The Moral Career of a Suspected Legionary: Psychological Language in the Securitate Archives

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This article explores some notable uses of psychological language in the Securitate archives. We examine Securitate files concerning Constantin Vaman, a suspected legionary subjected to surveillance work by the Securitate. This article seeks to show how Securitate activities, particularly the writing of informer notes and operatives’ reports, are the upshot of strategic use of morally implicative psychological language. Constantin Vaman’s Securitate files are used to explore two categories of psychological language: the language of mental states and the language of disposition and motive. We argue that close attention to the many facets of psychological language used in Securitate documents discussed in this article may enable researchers to understand more fully the complex nature and inner workings of surveillance work.

Keywords: Communism; psychological language; Romania; Securitate files

Introduction

This article charts the evolution of Constantin Vaman’s psychological portrait and moral career, as narrated in Securitate files produced during his arrest in 1948, owing to ties to the Legionary movement, and following his release from prison, in the 1960s, and from the period (the early 1970s) when he was placed under surveillance for suspected adherence to legionary ideology. We define the notion of “moral career” as “any social strand of any person’s course through life.” Our use of the term morality is aligned with its use in natural studies of language. Here we are concerned with what Sidnell calls the “ordinary ethics” of talk and text as a way of showing how orientations to morality and ethics of conduct in these particular circumstances are part and parcel of sense-making in the Securitate archives.
The article draws out some general themes and concerns related to the role of psychological language as a *sine qua non* feature of bureaucratic processes. We base our analysis of Constantin Vaman’s psychological profile on Securitate archival documents concerning him in the 1970s. The case study approach we adopt allows us to examine both particular and more general aspects of reading such files by examining the psychological language used to craft them. These files are part of the Securitate archives, currently under the aegis of the Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives (CNSAS).

The material discussed in this article is the product of a series of “intensive excursions” into the CNSAS archives by the first author, between 2014 and 2016. These repeated excursions were conducted with the primary aim of revealing some of the workings of Securitate’s formal system of classifications, processes, and other bureaucratic means of capturing subjectivities: what Middleton and Brown call an “archontic infrastructure.” As archontic infrastructures, archives contain various connected or unconnected bits of evidence about people, events, and circumstances that are distributed within the archive.

We had to connect the archival dots and engage with orientations to “truth” and the lack of authenticity, completeness, and reliability of the secret archives. When these archives opened to the public, they were “subjected to mass visitation, reproduction and dissemination.” Currently, they are part of what might be described, following Goffman, as a “publicly accessible institutional complex.” The archives that we explore in this article are a particular type of natural laboratory for researching the bureaucratically organized activities of the Securitate. They enable us to study facets of human experience that are both biographical and historical.

This article looks at some of the constitutive properties of informer notes on Vaman and Securitate operatives’ responses as “active texts” and cultural means of accomplishing psychological and moral actions. We conceive of the production of informer notes and other documents of the Securitate as constitutive of a network of practices in the service of state control. We contend that informer notes and other documents of the Securitate, used to sketch Vaman’s moral portrait, furnish the visible display of public accountability in relation to a person’s character. We thus focus on an examination of situated means of their discursive production that produces “a special character for whoever is located in the records.”

In this article, we are concerned with the use of psychological terms and language as morally implicative language. By “psychological language,” we refer to the language of mental states, motives, character, and disposition. Such a language performs subtle “rhetorical work” when used to sketch moral portraits employed in surveillance work. As Edwards has shown, the strategic deployment of psychological categories can be a way to “link factual reality to psychological states, motives and dispositions.”

In this article, we introduce Constantin Vaman’s case while paying special attention to how documents at the CNSAS engage with his biography and moral trajectory...
as a suspected member of the fascist organization The Legion of Archangel Michael. We then offer a brief overview of Securitate’s institutional practices in the 1970s in relation to the way in which it recruited and instructed members of its surveillance network to gather information on its targets. This is followed by a discursive psychological analysis of informer notes on Vaman and Securitate operatives’ responses to them. We conclude by drawing out some general themes and concerns related to the role of psychological language as an essential feature of organizational process.

The Case of Constantin Vaman

Constantin Vaman was born on 23 November 1922, in the village of Racova-Bacău. He was arrested in 1948 for alleged ties to the Iron Guard or the Legionary Movement, terms employed interchangeably to refer to the Romanian fascist organization, antisemite and anti-Communist in rhetoric and activity, which was founded in 1927 by Corneliu Zelea Codreanu. This organization, initially called the Legion of the Archangel Michael, sought to combine Orthodox Christian mysticism with violent antisemitism.

Vaman, along with twenty-nine other students at the Faculty of Theology at the University of Bucharest, first came to the attention of the Securitate in relation with the dissemination of several copies of the legionary manifesto entitled “Christian brothers” (Fratii creștini) sometime in May 1948. The manifesto was problematic for the newly formed regime as it urged people to not celebrate Labor Day but to maintain it as a day of fasting and prayer. This is because in that year May Day fell on the Saturday of the Passion Week, the week before Easter, which, by 1948, was no longer open to public celebration.

