

## THE SECURITATE FILES FROM A CULTURAL HISTORY PERSPECTIVE

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My paper focuses on the Securitate files as a political stake, but also as first rank sources for academic research, not from the current perspective of recent history, but from that of cultural history. In post-communist Romania, *silence* is the secret's poor relative and *confidentiality* its respectable form. Ironically or not, we could state that in our country the secrets of communist repression are literally protected by law. The secret is an unbidden, illegitimate competence. In its ethics it does not matter what is good and what is bad, what is true and what is false. The main interest is what is said and what isn't. The secret being a convention, a pact, the gesture of not saying seems to be more important than the thing unsaid. The inexpressible, the unsaying create relationships, social complicity, but also hierarchies, demarcations between those who hold a secret and those who do not know it or are afraid for this not to be divulged.

Together with the already sanctioned utilization in the electoral *political fight*, where the secret, once unveiled for the public, does not look like a foul hit but like a victory of truth over the lie. In the years after 1989, the very things that had lived under the aegis of the "strictly confidential" have become, paradoxically, arguments to defend principles flagrantly violated under communism. For example, in supervising "suspect" individuals, the regime proved no respect for private life. Now, to avoid knowing how the private life was damaged by political police actions, it is "sincerely" invoked the privacy respecting principle. Thus, the concealed truths get to have, allegedly, a *civic function*, that of defending the national consensus, the social peace. They also get a *patrimonial character*, of some people's sufferance concealed in the name of everybody. The tragedies of certain individuals are forgotten under the pretext that they would have belonged to the whole society, to all Romanians, and it would be indecent, they say, to be claimed by one individual or another. Not to talk about yourself because the same distress happened to someone else as well is a new form of censorship political, but also social. One way or another, people today reject the idea that sufferance would be a merit. Eventually, the secrets of communism are defended even with the help of democratic and religious values.

It is pretended that there is no point in digging up the past, that we should respect, now at least, the individual's intimacy, the human rights, and that it would be unChristian to take revenge. Therefore it is considered a good thing that all secrets of our lives during communism should be kept with care by a small group of civil servants, from a specialized institution, SRI (Romanian Intelligence Service). As it demands all the time a credit of trust, the secret sets up thus a relationships of communication *sui generis*. The stake of the state secret does not lie in the concealed piece of information. It is rather concentrated in the order that its disclosure might threaten. This is why, it decides what must and what must not be known, in the public sphere. The public sphere is modelled, constrained, delimited; and it is through this process, and through the omission of inconvenient truths, that the community's historical identities is formed. The idea that the secret protects renders the truth traumatic. They also say that the sufferance provoked by Securitate was so great that its current investigating would be premature and we should consider the possibility that its verbal resurrection might generate the risk of having to relive it in facts. The secret is a truth unassumed. It plays the role of a mediator between the contradictory truths, between what a social group wants and what it no longer wants to know about itself. It eliminated part of those aspects that contradict the need to explain coherently the self-image. On the background of this obstinate search for continuity, for historical identity, the divulged secret passes as an unwanted, traumatic event, which troubles the senses. Furthermore, once unveiled, the secret is egalitarian, a destroyer of sociability, complicity, values. The latter indicate the different degrees to approach a secret. We have, in theory, the secret of the Securitate files, currently held by the inheritor institution, the Romanian Intelligence Service. The silence on the administration of these secrets could be divided into two: 1) silence on the secrets known to exist but which are not yet made public and 2) complete silence, on those secrets that nobody knows as such. In the first case, the secret suspends some truths, refusing their actualization. In the second, the secret is denied its own existence, the declarations being either that there is nothing to be hidden or that nothing happened. The secret not known as a secret brings certain pieces of news out from the flux of memories, it draws them out the commemoration, accentuating their pastness. It therefore consigns certain historic facts, tortures or denouncements, for instance, to nothingness, by pretending they just never occurred. The secrets of Securitate are found out in an arbitrary, fragmentary way, urging us to anticipate, to imagine, even more breath-taking disclosures. No matter how much they may want to steal from memory, to create blanks, the secrets of the former regime function, involuntarily, as *active silences*, as permanent hotbeds of conflict. Silence stores political and historical information using traditional archival methods, thus promoting not disinformations but rather incertitude and fabulation. It thus multiplies the imaginary, the rumour-mongering and other such zones of cultural reproduction of the state secret.

If there weren't so many things to negotiate, as it happens in fact in the relationship between the CNSAS (National College for the Study of Securitate Archives) – SRI, the secret of the files would not transform knowledge into privilege, in fact it would not exist as a form of power. The divulged secret rather than accuses, the unmasking of the Securitate informer provoking no indignation but rather transforming him into a victim, in a person subjected to blackmail, forced to act against a supposed conscience and give compromising information about other close individuals. As the Ristea Priboi case shows, the one who raises the mask is more discredited than the unmasked. The above mentioned individual starts a court action against the historian Marius Oprea, a trial in which Priboi is not the one to prove his non-implication in the political repression in Braşov, but Marius Oprea is the one who has to respond for the impudence of having written about the activity of the former Securitate officer.

