

Even when I wasn't in Romania they would be calling her at home, setting up meetings, at which the officer would tell her to talk to him about me. They kept after her about my name—is it Hungarian?—were always trying to get her to say I'm doing things I'm not supposed to, and continually asked her whom I meet with and why I always stop the taxi elsewhere, rather than at her building. "I tried like hell to avoid saying anything important," she assures me. They didn't take notes—she thinks they tape recorded it all—but would bring her water, listen, then ask her to write it down. "The worst part was when they would leave me a few minutes to write things down and then make me sign my name. That was the most difficult of all: signing my name." She recalls this as very important, remembering it clearly. "I felt that that moment was the most embarrassing and worrisome seal on the event. I wondered what psychological value there is to whether or not you sign your [actual] name."

Her notes were signed with her name, not her pseudonym.

Interesting in this recital is that in describing her meetings with her officer she consistently uses the pronoun "they," even though when asked, she confirms that except for the recruitment there was always only one. The plural may reflect her feeling overwhelmed by the situation, her conflating all meetings with the first terrible one, or perhaps her thinking in terms of "us" versus "them," as she said later. On another occasion she recalled how she would feel at her meetings with officer Ținca:

"Every time I left that café I felt dizzy and disgusted. I'd try to repeat to myself how it had gone. I felt nauseous at that glass of juice or whatever it was he gave me. As I would go down the hill I was panicked at the thought that I might be followed. Everything culminated in an episode near my building where I had the feeling that two guys were posted there who didn't leave all evening. The next day I complained to a friend that I was afraid I was developing a persecution complex" (*delir de urmărire*).

She recalls telling them two things. The first was an incident I had reported to her about my room at the hotel being searched, and I filed a complaint, told people about

it. Since they were always asking her for information, she told them about this, thinking there was nothing new in it. Second, I left my field index at her house once, and she told them about that. "I wanted to give them something to chew on. 'Did you find anything interesting in it?' the officer asked, and I was thrilled to tell him I didn't find anything." She was very excited because she was saying nothing and thought she was protecting me by not telling them! "I thought I was as clean as a tear." But what she had done was to tell them it existed, making it a target of their searches.

"By 1987 I had already decided not to see you any more—I wanted to, but I just couldn't take it. Worst of all was that I couldn't talk to anyone, my friends Adriana and Ionel, my brother especially. I couldn't explain it to them, though I think they guessed. Two or three days after the revolution, my first subject of conversation with them was what had happened to me the night I was recruited. I had never told anyone, and it was deeply liberating to tell them now. We had always talked about 'us' and 'them,' and once I had made this confession I thought we could all remain 'us'—I kept insisting that I was never involved in the reporting, I hadn't become 'them.' I had to make my confession or I couldn't remain friends with them. I was afraid of their disapproval, needed their understanding so there would be nothing separating us; needed their absolution. Like with a priest. I told another friend later, who replied, 'Don't worry, all intellectuals did that!' I had wondered if I was the only one! It's very important to know there were lots of others."

She had earlier refused their request that she report on people besides me, and after the revolution she refused even that. "After December another person appeared—I was at work at the end of the day—and it really shook me up. That time I was very brave and sent him away at once: I told him very firmly never to appear at my office again. Apologizing, he left immediately, and I've never seen him since, even on the street. Even now, though, I feel a shiver down my spine remembering it. The revolution notwithstanding, they still had their program!"

"After the revolution, I thought to myself, 'I was an informer!' It's horrible to me, but this is what people would say. I regret that I've been 'outed' by the CNSAS. Except for the stress of it, I never had the sense that I did something important or interesting. I never felt I was an informer, and I have trouble using the word concerning myself. It's very upsetting to know that this word is attached to me now in an official way. The word 'informer' is repugnant to me! Hearing it about myself . . . I refuse it! I don't identify with this label. Maybe this is why I can talk about it so easily."

She had been afraid to discuss this with me—a question of self-image—but she thinks I can understand, maybe even empathize with her situation. The most painful thing was telling me not to seek her out, but she couldn't stand the idea that they

would keep calling her. The emotional momentum of this conversation now drives me to remark, "It's pointless to say this, but I'm unspeakably sorry that these things happened to you on my account." I choke up, look away.

After this long day, we have dinner and I eat ravenously, drink too much, go home and eat even more. I'm both exhausted and energized, feel very bad about her suffering but fascinated by these two ideas (on her acquiescing to the rule of silence and on not thinking of herself as an informer).

11 June 2010. We continue where we left off, filling in further details of the recruitment and its effects on our relations: "It complicated my friendship with you terribly, by founding it on a deception. You have no idea how awful it was to have this duplicitous relation with you—wanting to get closer to you and create trust, while constantly knowing that I was duplicitous. It set up a dreadful conflict in me—it changed my relation to myself. That was partly why I decided in 1987 I would give you up. Better that than to have this constant terror about the phone calls from the Securitate. Then I would have to try to outsmart them, my whole day would be destroyed, my nerves. . . . Any phone call made me nervous. If he called in the morning for an afternoon meeting, my day would be ruined; if he called in the evening for the next day, I wouldn't sleep a wink. But at the same time I had a powerful desire to see you, to develop our connection."