Because Vaman offered to the Securitate insider information about the Legion that was reserved only to members or close affiliates, it is likely that he had ties with this organization. The purpose of this article, however, is not to prove or disprove that he was a legionary. Firstly, his age would suggest that he could not have been a legionary in the 1930s, as he was born only a decade prior to that. Secondly, not all who admitted to being a legionary were indeed part of this organization. During the 1950s and the 1960s, it was common for arrested, and subsequently imprisoned, suspected legionaries to deny affiliation with the Legion; however, some of them were officially denouncing the Legion in order to prove to prison authorities that they underwent successfully the reeducation program to which they were subjected while incarcerated.

One must point out that Securitate documents linking Vaman to the Brotherhood of the Cross organization during his youth, a Legionary organization comparable to the German Hitlerjungen, do exist. However, one has to take the information in these files with a pinch of salt. It was not unusual for Securitate files to contain information that contradicted earlier documents. Given that the information we
had access to was patchy and, at times, unreliable, we believe that the label one may be able to use to describe Vaman is less important than exploring how the Securitate itself wrote about suspected legionaries.

Vaman’s declarations to the secret police in the late 1940s, corroborated by scholarly work on the Legionary movement, suggest that he was an active participant at legionary meetings held at the Faculty of Theology at the University of Bucharest. His declarations are the sole instance in the files wherein his voice comes through. Furthermore, it is likely that declarations obtained during police interrogations were not written necessarily by him, but by secret police operatives on his behalf. The only record one can work with consists of informer notes provided on him decades later, no longer in prison and reinserted into the Romanian society of the 1970s. We are thus unable to shed much light on Vaman’s own perspective on the story.

The information notes on Constantin Vaman to which the first author gained access while doing research in the CNSAS archives date from the late 1940s, early 1950s, and the 1970s. It is uncertain whether the Securitate continued its surveillance in the 1960s, after Vaman’s release from prison. The files from the 1970s were produced five to ten years after the rise to power of Nicolae Ceaușescu’s regime (1965–1989), a time that brought new structural changes within the Securitate and less overtly violent methods of repression of the Romanian population in its surveillance methods. As the majority of researchers of the Securitate archives, we remain dependent on the information and documents given to us for perusal. We are unable to state with certainty whether more files on Vaman exist.

Furthermore, the files concerning Vaman do not offer much information on his life in prison. This is not to suggest such files do not exist. A record of his incarceration does exist—see, for example Alin Mureșan’s Pitești: Cronica unei Sinucideri Asistate. Mureșan documents Vaman’s participation in the gruesome reeducation prison experiment. Constantin Vaman’s case, unlike that of other suspected legionaries, is unique because of his experiences with the Pitești experiment that sought to reeducate inmates and convert them into law-abiding members of the communist society aligned with the Marxist and communist ideals. The Pitești experiment is discussed in academic literature as an event pertaining not only to the history of communism but also to its psychology.

This prison experiment began in 1948 at Suceava prison and gradually spread to Târgu Ocna, Ocnele Mari, Târgșor, Baia Sprie, and Aiud. At the Pitești prison, it reached its highest level of cruelty in its attempt to turn former anti-communists into adherents of Marxist and Soviet ideology by inflicting the most atrocious corporal and psychological torture. Inmates, most of them former legionaries, were subjected to extreme physical pain and psychological coercion, to turn against each other and become perpetrators themselves, thereby perpetuating the abuse they had once experienced. It is uncertain what was Vaman’s experience while incarcerated at Pitești and Gherla prisons. Most certainly, however, he was not left unscathed by
such a highly traumatizing event discussed at great length in the works of Stanescu and Mureșan.

**Operation “Epilog” and recruitment of informers**

By 1971, Vaman, along with many other individuals identified by the Securitate as legionaries, were placed under surveillance under the nationwide operation “Epilog.” By the 1970s, the Romanian secret police, in general, engaged in what one of its educational manuals describes as “information surveillance” (urmărire informativă), carrying out surveillance programs “with the aim of preventing and putting an end to hostile actions against the state.” “Epilog” was one of Securitate’s many operations aligned with these goals. This operation’s goal was to monitor the activities of those with “legionary affinities” (antecedente legionare) and find out if they did engage in activities deemed to be “hostile against the state” or continued to display a “legionary mindset” (gîndesc legionar), years after release from prison. A Securitate report published in a brochure meant for internal use by the Securitate staff provides further details on this operation.

In order to prevent any actions that Vaman would be able to undertake against our State, we propose the continuous surveillance of Vaman [sic].

Vaman’s ties to Teodor Petre, condemned twice before for “plotting against the State,” were likely to have been one of the reasons for bringing Vaman to the attention of the secret police. Like Vaman, Petre too was identified as a legionary in these files. The apparent preferential treatment that Vaman received from people holding leadership positions within the Church hierarchy, some of whom also had ties to the Legionary organization, was perhaps the other reason. The Securitate report cited above calls for special consideration of those with close ties to the Christian Orthodox Church, pointing out that many “legionaries are also Orthodox clergy,” which “serves as an ideal cover for clandestine activities.”

