

Manuscript

Radio Art/ Artistic Feature

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“The Hanna File”

A life under the gaze of the Securitate

**Feature
by
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Original sound 1 (Bayerischer Rundfunk material)

Reporter (R): I'd like to know how old you are?

Helga Höfer (translating): 76

R: 76. And what did you do in your life, what was your profession in the past?

Helga Höfer: Civil servant

R: You were a civil servant, do you receive a pension?

Helga Höfer: In a factory. Yes.

R: How much is it, how many Lei (*Romanian currency*)?

Helga Höfer: 500 Lei

R: Do you still need to earn money here to be able to live?

Helga Höfer: Yes, he also earns money here.

Music - Cathrin Pfeifer: Minervals

First-person narrator

After searching for a long time, I finally find her in a television report from 1975. The Romanian-German journalist Helga Höfer. She accompanied correspondents from the West when they were working in Romania. Helga Höfer was mainly active in the background.

Original sound 2 (Bayerischer Rundfunk material) 00:40

R: I would like to know how old you are.

Helga Höfer: 82

R: And have you always been a gardener?

Helga Höfer: Always.

R: Don't you have a pension?

Helga Höfer: 150 Lei

Music - Cathrin Pfeifer: Minervals

First-person narrator

Helga Höfer is my mother. I hardly recognize her voice.

Prior to that she wrote for the "Neuer Weg" ("*New Way*"), the newspaper for the German minority in Romania. She felt most comfortable in the culture section. She wrote about international guest performances or music festivals. The political thaw, the supposed liberalisation of Romanian foreign policy made this possible.

Original sound 4

“Golden Stag” international music festival

Young first-person narrator

My mother with Herbert von Karajan. My mother with Udo Jürgens. Ray Charles, Louis Armstrong, Dizzy Gillespie... all photographs my father took at the festivals. Back when Roquefort was still on sale in the shops, as he always says.

First-person narrator

When Kafka’s “Trial” was published in the Romanian translation. For me, then as now, almost unreal times.

Music - Cathrin Pfeifer: Minervals

First-person narrator

At the end of the 60s, beginning of the 70s, Romanian President Nicolae Ceaușescu propagated relaxation by loosening the unity of the blocs. The fact that Ceaușescu did not take part in the invasion of Soviet troops in Prague earned him even more respect. How the people lived, how they were harassed by the Securitate was rarely in the foreground of reporting.

Background noise typewriter/ typing (repeated regularly as identification):

1st Speaker (File)

Since 1967, Helga Höfer has been seconded several times by the newspaper “Neuer Weg” to accompany foreign journalists as an interpreter. In this capacity, she came into contact with a film team from West German television. The Höfer couple has developed these official ties into private relationships and receives numerous visits in their private apartment.

Background noise typewriter/ carriage return:

2nd Speaker (File)

In April 1973, the first West German television channel applied to the Romanian Foreign Ministry for the establishment of a representative office in Bucharest and the employment of an editor, who was to satisfy the following conditions: University degree, knowledge of German, ability to

perform secretarial tasks. On this occasion, it was suggested that Helga Höfer, an editor at the newspaper “Neuer Weg” be employed.

First-person narrator

In 2012 I apply for the files of my mother, who has meanwhile passed away. A few months later I receive a message. A good 850 pages of the Helga Höfer File, alias *Hanna* and *Hermina*, are now available.

“Here, your mother!” the woman groans and slams several thick folders onto the table in the small reading room.

1st Speaker (File)

Our informant “Florea” characterizes Helga Höfer as an intelligent, serious woman who pursues her work with a lot of passion. She has a very communicative and social nature.

First-person narrator

Reading this characterization of my mother in the files both disgusts and moves me at the same time. I recognize her, but I recoil from working off the description of a spy.

2nd Speaker (File)

Helga Höfer struggles with family issues. She has two children that she looks after alone. Her husband Edmund Höfer, a photo reporter, also employed by the newspaper “Neuer Weg”, does not help at all in the household. He is a guy with a tendency towards independence and megalomania, who likes to go to parties and drink. Edmund Höfer leads a disorderly life in which the only thing that counts is the art he executes.

First-person narrator

All of a sudden my childhood in Romania unfolds before me in quick motion.

Music– Cathrin Pfeifer: Tough & Tender

Young first-person narrator

I live with my family on the outskirts of Bucharest. They say we are lucky with our apartment block because it is built of bricks and not concrete slabs. I don’t quite understand that. Our apartment is small and the living room is mouldy.

First-person narrator

I fragmentarily remember life with my despotic father, a charismatic man, a photographer, who gets away with everything he did as artistic licence. And the feats my mother had to perform over and over again to keep our lives reasonably balanced.