At the end of this conversation she has withdrawn and is defensive. She leaves the room, and when she comes back she asks me, "Did you turn off the tape recorder?" Then she adds, "Imagine if after all this time I ask you this question even in jest, what that means!" After a while, she says, "What a lot of harm you caused me!" Then, "I know you didn't do it, but Adriana, discussing all this with me, said, 'How could Katherine not know how much harm she could cause you?'"

After this I had a terrible night's sleep; wide awake, obsessing about it, feeling bad. Who betrayed whom? Whose responsibility was it to prevent this trauma? Such a ridiculous question. It was the Securitate's responsibility, or the Party's, or Churchill's and Roosevelt's at Yalta when they let Stalin keep Romania, but surely not any one individual's, certainly not just mine. Nonetheless, I feel guilty for having brought such a dreadful experience upon someone I cared for.

How's that again? She had informed on me, but I had harmed her? It reminds me of the film *The Autobiography of Nicolae Ceaușescu*, in which perpetrators keep being confused with victims, keep becoming victims—a widespread tendency in the way many informers have struggled to account for their actions: by presenting themselves as victims of the system. In fact, I am sympathetic to this position, especially for those whom officers blackmailed, but I would like it to accompany some acknowledgment of remorse. Here she is, rejecting

the identity of informer and embracing that of victim, sought by so many in today's Romania. *Everyone* wants to be a victim, so as not to be accused of collaboration; it helps them preserve their relationships. Does this resistance to acknowledging one's actions come partly from writing of oneself in the third person, as "Source"? Maybe in a situation of extreme anxiety, that holding of the self at a remove diminishes the anxiety by splitting it off, helped by that use of the third person. "Source" is not me, it's someone else.

I could answer Mariana's question of why I didn't know how much harm I could cause her by saying I *didn't* know. I was in the first generation of U.S. ethnographers in Romania: we were ignorant. I always assumed people might be asked to report on me, but I had no conception at all of what that would be like. Although I knew I might be followed and my phone conversations overheard, I somehow thought I'd taken care of that by phoning from the street instead of my room and taking taxis to addresses a few blocks from my destination. Besides, so much in Romania was inefficient; I could tell myself that surveillance would be, too. It is comforting to learn from Romanian writers such as Stelian Tănase and Gabriel Liiceanu that reading their files had made them, too, realize how naive they had been in underestimating Securitate surveillance.¹³

Indeed, I could add that not even Mariana herself knew what harm I could do her. An entry in my field notes for 20 October 1984, before her recruitment, reports a comment that she made to me on the subject of surveillance: "The best thing is to carry out your affairs in such a way that there's nothing to hide." When I tell about my friends' wanting me not to phone and so forth, she continues: "You should tell them not to worry. Nothing will happen; you make an affective matter of these things, when at most they should only be a question of strategy. Part of your personality is to take excessive responsibility for things, for other people's decisions, but it's not necessary: you go through all these contortions because you want people to like you." My concluding note: "Either this woman is really naive, or this is a nifty example of how people fail to look out for one another." She would realize soon enough how wrong she had been.

But the most important conclusion from my conversation with Mariana is, as she so perceptively revealed, that the Securitate's methods changed how people related to themselves and altered their relationships with others. Like viruses corrupting a healthy organism, Securitate practices subverted positive sentiment and turned it into guilt, rejection, and avoidance, making me feel guilty for having loved my friends and for not protecting them enough. Mariana came close to saying I had harmed her by wanting to spend time

with her, that my affection had turned her into something she did not want to be—an informer. In my view, we are mistaken to see this merely as her refusing responsibility for her actions (though it is also that): it is the effect of how the Securitate's power worked.

13 June 2010. Two days later we continue this exhausting exchange. Before we begin, I ask her if our conversations so far have made things worse, better, or neutral. "Neither one nor other," she replies, "but in no case 'better.'" It has created unpleasant inner states, more insomnia—for both of us.

We enter into the thorny question of who initiated our friendship and continue with how I could not have known what harm I was doing her. Her line is that I came to Romania with a disposition to connect with people, she was one of them, then I left. She was a casualty. I remind her that from the first time she invited me to her house, which she did voluntarily, she had already implicated herself and brought on that harm. She could have avoided it by not inviting me. She accepts this but returns to the various things that made her feel she couldn't refuse to inform, and to the ways she had been brave in her relations with her officer. Although she does not now repeat the most important justification for her informing, I see it as key in my desire to excuse her: that when the two officers escorted her to headquarters and held her for seven hours, it reactivated all the terror and shock she had experienced as a little girl when the securiști had broken into their home and hauled away her grandfather forever. After her recruitment she'd had nightmares about that for weeks, recalling those events, and echoes of the nightmares after meetings with her officer.

At 6 P.M. I phone her from the airport as I leave, say we should have had some sort of absolution for all the confession we had performed, to use her own words. For my part, I offer mine. I couldn't quite hear her response.

Absolution? What possible sense does that make? Who am I to absolve a person trapped in a global conflict not of her making—whose chief "sin" was to reciprocate my affection—of doing what she felt she had to do to survive, even if it meant keeping from me the secret of her double identity? I know she suffered for it. Of course, from the Securitate's point of view, her "sin" was different: she befriended a suspicious foreigner, a spy. But I am not the one to absolve her of that.

