

Under Surveillance

Herta Müller' Securitate File

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EVER SINCE its inception in 1948, *Direcțiunea Generală a Securității Poporului* [*The General Directorate of the People's Security*], later simply known as the Romanian *Securitate*, played a major, yet unfortunate role in the history of 20th century Romania. During the communism, it was responsible for “eliminating opponents in order to consolidate power, ensuring compliance to the regime and its leader, as well as shaping public sentiment and gaining acceptance for public policies”¹ through brutal and, often, abusive actions, disseminating fear and manipulating individuals and their destiny to such an extent and so efficiently that its policies and methods became instrumental for the regime, as academician Dinu C. Giurescu accurately pointed out: “*the repressive system had been a permanent instrument of government*, an essential component of the single party—democratic, popular and socialist—regime [emphasis in original]”².

Following the death of the Soviet leader Joseph Stalin, the troubling events of 1956 in Hungary, and facing accusations of power abuse and criminal activity, the Romanian secret police underwent a deep reorganization process. Between 1968 and 1989 the repressive system, whose main tool was the *Securitate*, entered its longest and final stage, transforming into a “preventive *general surveillance regime* [emphasis in original]”³. The key factor here is this *preventive* dimension taken on by the regime, which actually provided it with an even greater power, setting a legislative context which allowed it to sanction even the mere intention or dissident thought—everything done, of course, in the name of the general greater good (to be read—*the socialist order*). For *Securitate* this meant a change in its approach and a decantation of its methods, going from direct repressive actions toward a more subtle and efficient means of control and interference in the everyday life of the individual, developing intricate networks of surveillance which targeted special groups like former political prisoners, people with known anti-communist beliefs, minorities, intellectuals, among whom writers enjoyed special attention. Their ties to the West and their visibility turned them into a liability for the abusive communist regime, confronted with the risk of exposure, therefore their manuscripts not only got censored before publication, but sometimes, even got confiscated.

A published author and a close friend of the writers from the Aktionsgruppe Banat, Herta Müller soon caught the attention of the infamous *Securitate*. Her first volume, *Niederungen*

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(*Nadirs*), a collection of 19 short stories with an initial Romanian version from 1982 (heavily censored) and a later version published in FRG brought her both the recognition of her literary work and the disapproval of the Banat-Swabian community, who felt that their way of life had been betrayed and stained. The dissatisfaction within the community eased the way for the secret service to find collaborators for the defamation campaigns conducted against Müller in and outside Romania. In fact, the author herself identifies the Banater Schwaben Landsmannschaft as a key factor in the discrediting actions directed against her in West Germany: “The most important ‘partner’ in Germany for such slanders was the Association of Banat Swabians”²⁴.

Müller’s obstinate refusal to collaborate with the *Securitate*, despite several quite brutal recruitment attempts made on her, while working as a translator at Tehnometal tractor factory, added to the fact that she frequented a group of writers known for their “hostile preoccupations” and “the misleading presentation of the socialist realities” in her first book *Niederungen* automatically triggered the beginning of her informative surveillance and the opening of her *Securitate* file.

File I 233477. “CRISTINA”

HERTA MÜLLER’S *Securitate* file I 233477, “CRISTINA” is almost a textbook case of a victim’s information surveillance file, which according to Canadian scholar Lavinia Stan had a very clear structure and well defined steps: “The victim’s file (which could include from one to as many as 19 different volumes) usually began with the report in which the officer explained to his superior why the person had to be placed under surveillance (“to be worked”), and not, as one might expect, with a denunciation that started off the surveillance process. If the proposal gained approval, the report bore the signature of the two superior officers and any handwritten remarks they considered appropriate to make. The report was followed by a number of documents detailing the victim’s activity, the notes filled by informers, neighbours or workmates, the agent’s requests for information from other *Securitate* structures, periodical analyses in which the agent and his superiors evaluated the progress of the investigation (including strategies to solve the case, specific deadlines and each officer’s responsibilities), the report on the termination of surveillance, the decision to archive the file and eventually the stamp attesting that the file had been microfiched. If the victim was incarcerated, the file also contained interrogation memos.”²⁵

Following this pattern, the 3 volume surveillance file, consisting of 914 pages, supposedly opened in 1983, closely documents the public and personal life of Herta Müller, mostly between 1983 and 1987, the information though goes beyond this time-framework until 1989, that is even after her departure from the country, emphasizing the fact that surveillance never ceased to be carried on.