A society that defends the secrets of the past in this way only accentuated their actuality. Furthermore, getting people used to the idea that it is not decent to have access to the secrets of their own lives, the authorities transform the present chicanery of legislative, bureaucratic nature, into an element of political culture, of mentality. It resigns itself to the thought that the biographies, the legitimacy of the current political leaders is not essential, that the truths about communism cannot replace the economic effectiveness. From the cult of *personality* we pass to the fervent adoration of *utility*. Living in a secretive world, the historian could let himself influenced by the general state of mind, sharing some people's conviction that the history of communism cannot, for now, be written, because the main sources are not yet accessible to us. It is quite true that many archives are not accessible to the historians of communism and that we risk compiling insufficiently documented works, with the material presently available to us. That is, to risk that later, after other briefs are given to investigation, our books might become obsolete, out of date, like the one-day old news in the press. These reserves belong particularly to the high education field, which, waiting for definitive surveys on Romanian communism, prefer to avoid including this subject in the curricula. *A society that protects the secret with such fervour fetishizes it, it lets itself be fascinated by it and tends, predictably we could say, to understand even its past through the lens of some endless conspiracies.* Moreover, the historian cannot wait forever, he cannot give up in front of the bureaucracy-related drawbacks. Though the sources for the history of communism are indeed truncated, the present solution cannot be but one of methodological order. The important thing is that the historian should formulate with prudence his issues of interest and confine with precision the sources, so that his studies keep their validity in spite of the time. As one interested in analyzing history from a cultural-anthropological perspective, I think that the researches made on the period 1945-1989 could progress with the help of an interdisciplinary investigation of the document, provided that the accent should not be placed on their "published" or "never published"

characteristics, but on their quality as *text*. Approached from the point of view of hermeneutics and discourse analysis, the “traces” left by communism could offer us plenty of hints about the cultural codes of the “democratic-popular” societies, about private life, about the relationship between power and authority, about symbols and taboos in these regimes. Or, if we stay in the conviction that the historian should absolutely “discover” something novel, unseen things, all these subjects of research will always remain marginal, delaying all the time the deepening of the history of communism. We should also say that over these years, since the totalitarian regime collapsed, historians have established the basic features of the system in which they lived for 45 years. The great truths related to communism cannot be hidden any more. But people have the natural tendency to forget and we think that what would be important today are not the strictly factual details, the exactitudes easy to remove from the memory, but certain interpretations of these, certain conclusions we could draw out of them. Furthermore, given the assiduity with which Securitate used to watch its victims, we think that instead of a *history of repression*, rather impossible because of the huge amount of documents which we don't have access to yet, we could write a very interesting *history of the daily life*, based upon the so minute supervising reports.

Today, in a world overwhelmed with *information*, history cannot have a public any more, unless it offers *significations*, unless it avoids the old empirical paradigm of the “historian-detective” who, for the sake of as many “disclosures” as possible, fails to interpret them. One of the common laws of the research activity accords priority to the unpublished archive document, making thus the confusion between the absolutely unknown source, and the unpublished one, known, used by many historians and yet favoured from the start as a first hand source just because it hasn't been yet published. Or, if we rate discovers over analysis, why publish volumes of documents, taking their “virginity” and, for those people maybe passionately fond of it, the pleasure of searching and of a primordial reading? Moreover, if we follow the logic mentioned above, disciplines as numismatics and archaeology, which do not use archive documents, appear dilettantish or frivolous. Nobody can deny that the publishing of documents is indispensable to the historian, for factual reconstruction, but similar importance is not given to analyses inevitably focused on published writings. Far from denying the argumentative value of the archive document, we only want to state that it only becomes useful if joined, in the same story, to other types of sources, having, by itself, no privileged relationship with the truth. As in the international scientific community it was established that everything that can provide viable information on the past becomes document, we think that the value of a source is given by its contribution to the formulation of hypotheses about the past and not by the place of its storage. Lengthy archival researches do not excuse the refuge in statements of a formal, descriptive order. And the literal understanding of the document is quite risky for the researchers of the

communist regime, known as one of self-mystification par excellence. This is why cultural history aims to distinguish the *interpretation* of the document from its *paraphrasing*, it doesn't confound the *meaning*, mainly precise, of a text with its *significance*, often unstable, which it can obtain under diverse contexts and readings. We insist on the aspects of methodological nature fully consciously, believing the culturalist option is one of the ways to follow for those aware that the work of deciphering the document shouldn't be an end in itself but only a phase in the way to synthesis. With no *mise en intrigue*, history cannot hope to gain its audience back. And this result will not be achieved simply by reading sources and reciting them.

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