Young first-person narrator

I go to the German school. One hour every day by trolley bus to the city centre and back. I don't like being at home that much, only during the holidays, when everyone has time and is in a good mood. Whenever there are visitors, the telephone is put in the cupboard so that the conversations are not monitored.

First-person narrator

The fact that I can hold and read the original files makes the fear present and tangible.

Young first-person narrator

Sometimes we get mail from our relatives in Germany. Once there is also a letter addressed to my music teacher in the envelope. It soon becomes clear that the censorship was sloppy. Everyone laughs about it. Even the music teacher, when I bring her the letter.

First-person narrator

My parents didn't find it quite so funny that there were sometimes cars parked in front of our house to see who was coming and going. As a kid, I learned how to deal with it. I felt what it did to us. Did I think about it? Make myself aware of the uncomfortable feeling that I often had? I have the files copied. They're with me to this day. I wonder if at some point I will find it difficult to distinguish between my own memory and the File.

Music - Anda Călugăreanu: O, Mamă, Tu

First-person narrator

Six years later. Sound check!

Original sound 5: Ilja

Well, my name's Ilja, and we're in Jerusalem. I'm talking to Senta, the daughter of our friends of old, Helga and Mundi.

First-person narrator

I've known Ilja since I can remember.

Original sound 7: Ilja

I think that our first contact came about through my work with Romanian television, specifically, I worked for years with the German television broadcast of Romanian television.

First-person narrator

When I found his name in the files years ago, I wrote to him immediately. I mentioned the files and asked about them. Without accusations, without commenting on the reports. He didn't go into it. The matter was closed. This time it will be different.

Original sound 8: Ilja

But then we found out that we were neighbours. We had recently moved into an apartment in a new building in a Bucharest neighbourhood and to our delight, we found that Helga, Mundi and their two children, Senta and Hanno, lived there too. Then our daughter Judith was born, and we got closer and closer, we met often and enjoyed doing so.

Original sound 9: Ilja

SH quietly in the background: *You started talking about this circle of friends... why it was so important in those days.*

Ilja

It was important because we were similar. And somehow, despite the difficult circumstances, we somehow had connections to the German cultural circle, we listened to records, we listened to the Wolf Biermann songs, and many other things, and nothing was more natural than that.

Music - Wolf Biermann: Ermutigung (*Encouragement*)

Original sound 10: Ilja

And then suddenly there was a surprise. Our friend Helga, Helga Höfer from Neuer Weg, was somehow appointed as a representative of the West German television channel, the ARD, in

Romania and took up this new post. A lot of people were happy, some envied her, it really was a dream job.

1st Speaker (File)

During a discussion with Helga Höfer about her intention to work at the representative office of the first West German television in Bucharest, our informant indicated to her that the management of the newspaper would not be able to agree to her leaving the editorial office. With tears in her eyes, Höfer gave her thanks for the collegial support on the part of the editorial office. She pointed out that there would only be two reasons for accepting the offer from the first West German television station: The material advantage as well as the fact that she would then have more time for her children. We will continue to investigate Höfer Helga in order to contact her regarding her recruitment.

2nd Speaker (File)

Before Helga Höfer was hired as the ARD correspondent in Bucharest, her husband Edmund Höfer asked me for my opinion. I said that this would no doubt be advantageous for material reasons. However, Helga Höfer would certainly not have an easy time of it, because her German supervisors would be sure to require information from her, the procurement of which would bring her into conflict with her obligations as a Romanian citizen. On the other hand, she would have to inform the Romanian authorities about her activities. Edmund Höfer took this as an allusion to the fact that she would have to work for the Securitate. He could have discussed it with her but did not consider her capable of it. He is beginning to get used to the idea that every phone call with his wife will be tapped, but he cannot imagine that their apartment will also be bugged.

Young first-person narrator

It's always noisy in our apartment.

Original sound 11

Deutsche Welle jingle

Young first-person narrator

The days begin very early. My father listens to the radio in the living room.

First-person narrator

My older brother and I shared a small room. When we were both at home, we didn't fight about space, we fought about listening space.

Young first-person narrator

My brother listens to football on the radio and Bob Dylan on cassette. I want to listen to ABBA and play the recorder.

First-person narrator

The apartment building was never a protected space. More of a place to run away from. An unsafe stopover. Evenings were often spent in front of the TV.

Young first-person narrator

When Nadia Comaneci is on doing gymnastics, I am allowed to stay up late. I copy all her moves in the two square metres between the sofa and the TV. I want to be a gymnast. My parents shake their heads uncomprehendingly and tell me about drill, beatings, people being tormented.

