

Romania

Testimonials of the members of the MISA Yoga School

Carmen Popescu¹

The undersigned, Popescu Carmen (...), restauration painter and decorator, I am writing this statement to show the discriminations to which I have been subjected from 1993 until today, 2005, because I chose to practice yoga within MISA, which has Gregorian Bivolaru as its spiritual mentor, and because of my life convictions that are common to other yogis, such as vegetarianism.

Let's start at the beginning.

February 1993: I, the R.C. of that time; I started yoga classes at MISA in Constanta, the city where I was born and where I lived at that time with my family composed of my husband, R.I. and our two children – Oana, 10 years old and Vlad, 4 years old. R.I. was hardworking, he didn't drink, he didn't smoke, he was inventive and dexterous. Our relationship was good. We were both working, he was sailing as a ship mechanic, I had been working for 13 years as a decorator at the largest textile-footwear company in the city of Constanta and the entire Romanian seaside. We had money, a house, a business, cars, etc.

End of March 1993: R.I. left on a trip, I mention that until then my husband did not have the slightest objection to the fact that I was practicing yoga or to the yoga course itself. However, during the 8 months in which R.I. was away, my brother-in-law C.A. collected all the denigrating articles about Gregorian Bivolaru and the MISA Yoga School, from all the newspapers in the country.

The denigration campaign had just begun and the newspapers were all publishing the same information with spicy, falsified photos of Gregorian Bivolaru, because they targeted him first of all and by extrapolation, the MISA Yoga School. So, upon his return to the country, R.I. was presented with a collection of overwhelming articles about MISA. In other words, about what his wife does at yoga. Even though the brother-in-law was in a pronounced stage of alcoholism (not having been able to adapt to the social situation after 1989), this aspect paled in front of the rich denigrating material presented. R.I. became extremely jealous, suspicious about everything, dictatorial, impulsive and aggressive. After countless attempts to save the marriage, showing him how erroneous and ill-intentioned everything written about Gregorian Bivolaru in the newspapers was, when things seemed to calm down, a new wave of denigrating articles would appear in the

¹ Carmen Popescu, "Testimony", Gabriel Andreescu, *MISA. Radiografia...*, pp. 274-282 (Translated from Romanian by Cristina Andreescu).

newspapers, and everything would start again.

Thus, the situation escalated quickly and dramatically. R.I. believed that I shouldn't live anymore because I practiced yoga and tried to kill me by strangulation, the incident starting in the bathroom of the 4-room apartment where we lived. The children were each in their own room and had not yet fallen asleep. Thus, Oana, 10 years old, hearing what was happening, tried to open the door to the bathroom, locked from the inside, shouting: "You will not kill my mother!" and in the desperation with which she was trying to open the door, she managed to break the doorknob. I can see her now, with her eyes wide, full of fear, with the doorknob in her right hand, watching her father, with a watch with a metal bracelet around his fingers, in the fist of his left hand, hitting me on the head, disfigured by anger. Almost unconscious, I gathered all my strength and shouted to Oana to open the door of the apartment and shout for help.

The strangling and the blows stopped when he heard the neighbors who were reacting to the child's cries for help. However, no one was entering the house. I got up, because I was on the ground, and I started to run, swaying towards the door that I couldn't seem to reach and that Oana had opened. I saw, as if in a dream, Oana entering the house. I told her: "Get out!" Fists reached me from behind and I began to hear each blow sound in my skull again. Oana was shouting at R.I. not to kill me. I saw his face leaning back a lot, a grimace on it. I didn't understand at first. Oana had clung fiercely to her father's hair and was actually suspended in the air in her desperation to stop him. I shouted at her: "Let him go and get out!"

Thank God, she listened to me. I could see the light from the staircase approaching, I knew that it was my salvation, but the light disappeared. I couldn't understand, "I was almost out of the house!". A sharp pain in my right shoulder, the blows to the head started again. I realized that I'm stuck in the closed door, I have my right hand and leg out, and my head, and left hand and foot are in the house. I hadn't escaped. R.I., panting, repeated to me in a whisper: "I will kill you, I will kill you like a chicken." I could hardly see anything, my eyes were swollen and watery. I prayed to God not to scream, not to scare the little one, Vlad, who was in his room. The blows continued, each one seemed like an eternity. I felt something on my throat, he was looking for something, my windpipe! "God, he really wants to kill me!" He found it, he tried to hold it well in order to pull it, then I understood what he meant by "I'll kill you like a chicken". I said in my mind: "God help me" and an unknown force in me pushed my right hand against the door that immobilized me and flung it and R.I. and everything like a feather against the wall. Coughing and barely catching my breath, I finally left the house, out in the stairwell. I fell on the ground face down. Two hands turned me face up. Fists again, this time to the face. I heard voices saying "Leave her alone!". R.I. shouted "I found her with a man!!" "What does he say?, what man?? God, what is going through his mind!" The neighbors went silent when they heard this. I realized that I was lost, no one would intervene, only a miracle could save me. Fists fell on my face, I didn't feel them anymore, it was like snowflakes falling on my face. I was in the snow, it was snowing with big flakes falling on my face.

"Enough, you will kill her!" shouted a girl's voice. It was the nurse from the 1st floor. She had just finished high school. She was a child... The miracle!! She put her hands on

R.I. and pushed him while pulling me at the same time from between his knees: “If you caught her with a man, you settle it in court, but you don’t kill her!”, shouted the neighbor from the 2nd floor, and held R.I., who had recovered and was rushing towards me. I leaned against the wall. “The children, where are the children??”, and I shouted: “Oana, bring Vlad!!” Oana entered the house, R.I. kept telling me to go into the house also. “Never!”, I replied.