In June 2015 I decided on a whim to look up Mariana's Securitate officer, Ovidiu Ținca, on the Internet. Up came a huge photo of him, wearing academic garb in his role as eminent dean of the Law School of Oradea University. There was also a YouTube video of him giving a lecture on labor contracts. After some deliberation, I wrote Mariana an email asking if she had

any interest in seeing these reminders of her past. When she said yes, I sent her the URLs. Confirming that he was indeed the person who had recruited her and to whom she had to report (though he had used a different name), she wrote,

In the first seconds, opening your email and seeing his face, I had a sensation of disgust so intense that it racked my whole body. So I closed it rapidly. I don't know what I was expecting. Maybe something better, so I could go on reading. I recognized his face at once, like a predatory fish covered with ice. He hasn't changed much in these decades. Seeing him caused me the same shudder of repugnance that I had each time. . . .

You asked if he had behaved in an uncivilized manner, had tried to take advantage of me: no, which in no way diminishes my disgust because I always felt violated anyhow. As you know, the worst thing about it was that afterwards I couldn't talk with anyone about it.

I would recognize his voice whenever he called for a meeting. It was as if a SECRET were happening, which once I agreed to it, no matter how ugly, could not be contested or opposed. As if this fact "was accepted"—what kind of ACCEPTANCE is that!? In any case, I carried the stigma of what I had consented to and had no escape.

She ended with the following sentence: "I think I now see even more clearly the nature of the evil I lived and how much these individuals (in fact, the system) contributed to strangling some of my potential . . . a life not fully lived, unfulfilled, anguished, oppressed by fear and by half measures beginning when I was a child." I wonder if she was rendered a victim at so young an age that she was permanently imprisoned in the role.

Victims and Blame

In Eastern Europe, the language of punishment and forgiveness in relations between targets and their informers occupies much space in public discourse. Similar discussions have taken place in Poland, Hungary, Germany, Romania, Slovakia—wherever informer files have been made available. In Hungary, for instance, Hungarian scholar Anikó Szűcs has written about the conversation around Sándor Tar, a writer who, knowing he was about to be outed, sent a letter denouncing himself to the person he had reported on, historian and philosopher Janos Kenedi.¹⁴ Kenedi, in turn, immediately wrote him back and expressed his forgiveness. But this, Szűcs proposes, publicly advanced the position that, like the people they had reported on, informers

were victims of the regime; therefore, they cannot and should not be held responsible for their betrayals in the past. Kenedi states outright that the perpetrator was the communist regime itself, not those who tried to make their way through it. Nevertheless, Kenedi later comes to think that he acted too hastily: because his gesture of forgiveness absolves the informer of guilt, the informer no longer need take any responsibility for what he did. The informer, in turn, can object that if responsibility is being sought, secret police officers too should be made to acknowledge theirs.

There is more than enough blame to go around. Part of it involves claims of victimhood: Who were the victims—the people targeted by the Securitate? The informers who reported on them but who can claim also to be victims of the repressive apparatus? Officers themselves, “victimized” by the system they upheld? With everyone a victim, no one is responsible. In the canonical Romanian folk ballad of the ewe-lamb, “Miorița,” two shepherds plan to kill a third, jealous at his many sheep and fine dogs. A ewe warns the third of this plan, but instead of fleeing he accepts his fate, asking the ewe to tell his mother that he hasn’t died but gotten married to an empress. In her commentary on this, poetess Ana Blandiana observes that Romanians identify with the murdered shepherd, ignoring the fact that his two fellows had killed him. Identifying with the dead shepherd makes the ballad a story about the beautiful death-wedding given to him, whereas perhaps it should instead be seen, she proposes bravely, as “an analysis of our traditional incapacity for solidarity . . . and a recognition of the evil that has inhabited us for millennia.”¹⁵ But hers is not a popular view.

One kind of language that appears all over these ruminations concerns, as with Mariana, the question of harm. Informers are apt to say—as are Securitate officers like the ones I spoke with later—“What harm did I do you, after all?” or “My guiding intention was to do no harm.” This is a complex question to which I will return. In June 2014, I discuss it over dinner with my friend Andrei. I am telling him about someone’s reports that seem to me very mild; I find nothing to object to in them. He disagrees. “Say we meet for coffee and then you’re called to report on me,” he proposes. “In your report you say, thinking you’re just giving unimportant details, that we discussed irrelevant issues, then ordered coffee and put vodka in it. That detail may seem nothing, but then when the Securitate decides to recruit or investigate me, they start by saying, ‘Would you like some coffee? We have a little vodka for it, because we know that’s how you like it.’ This tiny detail is very destabilizing, because immediately I would say to myself, ‘If they know this about me, surely they know everything else.’ So the minor fact becomes the basis for de-

stabilizing me for investigation or recruitment.” Among people who describe being recruited, the pivotal moment is precisely when they feel “everything is known” and are pushed toward capitulating. This is the harm an informer can do, making those they report on vulnerable.