Original sound 12: Telejurnal (*News on the Romanian Television*)**Young first-person narrator**

My parents get upset about the news on Romanian television. I wonder why we bother watching it at all. My mother can even predict the news. Always a few seconds before the newsreader she says almost exactly what the newsreader says. When 0% invalid votes are announced again after a referendum or an election, my father says: "That's not true, I wrote Abraham Lincoln on the ballot".

Music – Trezoulé: Zart würzig zu Fuß (*Delicately spiced on foot*)**Young first-person narrator**

I speak German and Romanian. At home and with other people from the German minority I speak German, otherwise Romanian. My parents also speak Hungarian. Sometimes they speak Hungarian when they don't want my brother and me to understand them.

First-person narrator

But German was not always German and Romanian was not always Romanian. I learned very early to speak in code. To read between the lines.

1st Speaker (File)

1975, Plan of Action

1. Recruitment of an informant with access to the circles surrounding Höfer Helga to determine whether she is in the service of a foreign secret service.

First-person narrator

My mother's forthcoming employment with the Bavarian Television (Bayerischer Rundfunk) triggered off genuine actionism at the Securitate. They weren't sure which was better: To prevent it or to let it run in a controlled way.

2nd Speaker (File)

1. Instruction and control of the informant "Niculescu" in the vicinity of Helga Höfer.
2. Contact with Directorate 2 for West German counter-espionage...

1st Speaker (File)

3. Search of the workplace.
4. Surveillance of Helga Höfer to determine her contacts and the ways in which information is transmitted.

2nd Speaker (File)

5. Installation of operational listening technology.
6. Selection of those contacts of Helga Höfer, who could be of interest for further processing in terms of counter-espionage.

Original sound 13 (Bavarian Television)

The Hotel Intercontinental, where our office is located, is located on Balcescu Boulevard, the main street of the Romanian metropolis. We did not move in here completely voluntarily, but rather due to the lack of alternatives. This is because a Romanian law stipulates that foreign companies are only allowed to base their representative offices in hotels or other state buildings. In this way, their activities can be better monitored by the Romanian state security authorities.

Original sound 14: Ilja

Helga was very careful, very prudent. She knew she was in a difficult situation. Relations with the western press were never easy and never smooth.

Original sound 15 (Bavarian Television)

A television programme here in Romania cannot be prepared in the shortest possible time with just a few telephone calls, as is the case in the Federal Republic of Germany. This is why we have a

permanent member of staff in our office, Ms. Helga Höfer, a Romanian journalist of German descent, who does a large part of the preparatory work for us and looks after the permanent contacts.

First-person narrator

As a child, I did not understand that this cultivation of contacts resembled running the gauntlet if one did not follow the party line.

Music - Michael Nyman & Motion Trio: Silence

Young first-person narrator

At primary school we have to wear our pioneer uniforms every Tuesday, white blouse, black pleated skirt, white knee socks and the red pioneer necktie. Otherwise, we are given a bad grade for “Behaviour”.

Because I could speak German so well, I was chosen to take part in a holiday camp with children from the GDR (East Germany). Two weeks at the Black Sea!!! Then it didn't work out after all. My name was suddenly no longer on the list. The teacher said later that it was because my parents were not party members.

First-person narrator

My mother told me that I had come home crying that day and demanded that they join the party immediately. She talked to me for a long time, trying to explain why they wouldn't do that. But how can you explain something like that to a child?

At the 30-year class reunion my former school friends were surprised at my critical attitude regarding our school days. They think I'm exaggerating. Nobody believed in the system, they say. It is true that a normal life by today's standards was not possible, but it was still better than in the early 1940s in Nazi Germany or in North Korea today. Today, in the age of social networks, people do everything voluntarily.

1st and 2nd Speaker (File):

(Both speakers, louder and quieter, overlapping)

Horst, Dan, Florea, Radu, Lupu, Niculescu, Romulus, Ana, Puiu, Finger, Nina, Schmidt, Mischa, Lascar, Munteanu, Galați, Popescu, Cornel, Bianca, Mirel, Bob, Tinu, Karin, Cristina, Bogdan, Marinescu, Tinu, Homer, Barbu, Bettina, Timu, Marian, Emil, Marta, Georgeta, Veronica, Frantz, Roco, Argus, Badea.

...

First-person narrator

Looking through the files, I am shocked at the sheer number of people who were assigned to us. A former fellow student of my mother's was "delegated" to Bucharest to meet her by chance on the street, to get into a conversation with her and to have her invite him to the ARD (*West German Television*) office. He wrote pages of reports on the conversations with my mother and her West German colleagues. And about the fact that the whiskey offered was "veritable". And that she was delighted with the flowers he had brought. He would bring some again next time.