While the first two volumes, focus on her personal and professional life, her writing activity, even providing text analyses and critical opinions of the dilettante agents and informers who filled in the reports (among whom “VOICU” was extremely categorical in dismissing her work), the third volume “*Cristina*” and “*The Journalist*” [“*Cristina*” și “*Ziaristul*”] gathers 358 pages, most of which are handwritten transcripts of phone interceptions and conversations of the Müller—Wagner couple during meetings with friends or discussions they had in their no longer private home (as the writer was to find out in 2008 that every room of the apartment had been bugged by the *Securitate*).

As expected, the file opens up with the motivation behind the surveillance—which apparently had nothing to do with her refusal to collaborate with the *Securitate* (there is no such evidence attached to the file), instead it had everything to do with “‘Politically biased distortions of the realities in the country, especially in the village milieu’ in my book *Nadirs*. The claim is substantiated by ‘textual analysis’ carried out by spies. I belong to: ‘a circle of German-speaking writers known for their hostile works.’”⁶ These bogus accusations became the perfect pretext for the *Securitate* to enforce increased control over the life of the targeted person.

The *Securitate* monitored every meeting, visit or contact of the couple with friends from the same literary circle (kept under surveillance themselves) and West German citizens, trying to find out their whereabouts, what were their literary projects, whether they tried to send manuscripts outside the country to get them published, or any type of information that could be considered sensitive. Their state of mind was also a focus point as it was a good indicator for the efficiency of the intimidation tactics used and a precious aid in developing their follow-up activity plans, relevant in this respect is the *Note*⁷ (*Nota*) made by source “EVA” who reported in 1983, after her meeting with the writer, that Müller was sad and disappointed about the fact that she still hadn’t got a job after more than two years of teaching only one German class per week, making almost no money for it. Losing her job as a translator and her unsuccessful attempts to hold on for a longer period of time to a teaching position in any of the schools or kindergartens where she worked or even to continue private tuition classes were the harsh consequences she had to face after her refusal to collaborate with the secret police and a part of the *Securitate*’s plan designed to wear her down and force her to comply to the communist regime. Over the years, continuous efforts were put by the secret agents into the so-called measures of “positive reinforcement,” which actually translated into life threats, ceaseless harassments and never-ending interrogations, none of which are documented in the file.

Securitate’s diabolical plan consisted in continuous actions of slandering her image and disseminating distrust among her colleagues, using her permissions to travel abroad in order to receive literary prizes against her, by accrediting the idea that she must have been an agent herself to be granted such privileges. As efficient as this turned out to be for the communists, as damaging it was for the victim, who suffered a terrible blow, as in the public’s eye she was being turned into the perpetrator she had refused to become, moreover that she was trying to expose. The situation is largely pointed out in Müller’s political essay *Cristina and Her Double*: “How could I have explained to them what was going on, proved that it was the opposite of what it seemed. It was not humanly possible and the *Securitate* knew it, and that’s precisely why they cooked it up. They also knew that this perfidy would destroy me more than all their blackmail. You can get used to death threats. They are a part of the only way of life one has, because can have no other. You defy fear, deep in your soul. But the slander robs you of your soul. You are completely surrounded. You almost suffocate from helplessness.”⁸

Her labelling as a “*Securitate* stooge” started while she was working at Tehnometal factory and was primarily used as means of isolating her and preventing her to voice out opinions against the communist regime, but soon became the favourite tactic employed by the operative agents against Müller in and outside the country, in an attempt of discrediting her public stands, and, as it turns out from her surveillance file, the German migration and its press, like the “*Banater Post*” and “*Der Donauschwaben*” provided the perfect spreading medium for such manipulations⁹. The actions soon produced their effects: her colleagues from work, the actors from the German Theatre in Timisoara, journalists and stage director Alexander Montleart from West-Germany, all became suspicious about her involvement with the *Securitate*. A suspicion planted by the *Securitate* itself, as a part of a well-designed strategy

to denigrate and isolate her, which escalated throughout the years, even blocking her acquiring of German citizenship.

As documented by her file, the secret police tried to control every aspect of Müller's life by planting microphones in the couple's apartment, tailing her in order to find out her every move, intercepting letters received from FRG, instructing informers like "SORIN," "WAGNER," "EVA" etc. to find out more about her plans and literary projects, and in doing so they stopped at nothing, even using her best friend, Jenny to spy on her after her migration to West Germany, depriving her home and life of any kind of privacy (among the transcriptions of the discussions monitored by the *Securitate*, there is a confession that Müller makes to her visitor from December 1986: "They deprive you of your dignity every day, countless times!"¹⁰).