In our conversation, Mariana turned the question on its head, claiming (to my surprise) that I had harmed her rather than the other way around. But an even more astounding refusal of responsibility came from officer Pătrulescu, the *securist* of Gabriel Liiceanu, whom Liiceanu sued for gross breach of privacy and violation of the Romanian constitution, as well as of the international accords Romania had signed. Pătrulescu’s lawyer answered that Liiceanu should be ashamed of himself for complaining: he had been allowed to breathe the cool mountain air in the company of famous philosophers, had received a grant to study in Germany (albeit after two years of petitions), had not suffered anything special, and didn’t even know he had been under surveillance. The officer had only done his duty.¹⁶

Romanian ethnographer Smaranda Vultur further explores the subject of informers and their victims:

I have met people followed in the 1970s and ’80s who, after seeing their files, did not wish to reveal the names of those who had supplied even numerous reports on them, because they had written nothing bad. When the surveillance did not have grave consequences, in retrospect, the former victims may even have a feeling of gratitude for the person who reported . . . because the informer had tried to protect them. Others feel embarrassed to divulge the informer’s name so as not to make their own form of denunciation, in turn. And sometimes people feel guilty for not being vigilant enough, talking too freely, or being insufficiently selective in their friends.¹⁷

What is striking here, as I have observed earlier, is the lengths to which people who were reported on will go to excuse their informers. It’s as if retaining their social connections is more important to them than being self-righteous. This alerts us once more to the truth that, contrary to what most Westerners would think, informing in Romania was social. Becoming an informer was not a strictly individual decision dependent on a person’s courage or cowardice, though these qualities could affect it. Rather, as I observed in thinking about betrayal, people might feel compelled to inform so as to protect their families and social networks. To accuse someone of cowardice for agreeing to inform presupposes an isolated individual making decisions from conscience who must now take individual responsibility for those

decisions. That view makes less sense when not individuals but social connections are the basic unit of society. Perhaps the Securitate's fierce insistence on the oath of silence, even for those who refused to be recruited, was a response to Romanians' strong sociability. Otherwise, they would too readily break open the seal around the Securitate's secret world.

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It is impossible to describe retrospectively the effects of trying to do ethnography in this context. At the time of my research, although I periodically worried that one or another friend might not be reliable, I tried not to think about it (being something of a whiz at suppressing bad feelings). This may in fact have kept me relatively sane. Given what I know now, however, it seems almost unbearable—like a form of torture—never to be sure whom you can trust. Perhaps better said, I would make good connections with people, and then they would be recruited, thereby becoming a trust concern that they may not have been at first. A note in my field index for spring 1985 says that Mariana had become irate when I asked her about trust and that I was finding her to be more hostile to me than she had been earlier in the year. Her file shows that her recruitment had occurred not long before. This compromising of trust relations has sobering consequences for ethnography as a method.

The Securitate hoped to discover what was in the soul of their target, but in contrast to confessional practices of earlier times, they did not seek it by interrogating the target to make her confess. Instead, they sought out people to whom the target would open her soul, and then strove to get those people to confess. For officers, the most valued kind of recruit was the “depth informer” (*informator de profunzime*), who was carefully placed in the immediate proximity of the target; they had been “recruited from among the target's intimates, having the full possibility of knowing everything they do, as well as their intentions.”¹⁸ In my case, Mariana was one such person. On the evidence of her reports in my file, though, their strategy did not pay off. She knew a lot about my actions and intentions, but she did not “confess” them, and in this respect my trust in her was vindicated. Nonetheless, the cost to her was great, justifying her sense of having been harmed. I would insist that it was not I who harmed her but the apparatus of surveillance in which we were both caught up, but who's to say for sure?

NOTES

Prologue

1. Romania's Securitate was formed in 1948, with the help of the Soviet NKVD/KGB. It contained both foreign and domestic intelligence divisions, each of which—but especially the former—underwent massive restructuring after 1978, when the deputy head of foreign intelligence, Gen. Ion Mihai Pacepa, defected to the United States, the highest-ranking officer from the Eastern bloc ever to do so.

2. I do not know how widely it happens that intelligence organizations follow people back to their home country. Through a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request, I received sixteen pages from my FBI file. On one heavily redacted page there is a note: "It was [REDACTED]'s opinion that several other agents of the RIS [Romania Intelligence Service] were also deployed in actions against Verdery."

3. Haggerty and Ericson refer to this same product of contemporary surveillance as a "data double." Kevin D. Haggerty and Richard V. Ericson, "The Surveillant Assemblage," *British Journal of Sociology* 51 (2000): 613.

4. This organization was formed in 1967 with a mix of government and private funding to sponsor scholarly exchanges with the Soviet bloc; it was an offshoot of a program started by the Ford Foundation in 1956 that sent scholars to the Soviet bloc on tourist visas. The idea was to have scholarly exchanges, but because of Senator McCarthy's actions, they could not be run through the government, as Fulbright grants were, without becoming so politicized as to render them useless for scholarly purposes. See David C. Engerman, *Know Your Enemy: The Rise and Fall of America's Soviet Experts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

5. Herta Müller, "Securitate in All but Name" (interview), *Signandsight.com*, 31 August 2009, <http://www.signandsight.com/features/1910.html>.

6. Gabriel Liiceanu, *Dragul meu turnător* [My dear snitch] (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2013), 196.

7. For instance, Romanian writers Stelian Tănase, in *Acasă se vorbește în șoaptă: Dosar și jurnal din anii tîrzii ai dictaturii* [At home they speak in whispers: File and journal from

the late years of the dictatorship] (Bucharest: Compania, 2002); and Dorin Tudoran, in *Eu, fiul lor: Dosar de Securitate* [I, their son: Securitate file] (Iași: Polirom, 2010).