Music– Cathrin Pfeifer: Minervals

Original sound 16: Helga Reiter

They also approached me, well... to write reports. And it cost me two months of my life because I didn't immediately, categorically say NO. And I kept meeting these assholes.

First-person narrator

Helga Reiter, a friend of my mother's, she was an editor for the German-language magazine "Neue Literatur" at the time, Emmerich Stoffel was its editor-in-chief.

Original sound 17: Helga Reiter (2:04)

Until I... until I finally went to Stoffel. And told him that they were harassing me. Then he said: "Comrade, tell them if they want something from you, they should ask me. I told them that... I called them.

First-person narrator

Helga Reiter told the two men. Her editor-in-chief said to tell them that if they wanted something from her, they should ask him She would not cooperate.

Original sound 18 Helga Reiter (3:57)

Look, I have one recollection of that meeting. The two of them – the one I didn't know and the other one – laughing in a pseudo-friendly way throughout the whole meeting. Within a split second of me saying that, their faces were furious. Yes, then I wrote "ca refuz" (Romanian, I refuse).

Original sound 19: Helga Reiter (14:23)

Senta Höfer quietly in the background: *Did people talk about such things? Would you tell each other about these things the next day?*

Well, of course we would. It depends... I wouldn't have told everyone in the editorial office. There were suspicions on all sides, and FROM all sides. –

Music - Maria Tanase: Lume, lume...

First-person narrator

I hesitate for a long time before approaching a good friend to talk about her father's spying activities. When I finally bring myself to do so, she shrugs me off. When she was 19, she might have been surprised or disappointed to hear about it. Today she sees things differently. After all, there are worse things than that today. Coming to terms with the past is not a priority, people have other things to worry about.

Not everyone in Romania sees it that way, of course. It always depends on which side you are on. Now and then, public figures are exposed as former spies. But that rarely causes a stir in Romania. A differentiated consideration of such information hardly ever takes place.

1st Speaker (File):

1981, Expansion of the Plan of Action

1. Our informant is further instructed to provide daily updated descriptions of the family situation, concerns and projects, and especially to endeavour to procure any compromising data or materials, e.g. misappropriation of funds, unjustified expenditure, accepting bribes.

2nd Speaker (File):

1. Our informant Romulus, who was infiltrated into the environment of the subject in the second half of 1980, is instructed to intensify relations with Helga in order to find out more

about her circle of acquaintances and to find out if she shows an interest in information that she shouldn't really need for her work.

1st Speaker (File):

2. Since Helga's family plans to move, the possibilities of also adopting special measures in the new apartment should be explored.
3. Because her parents have not returned from their trip to the Federal Republic of Germany, an exploratory talk is being organized under the guise of the passport office.

Original sound 20 (Bavarian Television)

Witching Hour in Schäßburg, Romanian Sighisoara. The tower owl can scare you, but otherwise there is not much going on at night in this medieval town. The real Dracula is said to have been born here in the 15th century, a Walachian prince's son, not a Transylvanian vampire count from the horror novel, whom the Romanians only know from English tourists who search in vain for vampires or at least for bats in the house where Dracula was born.

First-person narrator

Peter Miroschnikoff was the Southeast Europe correspondent for the ARD and my mother's supervisor in the 70s and 80s. Over the years a friendship developed which was shaped by the circumstances of its origin.

Original sound 21: Peter

The pleasant thing, "pleasant" in quotation marks, was that I... comparatively... I witnessed an incredible kind of corruption. What this means is that I had previously had dealings with the GDR, where all this would have been impossible, in Romania, when critical situations arose, to say that there was some sort of negotiation would be going too far, but things could be twisted in such a way that both sides had the feeling that they had no problems.

First-person narrator

For my mother, this meant: Balancing the West German media's view of Romania with her personal work situation under the dictatorship.

Dracula is a recurring motif. Then as now, clichés are often used when talking about Romania. Besides Dracula, there are also horse-drawn carts, gangs of beggars, street children or stray dogs.

Original sound 26: Peter

It was difficult to place the topics except for Dracula or those topics where you had some kind of reference point.

Original sound 27: Peter

There had to be a current political reference, or there would have to be some kind of drama, which we could then use, let me make it quite clear, to sell the topics.

Speaker (joke):

A reporter from the West interviews Ceaușescu in the late 80s:

- (Reporter:) I heard that the apartments in Romania are very cold.
- (Ceaușescu:) Yes, but no one has ever died because of it.
- (Reporter:) I heard that there's hardly anything to eat.
- (Ceaușescu:) Yes, but no one has ever starved to death.
- (Reporter:) I also heard that you have to fight to get a seat on the bus to get home from work.
- (Ceaușescu:) Yes, but that's never killed anybody, either.
- Then the reporter says: Mr. President, why don't you try cyanide.