The Securitate recruited various informers “with prospects of providing information” on Vaman, and who had a certain degree of acquaintance with him. One of them was “Vasilescu,” who was too described in Securitate files as a legionary, and about whom the Securitate wrote the following:

Because one can conclude that the informer [“Vasilescu”] is trusted to a certain degree by Vaman, it will be asked [of the informer] [sic] to engage in extensive dialogue with Vaman in order to establish:

—if he [Vaman] continues to display a legionary mindset; in the case that he does, what arguments does he use to support his views—to find out if Vaman maintains ties currently with some legionaries, who are they and what is the nature of those ties
Not all potential informers were assigned to Vaman’s case. The assignment of a potential informer, a 27 August 1973 report states, fell through because the person was considered to be “mentally unstable” (bolnav de nervi), while another was also dropped for reasons not fully specified. Those who were deemed appropriate for the job had to satisfy certain requirements, in addition to being able to give information about Vaman’s family and social entourage, his whereabouts, and personal traits. Secluritate manuals on recruitment of informers indicate that this process was carried out in several stages: (1) shortlisting of potential candidates; (2) background checks of potential candidates; (3) selection of candidates; and (4) formal recruitment. As a Securitate manual suggests, the first two stages entailed an assessment of a candidate’s abilities, character, and personality. Alongside psychological traits, the operative agent charged with the recruitment of informers was also encouraged to examine, to the best of one’s abilities, the candidate’s critical reasoning skills, attention to detail, intelligence, ability for self-control, and recall. As part of the last two stages of recruitment, candidates were contacted and invited to serve as informers. Some accepted this arrangement for personal gain or benefit; others, as a result of blackmail and coercion. The formalization of recruitment was carried out last.

All of constituent parts of the surveillance network (reteaua informativă) comprised of collaborators (colaboratori), informers (informatori), residents (rezidenții), and support persons (persoane de sprijin)—were directly or indirectly involved in the creation, filing, processing, and/or interpretation of informer notes, such as the ones discussed in the next section. Those who authored these information notes concerning Vaman were most likely “informal collaborators,” not dissimilar to the Stasi Inoffizielle Mitarbeiter or IMs.

**The Informer Notes: Psychological Language and Moral Identity**

The informer notes discussed below and the institutional responses to them provide accounts of actions, moral identity, and accountability. These notes describe accountable activities tied to someone’s moral character. In this article, we argue that being able to produce inferences about Vaman’s moral identity on the basis of information provided in these notes drove the search for any information that might substantiate and support a particularly incriminating categorization: “legionary.” Below we describe several uses of psychological language.
We analyze the use of psychological language as social practice whose effect is to “formulate a mental life.” Psychological language sets the scene for institutionally relevant courses of action and accounts (e.g., viability and reliance of informers). However, psychological language is also a rich resource that those providing informer notes use for accomplishing the task of informing on others.

The Language of Mental States

We begin with the analysis of a particular language of mental states. Although the language of mental states was a significant feature of informer notes and commentaries on them, it also blended with concerns related to disposition and motive.

Extract 1

Informer note written by “Florescu” on 28/04/1972

The source tried to approach . . . Vaman and Teodor Petre at the Archdiocese. Vaman seems always rushed at work and trying to keep on top of things. He seems superficial, but always complains about transportation colleagues, saying that they are rude and have no manners. . . . Teodor Petre is always sad and unhappy. . . . He is a pessimist . . . The women from the office say that he is a failure, someone who will not be able to start a family.

Seemingly innocuous descriptions present Vaman as a certain kind of person: uninvolved in his work yet invested in his criticism of other people. Specific details about Vaman’s state of mind are used to support the factuality and plausibility of narrative accounts. These are kinds of orientations to psychological thesaurus that “construct public moral identities, and constitute people as bearers of psychological, moral, attributes that can be then linked to their actions, dispositions, ways of being in the world.” Without the work that psychological language accomplishes in situ, informer notes would be almost unintelligible and of no use to Securitate operatives.

Florescu’s description of Vaman closely matches the label “socially deviant,” a common description found in Securitate instructional manuals employed to teach its officers about human psychology. “Deviance,” as one such manual argues, “refers to forms of behavior that deviate subtly and less subtly from the dominant norms—mores or legal—in a given culture and subculture.” This Securitate manual introduces the Securitate officer to the work of numerous Romanian and foreign psychologists and psychiatrists who have written on subjects pertinent to human behavior and personality, all with the goal of helping the Securitate staff carry out psychological analysis on potential recruits and/or targets. The manual defines a deviant person as suspicious, distant, careless, and “exhibiting high levels of egotism.” Deviant people, it is argued, exhibit “unusual,” “atypical,” and “abnormal” behavior (reference is made to a definition of deviance by Robert King Merton in 1938).
A norm, in contrast, is defined in the same manual as the “totality of prescriptive and prohibitive rules written or not that regulate the social behavior in a given society.”⁵⁸ It is said that norms “vary in time and space, they exist in every community and constrain behavior.”⁵⁹ It is perhaps Vaman’s presumed lack of adherence to norm-informed behavior that led the secret police to investigate his actions and psychological profile years after he had been released from prison. We see how definitions of deviance, alongside psychological descriptions, are part and parcel of an apparatus of bureaucratically organized activities. The work of processing deviance, namely, the “socially significant differentiation of deviants from the non-deviant population,” is, as Kitsuse argues, “contingent upon circumstances of situation, place, social and personal biography and the bureaucratically organized activities of agencies of control.”⁶⁰