8. A somewhat different form in which anthropologists might occasionally catch glimpses of themselves under surveillance is the files of the FBI. In his book *Glimpses into My Own Black Box: An Exercise in Self-Deconstruction* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2010), George Stocking writes of the pages he was able to retrieve from that source.

9. In Poland, for example, where a lustration law was passed in 1997, only journalists, certified victims seeking exculpation, and researchers had access to the files: people accused of collaboration might or might not be allowed to see their files, and if so they could not make copies or notes, as is possible in Romania. In Hungary, following a period of partial access, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán proposed giving the files back to those on whom they had been kept—in other words, dismantling the secret police archive altogether. Files are particularly available in the former East Germany, for the public acted to prevent much of the destruction that occurred elsewhere (including Romania). In the Czech Republic and Slovakia, citizens have access to their files, but many more were destroyed than in Germany.

10. See, e.g., Florin Poenaru, “Contesting Illusions: History and Intellectual Class Struggles in (Post)socialist Romania” (PhD diss., Central European University, Budapest, 2013); and Lavinia Stan, ed., *Transitional Justice in Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union: Reckoning with the Communist Past* (London: Routledge, 2009).

11. That book differs from this one in several ways, including its more extensive scholarly apparatus, its discussions of secrecy and power and of compartmentalization in the work process, and its basis in archives and libraries rather than interviews and field research. The main substantive difference concerns its treatment of the secrecy of the secret police (see part II of this book).

12. For example, Steven Sampson and Sam Beck, among anthropologists, and a number of scholars from the Fulbright exchange. Beck, for instance, had been working on economic specializations, which included some fieldwork with Roma—a topic not welcomed by the authorities. This led to his being made *persona non grata*.

13. See, for instance, David Price, *Cold War Anthropology: The CIA, the Pentagon, and the Growth of Dual Use Anthropology* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016); Frances Stonor Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters* (New York: New Press, 1999); and Engerman, *Know Your Enemy* (e.g., 91, 242–43). The existence of CIA connections, or suspicion of them, may have been truer of grantees who went to the Soviet Union than of those who went to Eastern Europe.

14. Price, *Cold War Anthropology*, ch. 8.

15. Archive of the Consiliul Național pentru Studierea Arhivelor Securității (ACNSAS), Fond D, 12618/5, p. 23.

16. Information from Steven Sampson, email communication.

17. In his celebrated essay “On Ethnographic Authority,” James Clifford writes of how we develop knowledge of other cultures, emphasizing a method that involves two or more conscious subjects negotiating a reality together. The result, he suggests, is not experience-based interpretation but a dialogic and polyphonic account. This view strikes me as wholly inadequate for the situations in which I found myself in the field.

James Clifford, "On Ethnographic Authority," in *The Predicament of Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 21–54.

18. There is ample research on the phenomenon of secrecy in sociology, political science, and especially anthropology, which contains a large body of work on secret societies in places like New Guinea and Africa. See also Graham M. Jones, "Secrecy," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 43 (2014): 53–69. Because I report on some of this work in Katherine Verdery, *Secrets and Truths: Ethnography in the Archive of the Romanian Secret Police* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2014), my treatment of it here will be cursory.

19. István V. Király, *Fenomenologia existențială a secretului* [The existential phenomenology of the secret] (Bucharest: Editura Paralela 45, 2001), 84.

20. Cristina Vatulescu, *Police Aesthetics: Literature, Film, and the Secret Police in Soviet Times* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010), 4–5.

21. Pierre Bourdieu, *On the State: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1989–1992* (Malden, MA: Polity, 2014), 3–10.

22. Quotes from Philip Abrams, "Notes on the Difficulty of Studying the State," *Journal of Historical Sociology* 1 (1988): 68, 76, 69, 82.

23. For the former, see, e.g., Paul Amar, *The Security Archipelago: Human-Security States, Sexuality Politics, and the End of Neoliberalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013); David Lyon, ed., *Theorizing Surveillance: The Panopticon and Beyond* (Cullompton, UK: Willan, 2006); Mark Maguire, Catarina Frois, and Nils Zurawski, eds., *The Anthropology of Security: Perspectives from the Frontline of Policing, Counter-Terrorism, and Border Control* (London: Pluto, 2014); Joseph Masco, *The Theater of Operations: National Security Affect from the Cold War to the War on Terror* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014); and Verdery, *Secrets and Truths*. For the latter, see, for instance, John Borneman, *Belonging in the Two Berlins: Kin, State, Nation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Fernando Coronil, *The Magical State: Nature, Money, and Modernity in Venezuela* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997); Philip Corrigan and Derek Sayer, *The Great Arch: English State Formation as Cultural Revolution* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985); and Gail Kligman, *The Politics of Duplicity: Controlling Reproduction in Ceaușescu's Romania* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

24. Abrams, "Notes on the Difficulty of Studying the State," 77.

25. John Borneman, Joseph Masco, and Katherine Verdery, "Espying Spies," *Cambridge Journal of Anthropology* 33 (2015): 131.