“God, what is Oana doing that she doesn’t come out”? She finally came out with Vlad in her arms. “I couldn’t find him, he was in the toy basket!” How did he get inside? It was a raffia basket and it was full of toys. To get into it he had to have taken them all out, and the basket was almost once again as big as he was. How scared he was! I took him in my arms, I saw his big eyes, amazed, without tears but sad. “That’s it, baby, we’re leaving,” I told him. “It’s over, don’t be afraid anymore!” He held me so tightly around my neck! I didn’t tell him anything.

I took Oana by the hand, her hand was cold, her face was white as a sheet, and she was trembling. All three of us were in pajamas and barefoot. I turned my back and left, I knew it was forever. And I also knew: the children will always be with me. I didn’t know where, but I knew that I would never go back. Only my parents, I thought, had the right to beat me. And they were dead. God gave me life and only He had the right to take it from me. And IR is not God. It was over!

I went down the stairs thinking: “He’s really crazy!” The neighbor on the 1st floor asked me where I was going, because she knew that I didn’t have my parents anymore. “Anywhere but back there”.

She told me to go into her house with the children. I hesitated, it was too close, only one floor separated us. But I realized once again that we were in pajamas and barefoot. “He won’t find out,” my neighbor reassured me. In the morning, I got dressed in her daughter’s clothes and went to work. When my boss saw what I looked like, he went to the director, who gave me a car with a driver, to go to the forensic doctor and get a forensic certificate. “Why?” I asked, not knowing what will come next. “You’ll need it. Go.” And that’s what I did. I then took my children and settled in with a co-worker who also went to yoga with me and who, not being married, lived alone in a 2-room apartment, and offered it to us for as long as necessary. And all this because I chose to practice yoga here in my country.

And things did not stop there.

I filed for divorce, I settled in Bucharest with an uncle, I talked to the director and he told me that he agrees to my transfer. I was going to Bucharest to arrange the transfer to my new job. I talked to the director on the phone on Thursday and he told me to come on Monday at 12 o’clock to get my transfer. He wished me luck, was happy that it turned out fine. On Friday, R.I. picked Vlad up from kindergarten and didn’t leave him with us. “God I lost Vlad!” It was very hard for us! On Monday, 12 o’clock, I went to the director and instead of a transfer, I received a termination notice. I didn’t even have to ask why. I saw nearby, on the desk, the *Telegraf* newspaper and my face at 16 on the front page with my name written at the bottom of the photo like a criminal’s!! Stunned, I took the newspaper in my hand and read the article about me entitled (as if I had said those words): “If I had

to choose between family and yoga, I would choose yoga” and: “She left her husband and 2 children”.

Suddenly I saw myself through the eyes of those who read the newspaper, and I understood why my employment contract was terminated. They had been manipulated. The article about me was included in an extensive, denigrating material about Gregorian Bivolaru. “But it’s not fair!”, I exclaimed. “I’m going through a divorce! What they did is not legal and they didn’t talk to me at all!”

“It doesn’t matter, you do yoga and that’s enough,” the director replied and left the office. The written reason for the termination of the employment contract was the unjustified absence from work for 7 days (after 13 years in which I did not have the slightest misconduct). I mention that the reference to 7 days of absence is false, because those 7 days were approved and paid as part of the vacation leave that was due to me for that year (1994). After the appearance of the double false article against me and included in the denigrating one against Gregorian Bivolaru and me, I was retroactively denied the approval of the 7 days of leave and asked to pay back the money received for the leave approved before the publication of the article. My photo at the age of 16 published in the newspaper on the front page meant I was recognized by anyone who knew me since childhood. The result was that I was marginalized by everyone, people didn’t even greet me back.

And things did not stop there!

I wrote myself the reply to the article in the *Telegraf* and went to the editorial office of the newspaper asking for the right of reply. What reply? What right? I was not allowed any right to any reply on the grounds that “newspapers live on sensational things. And what I show in the written material is not something sensational.” What was sensational, however, was the fact that the *Telegraf* reporter broke the law and fabricated false evidence for R.I. in the divorce case. Obviously, the article did not say anything about the attempted murder, because I had not been interviewed, moreover, as I pointed out earlier, I had been totally denied the right to reply, it was falsely claimed that I had left the children and had also taken a large amount of money from the house, that I was Gregorian Bivolaru’s mistress.

For two hours I insisted that I be given a place for the reply I wrote and in which I showed that I had been going through a divorce for a month and the article was thus not legal, damaging my image and becoming false evidence against me, written by a reporter eager to be sensational who had interviewed only R.I. and didn’t objectively present the situation. Counting on the social instability triggered by the lying article, the people from *Telegraf* nonchalantly told me that I should sue them if I want the right to reply.

And things did not stop there!

All my relatives (except one of my aunts on my mother’s side) and all my friends turned their backs on me, refusing me even the slightest help, telling me that “they are ashamed and afraid to be seen talking to me or greeting me”.

And things did not stop there!

Settled in Bucharest, I had to find work without a work card because the way in which my employment contract had been terminated did not allow me to be rehired anywhere.

And things did not stop there.

Living in Bucharest with my uncle, who was only 10 years older than me, he and I

were called to the police station responsible for the street where we lived, because we were suspected of being lovers. This was only the superficial reason, for how many couples do not live together without being married. In order to overturn this supposition, which gave the police great headaches as if nothing more serious existed, my uncle and I had to prove with documents that we were uncle and niece.

And things did not stop there! At the police station in the area where my uncle's house was, where I lived absolutely legally, there was a copy of the article from the *Telegraf* newspaper in Constanta. So a label by which we were approached. Thus, the Constanta County Police always asked for investigations at my uncle's house and for he and I to come almost weekly to the police station, where we were asked for statements regarding yoga.