Extract 2

Informer note written by “Pavelescu” on 13/09/1973

I don’t know Vaman very well. All I know is that two years ago he obtained his bachelor degree in theology. He took to it like a duck to water as he had already completed another bachelor degree. In this situation, he got a leg up from several people working at the Patriarchate. . . . For approximately a year and a half he worked as an accounts inspector and it seems that in the last few years he became the head of transportation services at the Patriarchate. I know nothing else about him, as I am not in the same division and I don’t even get to meet him.⁶¹

The Securitate officer who took this note made the following comments below the page:
“The informer . . . for now has been instructed to establish who supported him [Vaman] during his time at the Theological Institute.”⁶²

In this note, the informer is seemingly reluctant to provide a psychological description of the target. Institutional accountability and process requires that people be described using everyday (psychological) language.⁶³ Although there are no explicit psychological descriptions on record, there is a sense in which the note alludes nonetheless to Vaman’s moral identity. There is a subtle orientation to “normative accountability for actions that are assigned to roles.”⁶⁴ Vaman’s moral portrait is that of someone who may have benefited from added advantage in his various activities and roles.

It is perhaps not surprising that the Securitate was then interested to find out who may have been in a position to “help” Vaman. Indirectly, Vaman’s identity and behavior are construed as suspect—therefore worthy of further exploration. The moral identity of the informer is also on record: the note opens with an avowal of “not knowing” Vaman “very well.” The activity of providing informer notes is itself an organizationally accountable activity—although ordinary language is used to
write informer notes, the activity of informing on others was far from being an ordinary activity.

The Language of Disposition and Motive

Extract 3

Report written in light of conversation with “Iliescu” on 13/7/1973

Iliescu informed me that in the past month he spoke with Vaman a few times but he never heard him making comments vis-à-vis the politics of our State. He has a subdued demeanor . . . considered at work to be fair, with a positive attitude.65

The Securitate’s commentary on Iliescu’s note captures the psychological gist of the information note—interestingly here explicit psychological descriptions of disposition and character (“subdued demeanor”) feature in the report submitted following the receipt of the information note but not in the original information note. In the hands of the Securitate, these psychological descriptions “perform institutional business.”66 The informer note itself (extract 4) is not devoid of psychological interest. The informer note seems to rely more on the link between membership categories and character types that ultimately lend themselves “to characteriological formulations of persons—their tendencies, dispositions, moral nature, desires and intentions.”67 It was indeed the case that the operatives’ commentary on informer notes took “commentarial dominance”68 over the notes themselves. What becomes the record is intimately linked to how personal history is re-traced on paper69 and how it is, consequently, included in institutional records.

Extract 4

Informer note signed by “Iliescu” written on 9/2/1973

I spoke a few times with Vaman. . . . Each time he was friendly and courteous, and we exchanged platitudes. Last time, at the end of January, I met him while I was looking for Teodor Petre, without being able to get hold of him. On this occasion, from the discussion it resulted that Vaman is fairly acquainted with Teodor Petre and that he appreciates him. “He is a good guy Petrică, he told me, but had no luck. Other people know how to climb the ladder. But nowadays it is better to take care of oneself and to not be concerned with what others are doing. I am happy to take care of myself and that’s it.” I had the impression that Vaman tried to convince me that he is minding his own business without having any other preoccupations.70

The “Iliescu” information note (extract 4) works to establish the ordinariness of Vaman’s moral character. This is an account that is putting forward a repertoire of “moral discourse”71 that normalizes actions and character by emphasizing the
mundaneness of behavior. In this context, it is a way of constructing intention and disposition as a way of going against the possible suspicion of being a legionary. Inferences linked to psychological descriptions are presented as corroborated through other means—personal observation, other people’s reports, one’s personal history; mere guesswork is to be avoided. The informer’s own biography is a resource used strategically to offer support to how one has come to know the things being reported. Vaman is described as someone inclined to “mind his own business,” therefore possibly not a transgressor of the communist state order. To say that Vaman is minding his own business is a way of saying that Vaman is going about his life without some ulterior motive. The psychologically allusive idiom is a discursive resource for indexing a reaction to the presumed transgression on the part of Vaman (see also the similar function accomplished by a “man you can trust” (om de nădejde) in extract 5).