26. See, for example, Steven C. Caton, *Yemen Chronicle: An Anthropology of War and Mediation* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2005) (for Yemen); John Borneman, *Syrian Episodes: Sons, Fathers, and an Anthropologist in Aleppo* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007); John Borneman and Abdellah Hammoudi, "Fieldwork Experience, Collaboration, and Interlocution: The 'Metaphysics of Presence' in Encounters with the Syrian Mukhabarat," in *Being There: The Fieldwork Encounter and the Making of Truth*, ed. John Borneman and Abdellah Hammoudi (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 237–58 (for Syria); and some of the papers in Martin Sökefeld and Sabine Strasser, eds., "Under Suspicious Eyes: Surveillance States, Security Zones and Ethnographic Fieldwork," special issue of *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie* 141 (2016) (ranging across South Asia, Africa, and elsewhere). One did not have to work in Eastern Europe to be

suspected of spying. What distinguishes my case from those others is not just being under surveillance but having the officers' notes.

27. Talal Asad, "Thinking about Terrorism and Just War," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 23 (2010): 7.

28. Timothy Garton Ash, *The File: A Personal History* (New York: Vintage, 1998), 42.

29. I could extend it further than I do to show some effects on Romanian identity of being raised in an atmosphere of suspicion, but that would have required a different kind of fieldwork.

30. Ian Hacking, "Making Up People," *London Review of Books* 28 (17 August 2006): 23–26.

Chapter 1. The 1970s

1. Bill Skinner saved our 1973–74 correspondence until his death in 2008. I am grateful to his widow, Susan Mann, who was kind enough to send it to me, greatly enriching my recollection of that period.

2. Franz Boas, "Scientists as Spies," *The Nation* 109, no. 2842 (1919): 797.

3. See David H. Price's excellent books on this subject, particularly *Cold War Anthropology*. Among other cases that aroused anthropologists' ire were Project Camelot in Latin America, with its counterinsurgency goals, and the Human Terrain System in the U.S. war in Afghanistan.

4. Lily Tomlin, *The Search for Signs of Intelligent Life in the Universe*, written by Jane Wagner (New Almaden, CA: Wolfe Video, 1992). Tomlin's word was not "paranoid" but "cynical."

5. "Moarte sigură cu cobră / Dar mai sigură cu Mobra."

6. This minority had been settled in Transylvania in two waves, during the twelfth and the eighteenth centuries, to guard the borders and improve agriculture. They were Romanian citizens but took their German identity very seriously.

7. In 2010 Romanian ethnographer Cosmin Budeanca carried out a few interviews in Aurel Vlaicu, asking what people thought of me, and was told, "They said she was a spy, they did. But after a while they got used to her. She stayed a long time, and they got used to her." Another response Budeanca received was more skeptical: "People said she was a spy, but if she was one they wouldn't have let her into the country. And she didn't have anything to spy on, 'cause we just talked about the collective farm. So if she has permission from Bucharest to be here, why would she be a spy? . . . What would she have wanted to do, overthrow our government?" My thanks to Dr. Budeanca for sharing his interviews with me.

8. Diana Georgescu, "'Ceașescu's Children': The Making and Unmaking of Romania's Last Socialist Generation (1965–2010)" (PhD diss., University of Illinois, 2014).

9. To distinguish among people with the same name, like "Maria," Romanians often add a possessive with the person's spouse or parent. "Maria lu' Relu" was thus "Maria, Aurel's wife."

10. The film was arranged for by Dr. Cristina Anisescu, of the CNSAS, as part of the institution's youth outreach activities. Made by filmmaker Nicolae Mărgineanu, it included conversations with a number of my friends and colleagues in Cluj and Vlaicu, as well as a running interview with me about my earlier years in Romania.

11. Katherine Verdery, "Homage to a Transylvanian Peasant," *East European Politics and Societies* 3 (1989): 51–82.

12. Hoping to build my story in counterpoint with others from my field site, I did not plan to have the other main figures be members of national minorities in a book about Romania. When I asked the Romanian friends who would have been the obvious possibilities, however—that is, people with whom I had an important and lengthy relationship from early in my research—they all preferred not to be made visible in this way, for a variety of reasons. I would not want Romanian readers to conclude from my frequent mention of the Biermans that I preferred them to my close Romanian friends.

13. In these documents, Directorate III, or the Third Directorate (present in the provinces as "Service 3 [or III]"), was the Securitate branch covering counterespionage for the whole country. Among its subunits were the special unit "T" for installing and using wiretaps and other technology, the special unit "S" for monitoring correspondence and handwriting, the special unit "D" for disinformation, and the special unit "F" for shadowing and investigations.

14. Examples of this from an earlier time can be found in Lynn Visson, *Wedded Strangers: The Challenges of Russian-American Marriages* (New York: Hippocrene, 1998).

15. In fact, I usually kept my three copies locked in my suitcase until I could go to Bucharest (about once a month), where I sent all three copies through the diplomatic pouch on separate days, never putting any in the Romanian mail. This does not guarantee that they were not read by U.S. government agents, as David Price points out (*Cold War Anthropology*, 246).

16. Although I do not usually correct the bits of misinformation in extracts from my file, I must disagree with this one. The "historical reality" is that a number of Hungarians lived in and around Vlaicu right up to World War I (see Katherine Verdery, *Transylvanian Villagers: Three Centuries of Political, Economic, and Ethnic Change* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983]), and a handful remained thereafter.