And things did not stop there!

I was "sought" by the police from Constanta in Bucharest and here I mention Major I., against whom I complained to L.A.D.O., the League for the Defense of Human Rights at the time, for exceeding his professional duties, because he harassed me to come to the police in Constanta when I lived in Bucharest, I was still going through a divorce and my address in Bucharest was known. I mention that later this major was dismissed and even imprisoned as a result of the abuses made against other people.

And things did not stop there! Because until the court decision was issued, R.I. was particularly aggressive in word and deed, still invoking his rights as husband, I applied to the Constanta police for my protection and that of the minors Oana and Vlad. From 01.03.1994, when I submitted the application, until 07.09.1994, not only did I not receive an answer, but when I received it, the date 06.04.1994 was written on the envelope, and inside the answer was dated 07.09.1994, the real date on which I received this answer.

So the police - through the chief of police, signature indecipherable - at my request to protect me and my two minor children, Oana and Vlad, from R.I.'s aggressiveness, wrote me a little letter after 6 months telling me that R.I. has "been warned" for his deeds. In other words: in 6 months both my children and I could have been mistreated dozens of times. I mention that this pseudo-response was sent after the opening of the L.A.D.O. investigation, not even taking into account the fact that my request was for protection, and the measure (after 6 months) was a warning. Without a decipherable name of the police chief, without concordance between the date on the envelope and the answer in the envelope, it is obvious that the "answer" was given to have no value in any situation, being only a formality. Why? It doesn't matter, this is about a follower of MISA for whom the status of citizen of Romania with all the constitutional rights deriving from it no longer has value.

And things did not stop there! Not being able to get used to the thought that I divorced him, my ex-husband filed a criminal complaint against T.C., a yoga student from Constanta, with whom he suspects that his ex-wife, that is I, is "having an affair".

For 2 years, four investigators, in turn, rejected R.I.'s criminal complaint due to lack of witnesses and evidence. When the answer to an inquiry came, R.I. filed the complaint once again. Thus, there were four different investigators. This insistence and the sensationalism of a yogi wanting to kill him at the instigation of his ex-wife, resulted in the appointment of a fifth investigator, who, unlike the others who saw that there was nothing true in

what R.I. declared, followed up on the criminal complaint by opening a criminal case on charges of attempted murder for T.C. and incitement to murder for me. Truly astounding, but possible because it was about MISA yoga students. I mention that during the criminal investigation R.I. brought as witnesses his sister and a person who had not been part of the family entourage as he pretended, but who testified about me, his ex-wife, during our marriage. It had been obvious to the other four investigators that this was a false witness. T.C. called as witnesses four people, three of whom were yogis, one of whom was me, two of whom lived in Bucharest. During the criminal investigation that took place in Constanta, we were asked to come from Bucharest several times without actually being questioned. We were asked to come on a particular day, we would wait all day, then late in the evening we were told to leave because they didn't have time for us and we were called back from Bucharest after 3-4 days. After this scenario was repeated three times, the fourth time we were kept for two days in the halls of the Constanta police, without being paid any attention, and were then asked to come on a Sunday, being told that for yogis there is a special program and protocol. The investigator was very unhappy when he saw that all five statements - including mine - ended with the very precise crossing out of the blank space left on the statement sheet. And he manifested his discontent by swearing, screaming and through intimidation towards "you damn yogis", after which followed threats of beatings and imprisonment in the cellar.

But "the little one" remained unmoved, not changing a single word of the statement or the entire statement as requested by the investigator, who was actually screaming, if he didn't want to "be beaten and spend nights in the cellar". This "game" with M. lasted about 8 hours. While this criminal trial was taking place, on 05.06.1997, in the newspaper *Eveniment* - a Bucharest newspaper that is distributed throughout the country - another slanderous article about Gregorian Bivolaru appeared, which mentioned, among other examples, myself, R.C., referring to the 1994 article (because there was a precedent!). But in this article, besides the fact that it was explicitly said this time that I declared something that I was not even asked about, something new appeared. Namely, "that I contributed to an attack on my ex-husband". This statement shows that since the publication of the *Telegraf* article in 1994 my life had been followed in the context of yoga. Is it the files that the police are said to have on the surveillance of some of the yogis? It is certainly an obvious conclusion. The proof: they obviously knew about the ongoing trial in which I was involved. The judge was a young woman of exemplary verticality, who did not get distracted by the fact that we were yogis. The only one, in fact, throughout the journey of the trials through which R.I. put me, starting - let's not forget! - with the denigrating articles in the newspaper, direct and effective tools in the campaign of denigration against Gregorian Bivolaru, yoga, MISA and hence all their sympathizers. The trial ended with the acquittal of T.C., found obviously innocent, implicitly mine also, but not before a request for forensic expertise to which R.I. did not comply. And these facts have not been the subject of any article in the press.

And things did not stop there! Today, this campaign has reached the level of the Inquisition, with yogis becoming a discriminated social class - because there are so many of them, and my example is indicative of what it means to choose to practice yoga in

Romania, or in other words, how I was prevented from choosing to realize my cultural-educational and philosophical aspirations.