Original sound 28: Peter

I will never forget that, for example, on Romanian television no frost was ever forecast. This was one of the funnier things, because it was not possible, because you knew that the opportunities for heating were limited, so what is not allowed to happen simply doesn't happen.

First-person narrator

Apart from Peter, many other ARD journalists visited Romania over the years. One of them asked in our living room if anyone knew how to solve the problem of the Eastern Bloc. The answer: Dig up Albania and dump it on Romania.

Music– Cathrin Pfeifer: Tough & Tender

Young first-person narrator

Every Friday friends meet in our apartment with things to swap. A farmer from the area brings us quark and cream, which we can exchange for other food. A woman friend brings “warm meat”. Warm because it was smuggled out of the slaughterhouse on her body.

Speaker (joke):

Dumitru Prunariu, the first Romanian in space, leaves a note on the kitchen table for his mother when he leaves: Dear Mother, I'm off into space, I'll be back in 30 days. On his return he finds a note from his mother on the kitchen table: Welcome back, my dear! I'm off to buy some cheese. I don't know when I'll be back.

First-person narrator

Necessity is the mother of invention, they say. Necessity is undignified, my mother said.

Original sound 29: Peter

I was always only temporarily on-site. That means I heard about things like some kind of exotic story and of course I registered them and reported on them, that's quite clear, but we weren't the ones who suffered, but rather people like your mother and others who had to cope with this in everyday life.

Young first-person narrator

At dinner, my mother tells a story about two elderly, elegantly dressed gentlemen who had a fight in a vegetable shop in the centre of Bucharest. Over a kilo of dry beans.

First-person narrator

Nevertheless, we did not want to bring everything down to the poor supply situation, the fight took place elsewhere.

Music - Ada Milea: Iarna.

Original sound 30 (Bavarian Television)

I'm beginning to get annoyed with the fact that the Western press is always harping on about supplies, about the cold winter, whereas political repression is actually the main reason for all of this. And without it, the situation, even the economic situation and the situation of political and ideological indoctrination would be unthinkable. I believe that the problem is not actually being analysed. It is not being grasped by the roots showing how it could have come to this and that everything is connected.

First-person narrator

The writer Herta Müller on her arrival in Germany in 1987 in a report by Peter Miroschnikoff.

Original sound 31 (Bavarian Television)

Ms. Müller, what is the root cause for you, the decisive one? What do you see as the problem?

The thing that distinguishes Romania from all the other countries of the East is this insane cult of personality, that this person has everything in this country in his hands and decides everything.

Original sound 32 (Bavarian Television)

The anthem to the beloved leader. Ceaușescu is celebrated as the morning star, the Carpathian Summit of Communism. His propagandists attribute silver brain cells to him, praising him as a brilliant strategist and the greatest hero in Romanian history. (singing fades out)

Original sound 33 (Bavarian Television)

Grasping this situation, which is so catastrophic that what you are actually writing can only be justified existentially. Several people have told me to write parodies of one thing or another. I replied that the situation is so serious that I am no longer able to. I can no longer describe the situation in this way, it seems perverse to me.

Music - Ada Milea: Fără Păneri.

First-person narrator

In grammar school, the Securitate was a topic of discussion from time to time. Some things we knew from our parents, and some things we suspected. And we also had our own experiences.

Young first-person narrator

German Olympics 9th grade. All are equal, but some are more equal than others, I quote George Orwell in my essay, and attribute the quote to Christine Nöstlinger. My mother shakes her head. She's not too upset about it, though. It wouldn't be the first time she's been summoned to school because of her children.

Music – Trezoulé: Zart würzig zu Fuß (*Delicately spiced on foot*)

First-person narrator

There's a question that's been haunting me for as long as I can remember: If no one took the regime seriously, why has everyone played along for so long? How can such a system work if nobody identifies with it?

Another attempt at clarification:

Original sound 35: Peter

I noticed that those who participated were almost always cynics. The ones who said: What are you talking about? I fooled them. I tricked them. I enjoyed my privileges without having to do anything. Sailed through effortlessly, so to speak. Well, I'd say this is a phenomenon I've witnessed all over the Eastern Bloc. What are you talking about? I've, now I've got what I wanted. I've got my houses or I've got my cars in good time. I've had my trips to the West and I was around, but I didn't do anything. That's how I would translate it.

Original sound 36: Peter

SH quietly in the background: *Exactly. And those who didn't play along...*

Peter continues: *They were, they were poor idiots who only have themselves to blame. They missed the opportunity.*

Speaker (joke):

What's small and black and knocks on the door? – The future!