Extract 5

Informer note written by “Iliescu,” written on 20/09/1972

In one of the conversations I had with Teodor Petre, I have asked him to describe Vaman Constantin and his opinion of him. Teodor Petre told me that Vaman is a “man you can trust (om de nădejde), someone you can count on,” because he suffered a lot. He told me that they studied at the same university, that Vaman . . . was arrested years earlier because of a confusion. It was believed that he had a leadership position in the legionary group in the theology [department], but in reality it was someone else [X]. He was imprisoned for 18 years but did not say a word [about it]. There they tried to turn him into a “traitor”; they pushed him to betray others, but he stood firm. He told me that Vaman is an introvert, because he knows he is under surveillance. In reality, he rises above anyone else and what can be admired about him is that after so many difficulties through which he lived, his morale is high. I told Teodor Petre that I would like to ask Vaman to allow me to use one of Vaman’s vehicles. He answered that I should not bother, but should that be necessary, he will speak personally with one of the drivers. This led me to think that Teodor does not see an eventual conversation between me and Vaman taking place. I wonder if he wants to isolate him? Or to protect him from eventual complications.

Interestingly though, describing someone’s actions as not driven by some ulterior motive does not offer full guarantees as to how the person will be perceived by others. In Vaman’s case, the pool of available psychological inferences about his moral character is wide open (see extracts 6 and 7 below). What is at stake in the majority of informer notes on Vaman is Vaman’s emerging moral portrait. Here, implying that Vaman’s actions are deliberate is a platform for managing moral inferences about Vaman’s character and discursively producing disposition and moral character. His identity is “permanently suspect.” Organizationally, the crux of the matter is one of deviance: being a member of the Legionary movement—a class of highly deviant
and transgressive behavior against the communist social order. Although none of the notes call Vaman a legionary, the possibility of transgression of the highest order is on record. At the same time, informers could neither conclusively state that Vaman was innocent, nor could they claim that Vaman was or was not a legionary. Informers themselves were never fully trusted by the Securitate.

Some informers, for example, were used to verify whether the information provided by other informers was accurate. “Vaman, a formerly imprisoned legionary, has been placed under surveillance,” a Securitate document states. “The informer (‘Puiu Cornel’) was tasked with providing us with information concerning his political beliefs. Even though he is irritable personality-wise he [Vaman] avoids making negative comments about the state. . . . We will see whether that which the informer states is confirmed by other sources.”75

Extract 6

Note written by “Iliescu” on 20/12/1973

I have known Vaman for 3-4 years. He was coming rather frequently to I.V. Georgescu, who is editor in chief of the Patriarchate newsletter. I found out from him that Vaman was preparing himself for his final exams at the Theological Institute and was coming over to borrow books and notes that he needed for exams and for his undergraduate dissertation.

I.V. Georgescu told me that Vaman was a political prisoner and he characterized him as a person with character, with special skills. I discovered that Vaman paid many visits to I.V. Georgescu. He and Georgescu have had several private face-to-face conversations.

Also, I noticed that he maintains a close relationship with Teodor Petre. Petre described him as being a capable man, full of [good] qualities, a “good guy, who suffered a lot,” or a “man you can trust.” Personally I did not speak with him [Vaman] but only met him on a couple of occasions, by accident, and then we talked about the usual work-related issues. I realized that he is a very prudent man, does not let out much, avoids direct conversation, . . . as if he is trying to protect himself from something. He generally behaves politely, he is friendly, but very distant.76

On other occasions I saw him talk with his drivers using a tone of superiority, bordering on authoritarian, treating them in a disparaging manner. He is a unemotional man.

. . .

Personally, [I] consider that even though he wants to leave the impression of a man [that is] fair and responsible, . . . [Vaman] is a threat for the new regime in our country.77
Extract 7

Handwritten informer’s note written on 9/04/1974

In the period of January-April I met Vaman on several occasions. These encounters were however random (întîmplătoare), and we have only exchanged each time only a few occasional words (What are you doing? How are things? Etc.) I have observed that he kept to himself and does not engage in conversation. He observes work protocols. However, for some time now I have the impression that this attitude of his hides something, as if he is hiding himself from something or he wishes to avoid something. Lately, he seems calmer, more sure of himself, he behaves like the kind of man who has a usual normal life. 78

The Securitate summary of the “Puiu Cornel” note (extract 8) ends with an organizationally relevant conclusion about Vaman’s supposed transgressive behavior. It is interesting to note how the conclusion is arrived at. This is a species of moral reasoning that blends psychological categories and commonsense (universalist or relativist) assumptions about people, activities, and social relations. 79

Extract 8

Securitate Report written based on information provided by “Puiu Cornel” (date not provided)

Based on the conversations that have been carried out with Vaman, he [Vaman] shows himself to be very amiable, but does not engage in conversations on political issues or any other issues worthy of note. Informer “Puiu Cornel” said that he last met with Vaman at the end of February of this year. On this occasion [he] tried to talk with him about Teodor Petre. Vaman, referring to Teodor Petre (sic) said that he had not seen him in a long time, as [he] had no such opportunity. . . . We can conclude that he does not have any intent vis-à-vis Teodor Petre. “Puiu Cornel” also tried to touch in conversation on other aspects [sic] related to the activity of other people from the Patriarchate, but the person in question [Vaman] avoided the topic. Based on our conversations with the informer, it results that Vaman does not make neither positive nor negative evaluations with regards to the political regime in our country. 80

Extract 9

Informer note written by “Puiu Cornel” on 1/02/1972

The note is written on Vaman. In it the following information is given: date, place of birth, education, marital status, time in prison and reason for arrest.