Since 1990, at School 43 in Constanta, yoga classes have been held in the school's gym rented by MISA. In 1994, following the appearance of the article in the Constanta newspaper *Telegraf* about me, Gregorian Bivolaru and MISA, the Constanta Education Inspectorate forbade the use of the gymnasium of school no. 43 for the yoga course. That is why, together with the yoga instructors from Constanta, G.A. and S.T., I went to the education inspectorate to report the real facts and to show them the real me, not the one described by the *Telegraf* article. Then I found out that my ex-husband had decided to "fight against MISA", which is why he filed this complaint. I mention that the article in the *Telegraf* newspaper, xeroxed, was the "proof" of the immorality of the yoga class. But it was a proof for the uneducated, because the chief inspector of the Constanta education inspectorate at the time, after talking to me and seeing that I was not the person depicted in the *Telegraf* article, showed me the complaint, which was "supported" by Shankara's verses, from the illustrious Indian poem "Shiva", verses taken out of their spiritual artistic context, which were presented as "the ideology of the M.I.S.A. sect". He said that he realized that what was claimed was not real, but that he received instructions "from above" to prohibit the holding of MISA yoga classes in School 43.

I restate the idea and take it further, or in other words, how I was prevented from opting to realize my cultural-educational and philosophical aspirations and how I have been and am harmed in several circumstances, both I and my daughter, Oana.

For example:

- In my family, except for an aunt, all the relatives don't talk to me anymore, crossing the street if we meet on the street. Occasionally, when I approached them directly and asked them to explain their behavior, the answer was: "We don't want to have problems because you are a yogi.";

- With the neighbors I have to put up with suspicious or rude looks, words said as if by chance when they pass by me, such as "yogis", "Bivolaru's people", "you do it as a group!". I have to fight the insinuations about the fact that I am seen buying a lot of vegetables by posing as "obsessed with my figure", which is fine, because being a vegetarian, in Romania, is something dubious;

- With acquaintances I have to refrain from acting like a vegetarian if I don't want to provoke suspicion in my relationships of any kind, because admitting that you are a vegetarian means, in general, the invariable questioning eyes and the exclamation: "You are one of Bivolaru's"? What in other countries in the world is a life choice, here, now, in Romania, due to the image created by biased, lying and petty investigative journalists because they play a dirty "game" towards Gregorian Bivolaru, yoga and "Bivolaru's yogis", is something downright criminal, being looked at with strange eyes for this reason alone. It is enough to be a vegetarian to raise suspicions that you are a yogi, and a yogi is the same as a terrorist, a criminal, depraved, and who wants to be seen around such a "specimen"??

- At work, in my work relationships, I also have to hide that I am a vegetarian or a yogi if I don't want to lose my clients or employees.

And things did not stop there!

Following the divorce trial, by court decision, although the father was violent in word and deed, the children were entrusted to the father because “it was in their interest” especially from a “moral point of view”, the mother being “preoccupied with yoga”. And so, Vlad was beaten at the age of 5 by his father - with a court decision in force - causing him a deviated septum by hitting him in the face, because he looked like me, his mother. And it was the court of law that decided, based on the newspaper articles in which Gregorian Bivolaru and MISA were slandered - brought as evidence and taken into account as such in a divorce trial! - that I, because I practice yoga, do not have the moral character to raise my children, and it is in their interest, of the children, to stay with the “father, who is aggressive in word and deed”, as it was ascertained through the witnesses’ testimony, and the court decision itself shows. Regarding the forensic certificates that I presented in court, not only were they not taken into account, because I was a yoga practitioner, but as can be seen from the court decision, they were mentioned only as “medical certificates” not forensic, which from a legal point of view have another value. And nothing is specified about the attempt on my life, but the blatant and unproven lie that I violated the obligation of fidelity became the reason the court considered me guilty of breaking the marriage, along with the truth that I practiced yoga. Because of the 3 reasons invoked, it is only true that I practiced yoga. This is the main fault on the basis of which I did not present the moral guarantee for raising my children, balanced against the aggressiveness proven through witnesses of R.I. and that continued towards them, as I have shown in the case of Vlad. As for Oana’s unjustified absence from school, there were 3 days in 4 years!, which in the eyes of the “bought” court, meant a lack of interest in raising my children. Intentionally, in fact, there was no reference to the number of days Oana was absent. And the 4 social services home visits carried out in Bucharest that specified that I have material and moral conditions to raise my children, are not even mentioned!

And things did not stop there:

My son Vlad, because he was not allowed to see his sister and mother since he was 4 years old - because by practicing yoga the mother is “depraved” -, at the age of 8 suffered from alopecia. The disease manifests as hair loss on portions of the head and is due to intense emotional suffering that the person cannot overcome. In other words, Vlad couldn’t handle missing his sister and mother. I mention that the disease ceased shortly after he was allowed to visit us, without him following a sophisticated treatment.

And things did not stop there:

A year after the attempted murder, Oana suffered from “night terror”, having nightmares that her father was trying to kill her like he tried with me. Who, because of practicing yoga in the way the newspapers wrote, didn’t deserve to live! And she was raised by me!

And things did not stop there:

My daughter, now 22 years old, for the past 6 years when she goes to visit her brother has to hide that she is a vegetarian.

And things did not stop there:

I work in design and landscaping, house restorations and water features. At the

beginning of March 2004, I had just finished handing over a mural of 30 square meters in Bucharest, and the beneficiary, satisfied, had shown himself eager to continue collaborating, offering me a subject to work on for the next contract at the end of the same month of March 2004.

In 2003, I was contacted to do the interior design for a mini-hotel in a tourist area in Focsani, together with C.B., who was going to make all the furniture for the hotel. The work started on 25.03.2004. I mention that in both situations the beneficiaries knew that C.B. and I were yogis. The quality work we carried out for other beneficiaries decoupled us from the label that the newspapers put on “Bivolaru and his people” over the years.