1st Speaker (File):

1986, Plans of Action:

1. Our informant MIREL, one of Hanna's husband's editorial colleagues, is to be instructed to pay particular attention to Hanna's participation in events at the BRD cultural centre (Goethe-Institut) during his visits there, especially because of her contacts to West German diplomats.

2nd Speaker (File)

1. In order to compromise her, she will be summoned to the Ministry of the Interior shortly before her West German colleagues arrive, where she will be asked to wait for two hours under the pretext of a planned meeting. She will then be released without being questioned. "Because something urgent has come up, the interview must be rescheduled."

1st Speaker (File):

2. The cleaning lady is to be checked, with a view to possible collaboration, in order to find out more about her remuneration or whether the sums actually paid match the amounts on the documents issued.

First-person narrator

Insert: The cleaning lady!

Liza is a simple woman, as they say. Thoroughly decent, attended four elementary school classes, member of the Hungarian minority, married to a Romanian, no children. That is to say: One child who died very young.

Music - Cathrin Pfeifer: Cirque de la Pluie

Young first-person narrator

Liza says I'm like her own child for her. I call her *mamã* (**pronounced in Romanian**). She has been looking after me when my mother is at work since I was two months old. It always makes me sad when she talks about her daughter who died. She spoils me good and proper, it's almost a little embarrassing. Fried potatoes every other day? Or pancakes? No problem – if we have enough flour!

First-person narrator

In her smoky one-room apartment I learn to speak Romanian and sing Hungarian. Making my first steps, sewing, cooking, and how to take life as it comes. After a brief check, the Securitate discovered that her general education was poor and so they classified her as unsuitable. That took a load off my mind. I'm convinced her common sense kept her from harm.

2nd Speaker (File)

3. Based on the results of the investigation, Hanna is to be informed that she has exceeded her authority and is contributing to the denigration of our country. This information could result in the termination of her employment contract.

1st Speaker (File)

4. In view of her compromised position, she is to be summoned to Police Headquarters No. 1, where she will be questioned about Senta. She will be asked not to tell anyone about this

interview. She is to be photographed as she enters and leaves the building. Even if she reports the interview, she will be suspected of working for us.

2nd Speaker (File)

5. Since her employment there have been several attempts to contact Hanna, but she has refused all contact with the organs of the Securitate. She communicated this to her contacts immediately, also expressing her contempt for us. From the information available to us which we have verified, it is clear that Hanna confirms in her conversations with the representatives of the ARD that she is in a difficult situation because “the Germans believe that she is working with the Romanians and the Romanians suspect her of working for the Germans”.

First-person narrator

I put my question again, in a different way. I approach my girlfriend again, the daughter of a former informant in my mother’s file. It’s the nuances that interest me, I tell her. After all, it’s our generation that has a key role to play in coming to terms with the past. And also the responsibility. I don’t want to name and shame anyone. I want to understand how life under the dictatorship has shaped us and how we view our parents’s lives. And what this has to do with us today. I am convinced that our friendship will withstand this.

People don’t like complicated things, my friend says. If a name appears in the files, she says, you’ve been a spy – and something like that shouldn’t be able to diminish your parents’ reputation. It is only their merits that should count, not what’s in the files. That was mostly trivial stuff, which did no harm to anyone. After numerous attempts to conduct an interview about it with her, I receive a legal warning by email. A clarifying interview is not possible.

Music - Ada Milea: Ceausescu n-a murit

First-person narrator

“Ceausescu is not dead! He is in me, he is in you. History has fooled us. We are the living and the dead.” The Romanian singer Ada Milea puts it in a nutshell – and gets applause in the country’s clubs, especially in the noughties. How can that be?

I realize that the dictatorship is still an important point of reference for my generation. The fact that many of the former followers of the regime are much better off today than its opponents, I might

add. Former full-time employees of the Securitate have occasionally even made it into high positions after 1990, all the way to the European Parliament. Few people are upset about this. Bush senior was also director of the CIA before he became president, a former teacher told me at our class reunion.

Speaker (joke):

The pessimist says: Things can't get any worse.

The optimist says: Oh yes, they can.

First-person narrator

With Ilja I explore our common past. We move slowly towards it.

Original sound 37: Ilja

Seen from today and seen from the outside, nothing was normal. Nothing was normal. There was an extreme lack of freedom in all areas, not only in terms of journalism. In all areas of life. You were not independent, everything was strictly controlled and directed.

First-person narrator

The ease with which Ilja described the first few years of his friendship with my parents disappears in the course of our conversation.

Original sound 38: Ilja

People were worried about their work, about their existence. You were never sure of it. There were no unions, there was no legal protection. Whenever the authorities, and in particular the political authorities, wanted it, they could remove you. If you were a radio person or a television person, they could always take your microphone or your camera away, this was stressful of course.