“On 21 June 1971, he was transferred at the Archiepiscopate in Bucharest, where he works currently.” The note also contains the following sentence about Vaman:
“Peaceful, very quiet, seems always fearful. Capable and receives appreciation from co-workers. Does not engage in conversations.”

Extract 10

Informer note (date not provided)

I asked him [Vaman] what he thinks about life in our new [communist] system, if he is happy, etc. He answered that both he and [his] wife make ends meet and he only wishes that people live a normal life, and that he can do so for the rest of his life. Nothing interests him except his own existence, neither politics nor the news from foreign radio stations. He only wants to live a normal and peaceful life, and be protected from wars and other difficulties. He feels life is good now; it can be better, but at least life is predictable.

The information note by Puiu Cornel (extracts 9 and 10) describes Vaman, again, as a meek soul—the psychological language of disposition is again on record. In these notes on Vaman, and more generally on other people subjected to intensive surveillance work, psychological language is rhetorically mobilized in the service of organizational processes of classification/reclassification, ordering/reordering of material about people (both informers and those informed on).

Conclusion

In this article, we explored the part played by psychological language in informer notes and other key documents of the Securitate concerning Vaman. We analyzed documents contained in the Securitate archives as cultural means of accomplishing psychological and moral actions. Psychological language of the kind we have examined in this article is indispensable to the moral trajectories and moral careers charted by Securitate documents. Psychological language is moral language—it is a means of rhetorically mobilizing and enabling organizational processes. We showed how psychological language can be put to different uses. On the one hand, it sets the scene for institutionally relevant courses of action and accounts (e.g., viability and reliance of informants). On the other hand, it is a resource for both those providing informer notes and operatives tasked with processing the information contained in them.

Very little research in the post-communist transitional justice literature examines the role that psychological terms and categories play in the operation of state institutions of control. The case study we have discussed in this article shows that psychological language is an essential feature of doing institutional work (case building, recruiting informers, surveillance work). A focus on psychological terms and categories can enable a shift away from some of the problems concerning lack
of authenticity, completeness, and reliability of secret archives. These remain important concerns for transitional justice research. However, they should not hinder approaches that involve close analyses of historical material that involves fragments of experience, archival gaps, and seemingly unbounded paper trails.

There are no ideal archives. What makes archives intelligible is the very fact that they are not fully devoid of ambiguities. Close attention to the many facets of the psychological language used in Securitate documents enables us to understand in much more detail the nature and inner workings of surveillance work. There are several avenues of future development. First, an important issue deserving of further development are explorations “in the institutional approach to the study of self” by drawing on careful and detailed analyses of networks of organizational actions that are bound to psychological descriptions (issues such as detection, processing, reporting, and so on), as organizational accomplishments. Second, attending to the many facets of psychological language in institutions of control (past and present) can illuminate existing structural explorations of institutional practices that may have a direct influence on how institutions enact bureaucratic means of capturing subjectivities. Formerly secret archives are archives that tell difficult human stories. These archives are both topic and resource for transitional justice researchers. The point is not to simply extract information from archives but to conceive of them as ethnographic spaces where issues of “ordinary ethics” of talk and text are part and parcel of how people and institutions make sense of their own practices.