But the way in which the raids of 18.03.2004 were made public, the incendiary and illegal presentation, threw a chilling shadow over Gregorian Bivolaru, MISA, its members and its sympathizers: paramilitary group, drug addicts, pimps, social danger, even a danger to the state, terrorists, ..., and other abominable accusations, none of them proven, but abundantly publicized. That principle that applies even to a notorious criminal and is called presumption of innocence did not exist for Gregorian Bivolaru, yogis and MISA, and the terror was thrown by TV channels and the press - those who vehemently publicized that we were a paramilitary group - on the souls of yogis in Romania, who woke up overnight with a rifle to their heads, in their own bed, in their own home, robbed of goods, money and documents. All the images with the visible faces of yogis, scantily dressed because they were in their beds, just woken up by the men in balaclavas, were re-broadcasted at regular intervals, and the viewers were told that they were real and those were the MISA yogis, who had Gregorian Bivolaru as their spiritual mentor. Yantras and the portrait of Jesus were filmed, and they were called pornographic. It's incredible! and it can be verified!

With such an image on our shoulders, not only did I suddenly lose the two contracts I mentioned above, but I also didn't get any others for a year and three months. I won't tell you about the horror we have experienced and the huge questions about the integrity of our and our children's lives, about freedom in our own country, because there are no words to encompass this.

I mention that everything I have written here represents only fragments of what I have lived and am living for now as a yogi in Romania, my country that I love and that I want free from the vipers that have invaded it and that want to drive out of the country those of us who feel Romanian.

Ionuț Eugen Pohariu²

My name is Pohariu Ionuț Eugen, I'm 37 years old, I live in Bucharest, I'm a professional actor and I'm in the tenth year of the Yoga course, instructor Camelia Roșu.

² Ionuț Eugen Pohariu, "Testimony", Gabriel Andreescu, *MISA. Radiografia....*, pp. 286-295 (Translated from Romanian by Cristina Andreescu).

I would like to make a few clarifications about what has happened over time regarding my “status” as an artist and yogi in Romanian society, the reactions of some of my peers towards my outlook on life (in which non-violence, non-stealing, the study of sacred writings, freedom of conscience and love predominate), towards my lacto-vegetarian diet, things that I did not think I would ever have to explain, because they seem to me quite intimate and deeply connected to my own beliefs.

The incredible situation that our country has been going through lately in terms of flagrant violations of justice (especially in relation to yogis and the Minerriads, most of these attacks being manipulated by politicians or created through the deliberate misinterpretation of the truth with the help of the media), leads me to state the following, thus identifying them as an alarm call to stop any forms of discrimination and persecution once and for all, in this country that wants to be an integral part of a modern, harmonious, democratic civilization.

I graduated from the Spiru Haret High School of Mathematics and Physics in the city of Tulcea and then I did 2 more years of study in Bucharest, in mechanical-automotive engineering. During this period, although I was in a STEM field of study, certain circumstances and inspirations brought to light what I was going to become and really wanted to become.

So at the age of 17 I took the first place in the country in pantomime with the help of a unique comic number, in the largest national art contest of that time; at the age of 19 as well, but with a different pantomime number, with the addition of a first place in recitation; and shortly after I also received the Grand Prize for Acting (“Stefan Voda”) in the student play with the same title, under the guidance of director and professor Cătălin Naum.

All these artistic achievements strengthened my conviction that what I was experiencing inside could take shape and materialize in a broad and eloquent way, finding its success in the souls of those who were watching me.

As the wise man says: What is inside, is also outside! What is above, is also below!

So there I was, ever since then, completely immersed in my art, in an assiduous and inspired work of rediscovering the true harmony and universal beauty in myself, work that had its fruits in the high states of tranquility or well-being, in the cathartic torrents of tears or the waterfalls of laughter overflowing in endless multicolored shades for my loved ones, for the public, for the surrounding worlds!

I graduated from the Academy of Theater and Film with full marks in the art of the theater and film actor, was employed in a professional theater beginning in my fourth year of studies, took part in numerous tours in the country and abroad that resulted in awards and spiritual satisfaction, and represented Romania at a high level within the European Union of Theaters.

And as a sublime culmination of what I had started, something else wonderful appeared in my life: Yoga and the spiritual teacher!

So I had started practicing Yoga, which helped me quit smoking, gambling, lying, and gave me a more robust health, a more youthful tone and body, a more vigorous stage voice and why not, more savings, because I no longer needed cigarettes, coffee, meat, medicines.

Some of you may be wondering, “Why Yoga?”

Because I realized that the two, art and yoga, go together, hand in hand.

The purpose of an artist is to live in full harmony with the world.

Synchronicity: just like the purpose of a yogi.

If the world is a theatre, then the actor’s first role is played on the stage of his own existence, and the way he does it is the measure of the awakening of his soul and his consciousness to the archetypal values of beauty, goodness and universal harmony!

Again synchronicity: these are also the ideals of an authentic yogi.

And, because just as the tree is recognized by its fruits, so both the yogi and the actor are known by their states. By the wonderful states!

But with the arrival of these beautiful mornings, the tests inherent in spiritual evolution began to appear!

What tests am I talking about?

In newspapers and on TV, lies began to flow about the yoga class, about the existence of so-called sexual orgies, drugs, weapons; aberrant lies and obvious fabrications to us, those who were in class weekly and saw the truth in our daily lives. Especially since after all the raids absolutely nothing was found of what the newspapers were chattering about. (Because there was nothing to find! And the authorities knew it too! Because there were enough of them “hidden” among the students!)

At first, I said to myself:

Hogwash, they don’t know what to write anymore and invent sensational news! It’s nothing, I’ve been through the sieve of theater criticism!... This can also be fixed: criticism is something that you can avoid by saying nothing, doing nothing and being nothing. But these lies were growing day by day, and people began to look at us as pariahs. I didn’t understand what was happening..., what a huge gulf between what I was experiencing in my daily life and the gossip in the press... that they ended up fabricating criminal cases about ... prostitution without prostitutes, arms trafficking without weapons, drug use without drugs!