The *Securitate*'s concern with the target's daily programme, state of mind, interests, projects, friends and foreign contacts is relevant not only in terms of the way they used to search for possibilities of infiltration and surveillance, but it also emphasizes the idea that the targets were perceived as indicators, barometers of the general sentiment, which, like in any repressive society, had to be kept under strict control.

As revealed by Müller's 3 volume file, the Romanian *Securitate* had designed and orchestrated a complex and highly efficient network of informers around the author in order to collect any type of information considered relevant in depicting her as an "enemy of the state," while at the same time designing compromising and defamatory campaigns against the writer in order to discredit and annihilate her unveilings of the Romanian communism and its watchdog—the *Securitate*. Within this file though, there is another "case" fabricated against her, forged in the secret police's workshop, that of Cristina's double, the ruthless communist spy infiltrated in the West, which started earlier as an isolation tactic and ended up in the creation of a "legend" around the author, still haunting her. The alter-ego that the *Securitate* fabricated for Müller's file has little to do with the actual person. This negative counterpart of the real individual is a person of poor morals, unconventional and unruly.

The "diabolized" projection of Herta Müller, forged in the Disinformation Department some 32 years ago, this relentless communist spy, infiltrated in the West, who has survived and accompanied the writer to this day, stands as a proof of the lasting effects in the collective consciousness of *Securitate*'s ceaseless manipulation work.

Herta Müller's surveillance file in itself seems to have been created, even from the start, for the sole purpose of staging the victim's culpability, a guilt established *ab initio*, no real proofs needed, they could have been (and were) always provided/fabricated by the *Securitate*. This surreal dimension, almost like in a Kafka novel, of the file is accurately expressed by Romanian dissident Paul Goma: "If you don't have a sense of humour, then the file becomes the Hellmouth in which you get pushed, without you being able to resist it. Because the file is there not to inform, but to crush you down."¹¹ In this respect the file becomes relevant both for Müller's projected image, her "diabolized" reflection and also for the way *Securitate* acted and achieved its goals.

By contrasting the file to Herta Müller's accounts of the facts from that period, several important omissions come to surface, some, like the unsuccessful recruitment attempts made on her, although missing from the dossier, are confirmed indirectly by lieutenant Padurariu's notation on the margin of a wiretap transcription, others, like the suspicious deaths of two of the writer's friends can be reconstituted only from her novels and the essay mentioned above, whilst the repressive measures used against her, like the breakings into her home, the violence acts, the harassments, the death threats, the interrogations are camouflaged under apparent "benign" collocations such as "positive reinforcement measures," "operational technique installation," "encounters with the target."

Incomplete and distorted as it is, Herta Müller's *Securitate* file, provides an insight to the panoply of repressive actions, intimidation and surveillance methods employed by the *Securitate* in the last decade of the Ceausescu regime, the gallery of informers¹² used to spy on the writer and the magnitude of this phenomenon in the Romanian communist society, but moreover it provides the historically accurate context of her writings.

The Eyes from the Shadow

ONCE ENTERED under the attention of the massive repressive apparatus of the Ceausescu regime there was no escaping from it, not even by fleeing the country, as proven by Romanian secret services' continuous efforts to discredit Herta Müller's public image and literary work, culminating in 2004, when she was awarded the Konrad Adenauer Foundation prize for literature. On this occasion, besides the usual calumny letters received by the Foundation (denouncing her as a spy and a traitor), intimidation methods were also used on the members of the jury¹³, unfolding the truth that the Romanian *Securitate* has survived the end of the regime it created it. Relevant in this respect is William Totok's 2009 article¹⁴ showing that the disinformation and manipulation tactics of the former *Securitate* are still employed today in media forums by the agents of the new, post-revolution secret service.

