

PREFACE

There's nothing like reading your secret police file to make you wonder who you really are. Page after page, all your activities, all your motives, are subjected to a reading from an alien position embodied in a logic different from anything you recognize. Events you remember as significant might appear without comment, while others you thought unimportant burgeon into grounds for your expulsion from the country.

Although questions of identity may trouble any researcher doing fieldwork, they are unavoidable for those working under surveillance. This is especially true in the Cold War context, and most especially when a change in that context releases the surveillance files into their targets' hands. I had gone to Romania's Transylvanian region in 1973, during the rule of communist dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu, to conduct anthropological research on village life; I returned for further study several times in the 1970s and 1980s, totaling over three years. Then, several decades later, I discovered that Romania's secret police, the Securitate, had kept an enormous surveillance file on me: 2,781 pages. Reading it, I learned that I was "actually" a spy, a CIA agent, a Hungarian agitator, a friend of dissidents: in short, an enemy of Romania. As I read evidence of Securitate officers' view of me, I came to question my work, my intentions, and my very identity. I found in those pages a whole invisible world of events, relations, plans, and interpretations of which I had been largely unaware. They made me reconsider that entire period of my life, along with the many "selves" that emerged from it. Furthermore, the file made me contemplate what it means to be suspected of spying and to what extent ethnography, the research practice of anthropologists, necessarily makes one a kind of spy.

Discovering what it has meant to live under a rule of secrecy when one had thought oneself transparent can be disorienting and upsetting. This is the story I tell here. The book aims to create a feeling for what it was like to live as a guest in one of the most repressive countries of the Eastern bloc, as well as to show how the global superpower conflict was refracted in the experiences of a young woman trying to learn about life there. I use field notes, journal entries, and secret police reports to tell about being a researcher in Romania during the Cold War, with reference to the invisible secret police. Organized by the chronology of the research (which extended to conversations with police and informers up to 2016), this volume foregrounds the voices and work practices of the Securitate officers who were my constant hidden companions and of the informers who assisted them.

The book is a story of the effects of being under surveillance, an experience becoming familiar, albeit in different forms, to everyone. We are all under surveillance now, but most of us have scarcely any idea what that really means. What does it feel like to be spied upon, on the suspicion that you yourself are some kind of spy or traitor? What is it to be enveloped in secrets you find out about long after the fact—secrets that include the names of friends who reported on you to the secret police and the actions those police took to interfere in your life? What is the effect of this experience, once its extent becomes known, on your identity and the relationships of trust that you thought you had built? It is my hope that this book will render visible a certain set of surveillance practices and their effects, in a world in which new forms of surveillance proliferate every day.