Original sound 39: Ilja

Then you were afraid of spies. Everyone was listened to and spied upon and reported wherever possible. You never knew who was doing it and how and what and what they really wanted from you.

Speaker (joke)

In the United States, the capitalists organized car races for entertainment, where one of the ten cars starting had defective brakes and nobody knew which car it was. In England they played Russian roulette, only one of the ten revolvers was loaded. In Romania, ten friends sat together and told each other jokes. One of them was a spy, but nobody knew who it was.

Original sound 40: Ilja

I guess, I don't know, I don't think it's a good thing to dig everything up completely. Because you... you don't just get disappointments, a lot of anger comes out, you have to get over that somehow.

First-person narrator

We look at the files together.

Original sound 41: Ilja

What's the date? '77... interesting. Reads from the files... continues in the background.

First-person narrator

I show Ilja the transcripts of our telephone calls. Some of them are between him and my father.

Original sound 42: Ilja

Laughs... fantastic... all the things they... Helga vorbeste cu Ilja... simply ridiculous...

Original sound 43: Ilja continues

They wanted... to know hour by hour what you are doing and where you are and what you are saying.

Original sound 44 : Ilja

How much work, so much work...

First-person narrator

How did he deal with the surveillance?

Original sound 45 : Ilja

I think we knew about it theoretically. Practically... I had nothing to hide.

I have my opinion, but I am not doing anything against the regime... we thought that it would be pointless, you can't do anything about it, it is such a huge power, what can you even attempt to do. Like I said, if I work there, I'm for it. I'm not schizophrenic enough to work for them and against them. I meant that in a positive way. If they ask me stupid questions, I'll tell them what they wanted to hear. I've got nothing to hide. I've not said anything negative about anyone, ever. I didn't... that was my mistake, I didn't attach any importance to it.

First-person narrator

The programme where Ilja works is closed down. Romanian TV is cut back to two hours a day: Party news, Ceauşescu's speeches and cultural programmes loyal to the regime.

Original sound 46: Ilja

Of course I took it personally in a way. Look, you've learned and worked and done and created things and all for nothing. Everything is bankrupt. Not you personally, but the whole situation. And the fact that they took the good people, that's how it started, that they kicked out the good people and all the various informants and the various little functionaries and the semi-educated people, they stayed and started to boss us around. And that annoyed me, I spoke out about it, I said that. And then... they also kicked me out in the end.

Original sound 47 : Ilja

SH quietly in the background: *Looking back, did you have a different perspective on these years?*
Ilja: *No, I found everything was logical. Everything turned out the way it should be.*

Original sound 48 : Ilja

It seemed natural to me. This is my work, this is my place, I didn't do anything bad to anyone there, if they bothered me, I reacted and carried on. Everyone knew that no one is safe. That nobody is protecting you. If they want to get rid of you, it happens in no time at all. And - it's true – subconsciously you were always worried about your job, your position, and your existence. But... you didn't want to lose it. Until of course they suddenly... I didn't believe it until the last day... until they removed me, I didn't want to leave the country, or the institution, or the work.

Music - Ada Milea: Leagăn Dulce De Oțel

Original sound 49 & 50 : Ilja

Look, this was a different time and a different world, it's becoming more and more difficult to understand. In 20 years, you won't be able to at all... today we still talk about it, you still have some memories, there's a lot of literature, but only specialists and historians read that. But... in practice, it's becoming more and more distant and less and less relevant.

SH quietly in the background: *That's why it's good that we are having this conversation...*

Ilja: *Well, you've managed to get me well and truly wrapped up in it,*

SH quietly in the background: *What do you mean, wrapped up in it...*

Ilja: *No no, that's not an accusation, on the contrary, I am grateful to you. Sure, you have to think back and understand what happened to you in your life.*

First-person narrator

The conciliatory ending to my conversation with Ilja does me good. It lightens the burden of the files somewhat. The conversation with Ilja continues – amicably, almost familial. After thirty years with hardly any contact. Other discussions ended in debacle. After decades of friendship.

Music - Motion Trio: Little Story

Young first-person narrator

1987. My parents apply for permission to leave the country for the Federal Republic of Germany.

All my relatives already live there. I realize that I have no clear opinion on this. Of course I want to go to Germany too, but I can't imagine leaving here. When I was little, I always thought that Germany was called Alemania, because "everybody" ("All men") wanted to go there.

The Federal Republic is said to pay up to 12,000 marks per emigrant. But the Germans from Romania don't always seem to be welcome in Germany. In an interview with a West German journalist, a German diplomat calls the so-called ethnic German emigrants, i.e. us, "second and third class people", my mother tells me.