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Notes

1. The authors thank the editors and anonymous reviewers who have carefully read the early drafts of this article and offered constructive advice on how to improve the arguments put forth.
2. E. Goffman, “The Moral Career of the Mental Patient,” Psychiatry: Interpersonal and Biological Processes 22, no. 2 (1959): 123.
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16. Tileagă, *Representing Communism after the Fall*.
17. D. Edwards, “Emotion discourse,” *Culture & Psychology* 5 (1999): 288.
18. D. Edwards, “Facts, Norms and Dispositions: Practical Uses of the Modal Verb Would in Police Interrogations,” *Discourse Studies* 8, no. 4 (2006): 477.
19. ACNSAS, Fond Informativ, file 1534211, vol. 1, p. 6. ACNSAS stands for [archives] CNSAS.
20. ACNSAS, Fond Penal, file 905, vol. 1, 17.
21. J. R. Fischel, *The Holocaust* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1998); R. Clark, *Holy Legionary Youth: Fascist Activism in Interwar Romania* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015).
22. The legionary flyers were delivered in late April 1948 to a small number of clerics, faithful Christians, and Church officials such as Patriarch Justinian Marin. ACNSAS, Fond Penal, file 905, vol. 6, pp. 6, 27. The manifestos were delivered in envelopes, addressed mainly to Christian Orthodox priests. ACNSAS, Fond Penal, file 905, vol. 6, p. 37.
23. D. Deletant, *Ceauşescu and the Securitate: Coercion and Dissent in Romania, 1965-1989* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1995); C. Plămădeală, “Antonie Plămădeală and the Securitate in the Years 1940s-1950s,” *Archiva Moldaviei* 8 (2016): 215–51.
24. In one of Vaman’s declarations given to the secret police in the late 1940s, he states that “those belonging to the Legionary movement are organized by triads and I could only know two people [from the organization], and only when he [the leader] would be convinced that I need to know them. [This was the case in order to avoid] an easy denunciation about the other members by someone who is not well prepared and is caught [by the enemy].” According to Vaman, these clandestine gatherings took place biweekly at the library of the student dorms at Radu Vodă, in their garden, or at the library of the Association of Theology Students from the Radu Vodă street. According to Vaman, these meetings also followed a rigid protocol: “First, there was prayer and oath,” “[then] discussion of Biblical text chosen by the leader, the minute dedicated to the Legion, and friendship during which observations were made to those from the group.” After Easter 1948, Vaman points out, “the Legionary movement being under persecution employed the ‘chain’ system, through which communications were carried out from person to person and by the leader or someone appointed by the leader. . . Meetings could no longer take place because we were exposed and we received even the order to not ever hold them, only [to carry out] communications on the street, so that they would not attract any attention or for [these meetings] to be held in hidden places.” ACNSAS, Fond Penal, file 905, vol. 6, pp. 25, 86, 61, 89, 22, 17, 25, 40. At times, the reading of the Biblical passage was accompanied by the reading of a fragment from Legionary books. ACNSAS, Fond Penal, file 905, vol. 6, 26.
25. See R. Clark, “Re-membering Codreanu: Maligning Fascist Virtues in Aiud Prison, 1964,” Caietele CNSAS 8, no. 2(16) (2015): 181–216.
26. Gina Pană, (2009). Frății de Cruce: Rezerva de Cadre Legionare [The Brotherhood of the Cross: Extra Legionary Staff]. Holocaust. Studii și Cercetări. Issue 1, no. 2: 101–107.
27. See footnote above. For a history of the Legionary movement in interwar Romania, see, e.g., Clark, Holy Legionary Youth.
28. Deletant, Ceaușescu and the Securitate.
29. See, e.g., a. Neculau, “La violence institutionnelle. Une expérience roumaine dans les années du totalitarisme stalinien: ‘la reeducation,’” in C@hiers de Psychologie politique, http://lodel.irevues.inist.fr/cahierspsychologiepolitique/index.php?id=1343#tocto1n1 (accessed 2 November 2020).
30. V. Tismăneanu, D. Dobrincu, C. Vasile et al., eds., Raport final: Comisia Prezidențială Pentru Analiza Dictaturii Comuniste din România [Final Report: The Presidential Commission for the Analysis of Communist Dictatorship in Romania]: 162, http://old.presidency.ro/static/rapoarte/Raport_final_CPADCR.pdf (accessed 4 April 2019).
31. M. Stănescu, Reeducarea in România Comunistă (1945–1952) Aiud, Suceava, Pitești, Brașov [Reeducation in Communist Romania (1945–1952) Aiud, Suceava, Pitești, Brașov] (Iaşi: Polirom, 2010); M. Stănescu, Reeducarea in România Comunistă (1948–1955) Târgșor, Gherla [Reeducation in Communist Romania (1945–1952) Târgșor, Gherla] (Iaşi: Polirom, 2010); M. Stănescu, Reeducarea in România Comunistă (1949–1955) Târgu-Ocna, Ocnele Mari, Canalul Dunărea-Marea Neagră [Reeducation in Communist Romania (1945–1952) (2012) Târgu-Ocna, Ocnele Mari, Canalul Dunărea-Marea Neagră] (Iaşi: Polirom, 2012).
32. a. Mureșan, Pitești: Cronica unei Sinuciderii Asistate [The Timeline of an assisted Suicide] (Iaşi: Polirom, 2011). The following Securitate document provided by “Teodorescu T,” a former inmate who in 1951 met Vaman in Gherla prison, offers some insight. “Teodorescu T” characterizes Vaman as a “person of small stature, thin, nervous, but with a strong power of self-restraint . . . becomes friends with someone not easily and opens himself extremely rarely and only partially. He always restrains himself. He passed through the so-called un-maskings from [prison] Pitești.” Here, the Securitate officer who authored this document refers to the four stages of the experiment through which these inmates passed in order to turn from victim to perpetrator. So does the following note: “before being set free (from prison) [Vaman] manifested a false sense of enmity vis-à-vis all those who had a reactionary attitude,” wrote a Securitate officer in the same document following his conversation with “Teodorescu T” about Vaman. “In February 1958 [Vaman] he told others that ‘he recovered’ and that he ‘does not want to remember of the attitudes that he was obliged to adapt during detention. He showed that he’s afraid of Securitate to propose [sic] him to give information because he can’t tolerate such an offense and will respond revolted.” ACNSAS, Fond Informativ, file I534211, vol. 1, 14.
33. ACNSAS, Fond Documentar, file D008712, vol. 1, P13, 10.
34. C. Stoica, “Concluzii și învățăminte pe marginea unei convocări” [Conclusions and Lessons Learned from a Meeting], Securitatea 21 (1973): 3–7.
35. Ibid.
36. Those perceived as representing the highest level of risk (grad de periculozitate) related to underground activities towards the communist State were assigned to special operations known as the “plan Aldea.” Ibid., 6–7.
37. Individuals deemed as high priority were under constant surveillance (pas cu pas). In the case of others, the Securitate insisted on obtaining information once every three months or on an annual basis. Ibid.
38. ACNSAS, Fond Informativ, file I534211, vol. 1, 15.
39. Ibid, 14.
40. Informer “Vasilescu” points out in his note dating from 19 November 1971 that Vaman was initially refused an accountant’s job at the Christian Orthodox Archdiocese of Bucharest as he was a political prisoner, but was given the job in the end because of the intervention of [Christian Orthodox bishop] Antonie Plămâdeală. Both Vaman and Plămâdeală are described in this note as “former friends and people who suffered.” “In 1971, with the support of bishop Antonie Plămâdeală, with whom he was imprisoned, he received employment at the Diocese of Bucharest, first as an accounts inspector and now as chief of
transportation-related services,” a similar document claims. ACNSAS, Fond Informativ, file I534211, vol. 1: 6, 7, 40.