And the thing with Madalina, forced by the prosecutors to give a statement against her will, because in her Diary, they say, all sorts of nocturnal idylls are recorded, like Catalina from our poet’s “Luceafarul”³, who, drunk on adolescent fairytales, imagined herself in the arms of a spirit!

And let’s be honest: only good girls keep a diary. The “bad” girls don’t have time for that... Then the thing with the Gendarmerie, in balaclavas, barging in, armed to the teeth, over peaceful people (Yes! Over my dear classmates!), breaking down the unlocked doors, knocking down without any real reasons and without even having search warrants!! Worse than in Ceausescu’s time!

Only later did I begin to understand why we were not left alone, why we were bothering some people.

“When a wise man appears in the world, you can recognize him by the fact that all fools hate him,” said Bisanne de Soleil.

3 Luceafărul („Lucifer”) is a narrative poem by Romanian author Mihai Eminescu. Many literary critics consider this poem one of the greatest accomplishments in Romanian literature (editor’s note).

The distorted image of Grieg was deliberately created by political order, and those of the old regime (and who were still in power behind the curtain and behind the set decor) already had something against our teacher, whose spiritual views went beyond the limits of the whole theory of dialectical materialism of communism! And the media (press and television) was that ideal revolving stage through which this game could be played, thus taking advantage of the credulity of the masses.

But it wasn't just a spin on a wooden floor and it wasn't just a utopian role: it was our very life, and the show that had the traits of a thriller was a LifeShow! "INSIDER"! "MATRIX"! in Romania, in front of the screens and the red curtain! Beyond... the hidden trace of "making fun of a bad situation", truly, I am telling you: immense damage was caused to us at work, at home and even in our families, and those with whom we came into contact looked at us as intruders.

And with this, there also appeared the mists of illusion, the darkness of the fear to tell the truth, the shadows of those of us who fearfully passed close to the walls of the houses, hiding from our own identity lest we be pointed at!

Only then did the Master's words resonate in my heart: "Never be afraid of shadows! They only show that there is light nearby".

Only then did I realize that... it is real, that we should not be afraid to tell the truth, that something must be done to transform the image of us, that we are not "insiders", that we have been here since we were born, that we speak the same language, that we are from the same nation, of Dacians and of Trajan, that we did not come into the world as "intruders", but as human beings with the same rights as all others...

So I began to defend my justice and my truth "and my needs and my nation" like Mircea the Elder in (Eminescu's) "Letter III", to be reborn from my ashes like the Phoenix bird, even if sometimes it seemed like I was fighting with windmills, like (Cervantes') Don Quixote.

Here are some of the extreme situations I have gone through:

- I was forced to leave the Odeon Theatre, following the repeated insistence of the deputy director, who said I was making her life difficult with my presence there - although from a professional and human point of view she had nothing to object to, I played in many plays of caliber from the theatre's repertoire, her attitude towards me had been excellent, of sympathy and friendship, until the moment she found out that I was a yogi;

- When I created a spiritual play ("Eu sau EU") within the Sophrozin Theatre, because we did not have a suitable space for staging the play, I went to a former acquaintance of mine, director of the Comedy Theatre at that time, and asked him to facilitate the rental of the hall at a time when the hall would be free (this action leading to a contract and money, obviously!), he replied slightly intimidated that he couldn't do it, dodging in various ways... (it was not difficult for me to reveal his theatrical play beyond the masks)... finally confirming to me that he couldn't do it because there was a circular from the Bucharest City Hall, which stipulated that actors who practice Yoga should not be allowed on any stage of the theaters financed by the City Hall! That is, almost all of them: Odeon, Nottara, the Small Theatre, the Very Small Theatre, Bulandra and so on.

„What do you mean? Regardless of whether they are professionals or not,

regardless of talent or not, regardless of whether we sign a contract or not - I asked - well, what is that?"

„Ioan, he answered, between the [director’s] chair under me and my friendship with you, I prefer this one!"

And he had shown me the chair - obviously!

Not infrequently at the Odeon I had to have my sense of improvisation sharpened to the maximum in order to avoid or pretend that I did not see the ironies or the mockery of my colleagues (such as: “How are you, herbivore!”, “Does chewing the cud work for you?”, “When you shit, is it green?”).

Thank God for Romanian humor, because sometimes it seems as if they were bathed as babies in a bath of parables and anecdotes!

And I used to say to them: “That the elephant is also a herbivore, and what a damn huge animal it is, that it can break you under its feet even if it is not a carnivore, and that its ivory is stronger than all these little teeth that use Colgate and eat hamburgers, and that it remains really bright beyond the ages, so people kill themselves over it so that they can then wear it carved in thousands of pieces of jewelry and show off what they have!"

And with the green, I told them that “as luck would have it”! Because... the color (and beauty) is given by the mind and the eye of the looker, it is not what I alchemize!"

After one rehearsal, a famous actor from the National Theatre of Bucharest, came towards me with an incomprehensible violence and slammed me against the wall of the building, asking me but rather monologuing: “What, man, are you good?” Zbang - one! “Tell me, man, are you harmonious?” Zbang, one more! “Hey, don’t you defend yourself?” ...

At some point, seeing that the hits did not stop, I grabbed his hands and asked him to stop because it didn’t look like a joke anymore... To which he told me:

“Well, it’s not a joke... Well, Yogi, don’t you see that there is both good and evil in this world!"

And the series of blows continued, until the paint on the walls started to cling to me.