First-person narrator

Is this also one of the reasons why my parents take such a long time to decide to apply for permission to emigrate? They only do so when it becomes clear that my brother and I have hardly any prospects in Romania. It will not be possible for us to study for free.

Speaker (joke):

Entrance examination at the university.

The first candidate is a protégé. His question: In 1907, there was a great popular uprising. In which year did the popular uprising take place?

The second candidate only has connections. His question: In the popular uprising of 1907, 10,000 peasants were killed. How many peasants were killed in 1907?

The third candidate has neither patronage nor connections. In the course of the popular uprising in 1907, 10,000 peasants lost their lives. Please name the peasants.

First-person narrator

In the last few months before leaving the country, my mother is busy obtaining certificates. The aim is to exchange all these certificates for a coupon with a red line: the *Talonul roșu!*

Young first-person narrator

My mother is constantly on the go, running from agency to agency. In between, she strained her back while packing, she has to spend a few days in bed. She can hardly stand it. I help out when she can't do any more.

We finally emigrate in August 1988. The hours immediately before and after our departure pass in a blur. I don't know what's coming. Can hardly stand what there is. What has been, I'm supposed to put behind me now. So they say.

At Bucharest Central Station we are bid farewell by friends – we don't know if we will ever see them again. About 12 hours later at the border, a policeman enters our compartment and searches listlessly through some of our luggage and leaves. My mother calls after him, tells him he has to look at the red coupon as well. *Talonul roșu*. Continuing to walk away, the border policeman replies: You can wipe your ass with it.

2nd Speaker (File):

The investigative measures show that Helga Höfer has adopted a hostile attitude towards our country and, in her contacts with West German journalists, has made slanderous remarks about the achievements of the Socialist Republic of Romania.

In June 1987, she applied to emigrate to the Federal Republic of Germany, together with her husband, a former photojournalist for the newspaper "Neuer Weg", and their two children, aged 21 and 17. On the basis of an emigration permit, she finally left the country on 21st August. We propose authorizing the removal of Helga Höfer from surveillance and the archiving of the file.

First-person narrator

The file is closed in 1988 with our departure for the Federal Republic. We spend our first weeks in Germany in a transitional hostel providing temporary accommodation in Nuremberg. Very close to the Nazi party rally grounds. Our first walk in freedom takes us to the Zeppelin Field. As a starting aid we are given a German-Romanian dictionary.

My mother gets a job working for *Bayerischer Rundfunk*, but she doesn't manage to fit in there. She can hardly cope with the fact that the revolution takes place in Romania one and a half years later. She reports – with Peter Miroschnikoff once again – from Bucharest.

Original sound 51 (Bavarian Television)

Helga Höfer: And why do you want to leave now, when everything has changed?

First-person narrator

While working for Bayerischer Rundfunk her focus is on Eastern Europe and the so-called exodus of the German minority. She would much rather report on theatre and literature rather than recapitulate her own life in Romania over and over again. She finds it difficult to find her place. In 1993 she capitulates and dies of cancer at the age of 52.

First-person narrator

Flashback. December 1987.

Original sound 52

Birthday celebration for Cella Delvrancea.

Young first-person narrator

Everything revolves around our departure. All of a sudden my mother takes me to an event. Officially an evening with classical music. Unofficially the 100th birthday of the Romanian pianist Cella Delavrancea. It's cold in the Romanian Radio Hall. Speeches, arias and chorales. I wonder why we are here. Hours later, the centenarian herself finally comes on stage. She plays the piano spontaneously, improvises and jokes openly with the audience that she feels like a 19-year-old.

Piano music by Cella Delvrancea

First-person narrator

As a young woman she was at home all over Europe. Her circles included Rilke, Fauré and Brâncuși. It is only later that I realize her 100th birthday is an historic evening. Apart from Ceaușescu no one in Romania is publicly honoured. So it is an evening that should not happen, during which the name of the dictator is not mentioned even once, the party does not play a role. An evening to which a 100-year-old lends an almost unreal lightness and cheerfulness. Which celebrates the freedom of thought and art. Which pushes fear into the background. Only the moment counts. My mother is beside herself. And at the same time so much herself as I have rarely seen her.

“The Hanna File -

A life under the gaze of the Securitate”

By Senta Höfer

You heard:

Imogen Kogge, Leonie Rainer, Leopold von Verschuer, Thomas Arnold and Jon Kiriatic.

With excerpts from television reports by Bayerischer Rundfunk: *Social security systems, opening of the ARD studio in Bucharest, Dracula’s home country, The woman who came in from the cold, Party leader with sceptre, Banat – the last Swabian migration*. And from the Romanian television film *100+101=Cella Delavrancea*.

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