17. Herbert Reinke, "Policing Politics in Germany from Weimar to the Stasi," in *The Policing of Politics in the Twentieth Century: Historical Perspectives*, ed. Mark Mazower (Providence, RI: Berghahn, 1997), 101.

18. They included a large group project run by John Cole (Sam Beck, John Cole, David Kideckel, Marilyn McArthur, Stephen Randall, Steven Sampson), as well as Andreas Argyres, Margaret Hiebert (Beissinger), Gail Kligman, and me.

19. Cristina Anisescu, "Dinamica de structură și rol a rețelei informative în perioada 1948–1989" [The dynamics of structure and role in the informers' network in the period 1948–1989], in *Arhivele Securității I* [Securitate archives], ed. Marian Stere (Bucharest: Editura Pro Historia, 2002), 29.

20. This would distinguish socialism's ethnographers from those of colonial times, who, Talal Asad suggests, were of rather limited utility to colonial authorities. Talal Asad, *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter* (New York: Humanities Press, 1973).

21. Pronounced DAH-veed pro-DAH.N. Born in 1902 in a village not far from Vlaicu, he wrote definitive works on the Romanian national movement and Transylvanian feudalism.

22. Sheila Fitzpatrick, *A Spy in the Archives: A Memoir of Cold War Russia* (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2014).

23. In my meeting with Securitate officer “Blidaru” (see chapter 3), I asked if he happened to recall the gender of the transcriber; he believed it was female.

Chapter 2. The 1980s

Epigraph: Quoted in Ira Jacknis, “Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson in Bali,” *Cultural Anthropology* 3 (1988): 172.

1. Robert Gellately, “Denunciations in Twentieth-Century Germany: Aspects of Self-Policing in the Third Reich and the German Democratic Republic,” in *Accusatory Practices: Denunciation in Modern European History, 1789–1989*, ed. Sheila Fitzpatrick and Robert Gellately (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 220.
2. Emily Gerard, *The Land beyond the Forest: Facts, Figures, and Fancies from Transylvania* (Edinburgh: W. Blackwood, 1888), 124.
3. Vatulescu, *Police Aesthetics*, 32.
4. George Ardeleanu, *N. Steinhardt și paradoxurile libertății* [N. Steinhardt and the paradoxes of liberty] (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2009), 276.
5. Tănase, *Acasă se vorbește în șoaptă*, 20, 57.
6. Herta Müller, *The Appointment: A Novel* (New York: Metropolitan, 2001), esp. 204–14.
7. “PROCES VERBAL de constatare a efectuării unor acte premergătoare . . . în vederea strîngerii datelor necesare începerii urmăririi penale.”
8. Liiceanu, *Dragul meu turnător*, 340–41.
9. Katherine Verdery, *National Ideology under Socialism: Identity and Cultural Politics in Ceaușescu's Romania* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

Excursus: Reflections on Reading One's File

Epigraph: Radu Ioanid, “Anatomia delațiunii” [The anatomy of denunciation], *Observatorul Cultural* 139 (22 October 2002).

1. Gilles Perrault, *Dossier 51: An Entertainment*, trans. Douglas Parmée (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971).
2. “Nu-mi place minciuna, prefăcătoră, falsitatea și ostentativul.”
3. Müller, “Securitate in All but Name”; Andrei Șerbulescu (Belu Zilber), *Monarhia de drept dialectic* [The monarchy of dialectical law] (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1991).
4. Tudoran, *Eu, fiul lor*, 9.
5. Liiceanu, *Dragul meu turnător*, 51–52.

Chapter 3. Revelations

Epigraph: Quoted in Michael Taussig, *Defacement: Public Secrecy and the Labor of the Negative* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 2.

1. See, for example, the beginning of the Polish film *Psy* (Pigs).
2. Garton Ash, *The File*.
3. Anisescu, “Dinamica de structură și rol a rețelei,” 35.
4. Monica Grigore, “Ceaușescu și redefinirea raporturilor dintre partid și Securitatea” [Ceaușescu and the redefinition of relations between the Party and Securitate], *Arhivele Securității* (2004): 412.
5. Figures courtesy of Florian Banu, April 2015.