41. L. Stan and L. Turcescu, “Church Collaboration and Resistance under Communism Revisited: The Case of Patriarch Justinian Marina,” Eurostudia: Revue Transatlantique de Recherche sur L’Europe 10, no. 1 (2015): 75–103.

42. Constantin Stoica, “Concluzii și învățăminte pe marginea unei convocări,” 7.

43. ACNSAS, Fond Informativ, file I534211, vol. 1, 7.

44. Ibid, 15.

45. Ibid, 7, 10.

46. C. Plămădeală, “The Securitate File as a Record of Psychography,” special issue on “Biographic Mediation: The Uses of Disclosure in Bureaucracy and Politics,” Biography 42, no. 3 (2019): 536–56.

47. “Index de Termeni şi abrevieri cu utilizarea frecventă în Documentele Securității” [Index of the Terms and Abbreviations that are Frequently Used in Securitate Documents]: 3–8, http://www.cnsas.ro/documente/arhiva/Dictionar%20termeni.pdf (accessed 5 July 2020).

48. The informer gathered information, at the request of the Securitate officer or resident assigned to coordinate the informer’s investigations. The residents were often members of the Communist Party and often held leadership roles in managing informers, “support people” (persoane de sprijin), and lower-level collaborators. Ibid.

49. M. Wetherell, “A Step Too Far: Discursive Psychology, Linguistic Ethnography and Questions of Identity,” Journal of Sociolinguistics 11 (2007): 668.

50. Tileagă, Representing Communism after the Fall.

51. ACNSAS, Fond Informativ, file I534211, vol. 1, 34.

52. D. Edwards, “Emotion discourse,” Culture & Psychology 5 (1999): 271–91.

53. Tileagă, Representing Communism after the Fall, 160.

54. The idea that this informer was taught to describe the target as such, and as a result of some training he or she may have been receiving, is indeed a possibility. However, it is not something that we can say with certainty in this case. Informers did receive some form of training on how to write informer notes, etc., and met periodically with operative officers to discuss surveillance work.

55. ACNSAS, Fond Documentar, file D008712 Vol 1 P47, 11.

56. Ibid, 57.

57. Ibid, p. 11.

58. Ibid.

59. Ibid.

60. J. Kitsuse, “Societal Reaction to Deviant Behavior: Problems of Theory and Method,” Social Problems 9, no. 3 (1962): 256.

61. ACNSAS, Fond Informativ, file I534211, Vol. 1, 28.

62. Ibid.

63. M. Albu, Informatorul: Studiu asupra Colaborării cu Securitatea (Iași: Polirom, 2008), 160.

64. D. Edwards and J. Potter, Discursive Psychology (London: Sage, 1992).

65. ACNSAS, Fond Informativ, file I534211, Vol. 1, 28-29.

66. S. Wiggins, Discursive Psychology: Theory, Method and Applications (London: Sage, 2017): 199.

67. D. Edwards, “Facts, Norms and Dispositions,” 498.

68. B. Hodge and A. McHoul, “The Politics of Text and Commentary,” Textual Practice 6 (1992): 189.

69. M. Lynch, “Archives in Formation: Privileged Spaces, Popular Archives and Paper Trails,” History of the Human Sciences 12 (1999): 65–87.

70. Ibid., 30.

71. J. R. Bergmann, “Introduction: Morality in Discourse,” Research on Language and Social Interaction 31, nos. 3/4 (1998): 279–94.

72. C. Tileagă, “(Re)writing Biography.”
73. Ibid, 31.
74. E. Rubington and M. Weinberg, *Deviance: The Interactionist Perspective*, 8th ed. (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 2001).
75. ACNSAS, Fond Informativ, file 1534211, Vol. 1, 26.
76. Ibid, 24.
77. Ibid.
78. Ibid, 18.
79. Tileagă, *Representing Communism after the Fall*.
80. ACNSAS, Fond Informativ, file 1534211, Vol. 1, 19.
81. Ibid, 39.
82. Ibid, 20.
83. Goffman, “The Moral Career of the Mental Patient,” 123.

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