I couldn’t believe it: he was an actor I respected for his work, and there was a discordant note between what he was playing and what he really was! He took advantage of his status as a star, of the fact that I was at the beginning of the road and of the fact that he knew that I practiced non-violence!

I didn’t know what to do and then I saw for a fraction of a second my thought coming out of the sliding roof of the theater beyond the clouds, towards a world full of gentleness, tenderness and love, towards the kingdom of the Good God!

Then, I regained my strength, I grabbed his hands once more and said in a whisper, looking him straight in the eyes: “There is an absolute good beyond the duality you are talking about! And stop being violent, because all this will turn against you!"

At which he fell silent and let his hands fall at his sides, saying: “See, this is the real you, a helpless guy, a vegetable, who follows after that Grig of yours! You don’t even deserve me beating you!"

Should I also tell you that he should have listened to me? A week later, our great actor was admitted to the Emergency Hospital and underwent cosmetic surgery on his nose

because another actor broke it with his head in a fight. The difference was that this time, the other actor was not a yogi!

Following the raids in March 2004, I went through a very difficult period because not one of those I told could believe that such a thing could be true in a country of our century, that there are still medieval influences in a state of law, that the justice system could do things only because a politician dictated it!

And in those difficult moments, many doors closed in our faces, some doing it for fear of losing their positions because they interacted with us, others even doing it with bad intentions, as in the following example.

The audio and video equipment, computers, all the specific materials from the Lotus Companies and Studio Headquarters were confiscated by the authorities who had been ordered to do so, and as a result many of us could no longer do our jobs.

That's when I phoned a former friend whom a few years before I had helped artistically (with my voice) in his project of setting up an audio-video studio, which he badly needed, because he was a well-known singer in Romania and also did advertisements to support himself.

When I called him, I told him that it was my turn to ask for his help, since I found myself in a similar situation to his in the past, and thus asked for his support for a job in an artistic field (voice advertisement). His answer was curt: "I'm sorry, Ioan! There are many others in line! I really wanted to tell you a long time ago! You were full of optimism, saying that if you do good things, good things will come to you! Look at your good things now! You pay for freedom!"

And he hung up. I couldn't believe it, I didn't understand anything. I wanted to call him back so he would explain what the problem was, but I immediately found out that he had been co-opted into a certain circle... of influence. I understood then that he had a task in connection with me as a yogi... Once politics comes in the door, friendship goes out? Once politics is out, yoga enters! Well, what does one have to do with the other?

Both are millennial, but only one is based on the truth!

Many of the rumors were about sexuality, about orgies on stage or other such lies supported by the media, but which, *even if they had been true*, did not break any law. In addition, what was said was exactly the opposite of reality, those TV stations broadcasted erotic sequences not only late at night but even during the day, and some of the actors who made such statements and who sometimes looked at me as at a debauched person, themselves played in plays („Au pus cătușe florilor”, „Danaidele”, „Zooeroticon” etc) or films („Cel mai iubit dintre pământeni”) in which nude scenes appeared and which elevated homosexuality as the main theme in an “artistic work”.

I say this because in art, the actor is fully responsible for the emotions he generates during the performances. He must understand that to feel and to evoke the negative states of anguish and disillusionment means to bring and generate strange resonances, poisoning his psyche and that of others, and to call on and to give joy, love, trust means to call into his being and that of the spectators beautiful and uplifting feelings, which can only be useful to everyone.

These fabrications of rumors also had harmful effects among my neighbors: one of

the neighbors (retired as a young woman on psychiatric grounds) began to knock on my door screaming: “Because she knows what we are doing here!” (Which we, I was alone?!), “That she saw on TV who we are!” (She had seen me on TV at a meeting where I was asking for the return of the goods confiscated a year before), “We’re going nuts with these orgies!” And then she started pouring out all her bitterness, screaming about everything she had been through in her life. She kicked the door with her hands and feet. I didn’t know what to do: go out and talk to her...., I had made such failed attempts before, or to call the police to defend me? But which Police? The one who confiscated our personal belongings and those of our companies and who had not yet returned them to us, after 14 months of promises?

I then resorted to a purely spiritual option: the blessing of that human being. On my word of honor that after that, in a few minutes, nothing could be heard from behind the door.

Silence had fallen!

At one point in the Theater there was even a small “tantric legend” about me, about that gentle, mysterious and apparently harmless man, who actually “is always at it” and that because of this my poor girlfriend, also an actress of the National Theater, left me because she could no longer stand how much “I fucked her in every corner and in every hole!” (I apologize, but I have reproduced word for word what the current rector of U.A.T.C. told me), a rumor that also amused my ex-girlfriend because we had not been making love since about my first year of yoga, when I was a “freshman”, and this gossip appeared after the fourth year of the course, when my relationship with her had long since faded from her point of view.

I was often insulted on the street when I was leaving the courtyard of the premises where the classes were held, and those who came into contact with us were large men with an attitude, quite violent, recalcitrant, looking for any reason for quarrel, usually behind the wheel of a car and shouting words that I do not want to express now.

That is what happened one day when a car suddenly braked right next to the entrance gate, where I was with three other female colleagues, before going towards the public transport buses that would take us each to our homes. Inside this car there were four quite good-looking men who were trying to look like “neighborhood bums”, who wanted at all costs to pick on the girls, knowing that they are yogis: “What are you doing in here, orgies?” I calmly replied: “No, yoga, asanas, meditations and ...”. To which he answered, obviously annoyed but never looking me in the eyes: “I wasn’t talking to you! Listen, girls, how about joining us for a small one? We are good for it too.” The girls did not answer them and continued on their way. The most impudent began to push it, starting to swear at the girls for not paying attention to them.