Despite the irrefutable evidence in Müller's file from the archives of CNSAS, the truth about her taping and the abusive actions taken against her are still occulted and distorted by the ones responsible, like former high-rank *Securitate* officer Radu Tinu, who tried to deny any involvement of the former secret service in her life, suggesting that her books are only the fictional translation of her psychosis and mere inventions: "Herta Müller tells a lot of bogus in her novels. Basically, she writes from other people's experience. She was not bothered by the Securitate. Unfortunately she suffers from a psychosis."¹⁵

Her 2008 visit to Bucharest set Müller back in time, in the nightmarish reality she had tried to leave behind in 1987, suggesting that the new Romanian Information Service (SRI) is no different from its predecessor, that the phone taping, the tailing, the interdictions are all still common practice. The times have changed, the names of the old institutions have too, but not the principles, nor have the people behind them. The former *Securitate* officers are the great potentates of the day, their action plans and networks are probably still operational while new surveillance files are worked on, as proven by the owner of the hotel where the writer stayed in Bucharest, still concerned, 20 years after the revolution, with the monitoring of his guests and their visitors, thus legitimizing Herta Müller's point made during an interview with Eugenia Vodă "mentalities live longer than people."¹⁶

In a country where surveillance was done on a general basis, as already in 1965 the *Securitate* population registry held records on approximately 7,000,000 citizens (more than 50% of the adult population)¹⁷, for a victim like Herta Müller to face this traumatic part of her past is a cathartic and possibly healing experience, while for the general public, still subjected to disinformation and manipulation campaigns, her surveillance file and literary works and the debates they generated in the public space can turn into an antidote against oblivion and a much needed reminder of a time of terror and repression.



Notes

1. Lavina Stan, "Inside the Securitate Archives," available at *The Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars*, 4 May, 2005, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/inside-the-securitate-archives>, accessed on 05.06.2015.
2. Dinu C. Giurescu, *Represiune și „legalitate populară” (socialistă)*, in *Istoria Românilor*, vol. X, *România în anii 1948–1989*, coordinator: Dinu C. Giurescu, Bucharest, Editura Enciclopedică, 2013, 603.
3. Idem, 606.
4. Herta Müller, *Cristina and Her Double*, in *Cristina and Her Double. Selected Essays*. Translated from German by Geoffrey Mulligan, Portobello, 2013, 73
5. Lavina Stan, "Inside the Securitate Archives."
6. Herta Müller, p. 56.
7. ACNSAS, file. I 233477, "CRISTINA," vol. 1, 17.
8. Herta Müller, 60.
9. ACNSAS, file. I 233477, "CRISTINA," vol. 1, 114.
10. ACNSAS, file. I 233477, "CRISTINA," vol. 3, 9v.
11. Paul Goma, *Culorile curcubeului '77. Cutremurul Oamenilor*, Oradea, 1993, 361.
12. For a complete documentation of the individuals who informed on Herta Müller and her friends in the Aktionsgruppe Banat see Valentina Glajar, "The Presence of the Unresolved Recent Past: Herta Müller and the *Securitate*," in Brigid Haines, Lyn Marven (eds.), *Herta Müller*; Oxford University Press, 2013, 49–63.
13. Herta Müller, 83. "Birgit Lermen's phone rang at a quarter to twelve—Chairman of the Foundation Bernhard Vogel's at exactly midnight—and Joachim Gauck's at a quarter past midnight. Inveective and threats, underlined with the Horst Wessel song. These calls went on for nights on end, until the police caught the perpetrator by intercepting the calls."
14. William Totok, "Herta Müller în atenția securumiștilor," 14. 10. 2009, available on <http://www.europalibera.org/content/article/1851149.html>, accessed on 05. 09. 2015.
15. Stefan Both, "EXCLUSIV Șeful securiștilor care au urmărit-o pe Herta Müller: 'Are o psihoză. Fabulează mult!'" in *Adevărul*, 18 noiembrie 2009, available on http://adevarul.ro/news/eventiment/exclusiv-Seful-securistilor-urmarit-o-herta-muller-are-psihoza-fabuleaza-mult-1_50acc58c7c42d5a66389b080/index.html, accessed on 04.10.2015. "Herta Müller fabulează mult în romanele ei. Practic, scrie din experiențele altora. Ea nu a fost deranjată de securitate. Din păcate are o psihoză."
16. <http://www.eugeniovoda.ro/ro/emisiuni/litere-si-filosofie/herta-muller>, accessed on 02.10.2014.
17. See Dinu C. Giurescu, 646.

Abstract

Under Surveillance. Herta Müller' *Securitate* File

The present article analyses the way in which the Romanian *Securitate* orchestrated Herta Müller's surveillance file, fabricating a "diabolized alter-ego" of the writer and then contrasts it with the information provided by the author's own interpretation and remembrance of the facts in the essay *Cristina and Her Double*, as well as in other literary and public sources.

Keywords

Herta Müller, *Securitate*, surveillance, informers, communism, manipulation