6. Maria Łoś, "Lustration and Truth Claims: Unfinished Revolutions in Central Europe." *Law & Social Inquiry* 20 (1995): 133.
7. Gabriella Turnaturi, *Betrayals: The Unpredictability of Human Relations*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).
8. Ana Blandiana, *Fals tratat de manipulare* [False treatise on manipulation] (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2013), 18.
9. Nicolae Corbeanu, *Amintirile unui laș* [Recollections of a coward] (Bucharest: Albatros, 1998), 237.
10. Herta Müller, "Every Word Knows Something of a Vicious Circle," Nobel Prize Lecture, 7 December 2009, https://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/2009/muller-lecture_en.html.
11. Mihai Albu, *Informatorul: Studiu asupra colaborării cu Securitatea* [The informer: A study of collaboration with the Securitate] (Iași: Polirom, 2008).
12. In previous publications I misidentified this person as her father.
13. Tănase, *Acasă se vorbește în șoaptă*; Liiceanu, *Dragul meu turnător*.
14. Anikó Szűcs, "Performing the Informer: State Security Files Recontextualized in the Hungarian Art World" (PhD diss., New York University, 2015), ch. 1. My thanks to Anikó Szűcs for sharing her unpublished work with me.
15. Blandiana, *Fals tratat de manipulare*, 456. On the death-wedding, see Gail Kligman, *The Wedding of the Dead: Ritual, Poetics, and Popular Culture in Transylvania* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).
16. The lawyer also claimed that Pătrulescu had brain cancer and would be dead before the case came to trial. Liiceanu withdrew his suit but still does not know if Pătrulescu died. Details courtesy of Gabriel Liiceanu (email exchange, 12 November 2017).
17. Smaranda Vultur, "Daily Life and Surveillance in the 1970s and 1980s," in *Remembering Communism: Private and Public Recollections of Lived Experience in Southeast Europe*, ed. Maria Todorova, Augusta Dimou, and Stefan Troebst (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2014), 427–28.
18. Cristina Anisescu, "'Partiturile' agenturii" [The "scores" of the informer network], in *"Partiturile" Securității: Directive, ordine, instrucțiuni (1947–1987)* [The Securitate's "scores": Directives, orders, and instructions, 1947–1987], ed. Cristina Anisescu, Silviu B. Moldovan, and Mirela Matiu (Bucharest: Nemira, 2007), 19114.
19. Once I created a direct relation with each of them, no longer mediated through secrecy, I decided to preserve their anonymity as they wished. To obscure further the identities of the three officers I present, I note that during each of my visits I was "processed" by more than one Securitate officer—at least seven in Hunedoara County, at least six in Cluj, and at least three in Bucharest.
20. The officer answered with a firm no.
21. Slavenka Drakulić, *They Would Never Hurt a Fly: War Criminals on Trial in The Hague* (New York: Viking, 2004), 190.
22. I have inserted into these notes a few points from a third meeting, in April 2015.
23. Thanks to Bruce Grant for this observation.
24. Jan Willem Bos reports that in 1991, 52 percent of officers in the new SRI were former *securiști*; by 2007 that number was down to 5 percent. Finding a reliable figure

is probably impossible. Jan Willem Bos, *Suspect: Dosarul meu de la Securitate*, trans. Alexandra Livia Stoicescu (Bucharest: Editura Trei, 2013), 73.

25. We get a sense of the different rationales for different times from a conversation between Romania's Princess Ileana and foreign minister Ana Pauker during the early 1950s. The princess asked Pauker why the communists used so much violence, when it would never convince anyone. " 'It is not intended to convince,' she replied calmly, 'but to frighten. When one replants, one first destroys everything that grows, root and branch. Then one levels the earth. It is only afterwards that one can plant successfully.' " Pauker went on to observe that, unfortunately, they could not simply destroy older generations, since they needed someone to raise the children. Therefore, the older generation had to be left alive, " 'but they must be too frightened to dare to interfere with the Communist training of the children.' " Ileana, *Princess of Romania, I Live Again* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1952), 245.

26. After the regime fell, Ralf left for Germany without such conditions.

Chapter 4. Ruminations

1. The organization of the former is called the Association of Military Cadres in the Reserves and in Retirement from the Romanian Information Service, founded in 1994. Its website and magazine, *Vitalii*, are accessible online to anyone. The organization of the external service, with its magazine *Periscop*, is the Association of Military Cadres in the Reserves and in Retirement from the Service of External Information.

2. See, e.g., Richard Andrew Hall, "The Historiography of the Romanian Revolution: The Uses of Absurdity and the Triumph of Securitate Revisionism," *The Archive of the Romanian Revolution of December 1989* (blog), 31 December 2013, <https://romanianrevolutionofdecember1989.com/2013/12/31/the-historiography-of-the-romanian-revolution-the-uses-of-absurdity-and-the-triumph-of-securitate-revisionism/>.

3. Marius Oprea, *Moștenitorii Securității* [Heirs of the Securitate] (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2004).

4. Cătălin Manea, "Securistul Ținca" [Securitate officer Ținca], *Tunuri din Bihor*, 26 September 2007, <http://tunuridinbihor.blogspot.com/2007/09/securistul-inc.html>; Florin Ciucaș, "Securist cu 'diplomă': Fostul decan de la Drept, Ovidiu Ținca, catalogat securist care a făcut poliție politică" [Securist with a "diploma": Former dean of the Law School, Ovidiu Ținca, classified as a Securitate officer in the political police], *Bihoreanul* tipărit, 31 July 2014, <http://www.ebihoreanul.ro/stiri/ultima-or-31-6/securist-cu-diploma-fostul-decan-ovidiu-tinca-catalogat-securist-care-a-facut-poliție-politică-115970.html>.

5. My thanks to an anonymous reader for this suggestion.

6. Col. Filip Teodorescu quotes writer Octavian Paler, who said, "Not every Securitate worker is automatically odious." Filip Teodorescu, *Un risc asumat: Timișoara decembrie 1989* [A risk assumed: Timișoara, December 1989] (Craiova, Romania: Editura Viitorul Românesc, 1992), 145.

7. Oprea, personal conversation, August 2015.

8. See, e.g., Gail Kligman and Katherine Verdery, *Peasants under Siege: The Collectivization of Romanian Agriculture, 1949–1962* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), 32.