I intervened verbally to shift the attackers’ attention from the girls and divert the discussion to something else, more beneficial. “Please calm down, you seem like adults. These attitudes do you no honor.” To which he answered indignantly: “Man, I wasn’t talking to you, stay out of it! Be careful or I’ll take you to the Station, because I’m from Police Station no. 3!” ... “And I’m from Directorate 5!”⁴, I answered promptly. In the

4 “Direcția 5” is a band from Romania that was formed in 1991 (editor’s note).

meantime, the girls, slightly smiling, had gotten away from the place in question, leaving only me with the four. The largest one was left with his mouth half-open, almost began to foam at the mouth, wanting to get out of the car to go at me. But just then 2 more cars were coming, from opposite directions, and started to honk, which made them move from the middle of the street where they had stopped. “Pull over to the right so I can get off and go at this one, see what I’ll do to him!”, he said to the driver, pointing to me.

But when they got to the front of the gate, I was gone! And I had not resorted to any invisibility technique!

As was to be expected during this period, most of the companies, associations and foundations through which yoga practitioners carried out their activities were financially audited. Thus, I was also called several times as a witness in one of the cases and to verify the legality of some sponsorships and contracts within the Foundation of which I am vice-president.

At the first meeting (the one at the Police General Inspectorate), I have to admit that the questions were related only to the activity [of the Foundation], since it was a financial audit, which ended well, because everything was fine at the Foundation. It was clear that the people there had been ordered to audit us, and they did so in accordance with the applicable laws, limiting themselves to what they had to ask strictly in relation to the note in the summons.

But a few months later, just before the presidential elections (!), I was summoned to the Prosecutor’s Office, although I had the OK of the financial auditors, and those from the General Inspectorate of the Police of Bucharest had said that everything was fine. So something was wrong about the new summons! What do you think was the reason for it? My participation in Thursday’s rally in support of MISA (the summons’ date was the day I was there!), when what I had to say reflected an indisputable truth: the fact that we were being persecuted and discriminated against. At that time, the PSD was the ruling party and the decision-making force on all levels was Prime Minister A. N., Grieg’s main accuser. But these political orders, secret meetings in the middle of the night at the Prosecutor’s Office, summonses signed whenever they felt like it, sent based on sympathies and antipathies and without having any connection with the legal reality, only proved that we were in a state where the dictatorship was beginning to stabilize.

Here’s how that meeting went. I had barely entered the room on the ground floor of the Prosecutor’s Office attached to the Court of Appeal with my lawyer, when one of the commissioners there began to insult me about my career, my job and my life itself, speaking vulgarly, sharply and insinuatingly about me, MISA and Grieg. I said that I would get up and leave, because that was not the reason for the summons as written on it. I was verbally stopped and then the commissioner left and three other good-looking men, looking as if they had descended from a James Bond movie, came in in his place, people who were leading the cases related to MISA and whom my lawyer knew well. In a warm and welcoming tone, they began to try to get something out of me (with questions like: what is the connection between me and Grieg, etc., etc.). I always said that I wanted to go back to what was written in the summons, they said that this is not why they called me there and that they can write another summons at any time, even in front of me! So

I stayed there for 4-5 hours, trying to slalom between the trick questions and the hidden taunts, trying to talk only about my professional activity and not about my private life or the intimacies they wanted on display, hoping to add more to the case in which Grieg was unjustly involved.

As for my parents, I can say that I had a lot of love and understanding from them and, although there were small tensions at the beginning because of my lacto-vegetarian diet (only with my father: “Come on, man, why not drink a glass of brandy together?!”, “Come on, not even a small piece of meat?! A small one, a chicken leg, because it’s lighter! Come on, just today, it’s a holiday!”), these disappeared as if by magic through my gentle firmness, spiritual and common-sense explanations and especially through the miracle of mutual love!

As for the orgiastic fairy tales, my parents knew that they were nothing but fabrications, knowing well the original, that is, myself, because it was only with their help that I was brought into this manifestation!

Fragment from Mădălina Dumitru’s book, *The Broken Flight*⁵

An inhumane, brutal search

I woke up to some very loud banging as if the house was collapsing on top of me. I looked out the window and saw masked individuals with some kind of black stockings on their heads scaling the courtyard fences and violently breaking the windows on the ground floor of the house. Others were hitting the entrance door with a big object. I could feel my pulse booming in my ears. My heart was beating so hard. I had never experienced such an intense state of fear. I thought I was going to die. I ran as fast as I could to my friend Mirona’s room, and I shouted as loud as I could:

- Mirona, Mirona, wake up, they have come to kill us!

It was around 8 o’clock in the morning. It was like I was in a terrible nightmare. I was terribly scared. I wanted to hide in the closet. Then, I thought of jumping out of the window; we were on the upper floor. We didn’t have time to do anything. The masked men, whom I initially thought were burglars, forcefully entered Mirona’s room. Some of them had some kind of uniform. It wasn’t until sometime later that I understood they were gendarmes. They were waving guns at us and shouting brutally:

– Get down, get down! Lay down, lay down! Don’t move! If you move, we will shoot you!

I was close to the window, and again, I wanted to jump outside. Then, Mirona let out a scream, and a gendarme rushed towards me.

– Let her jump if this is what she wants!

I heard another masked man say, who had just burst into the room. That gendarme

⁵ Mădălina Dumitru, *The Broken Flight*, pp. 14-19.

snatched me away from the window and slammed me into the closet door. Approximately 20-30 gendarmes entered the room, all wearing black balaclavas on their heads. They burst over the fence, through the courtyard, and through windows. They entered the house both through the windows and through the entrance door, which they broke. They had the whole house surrounded. Five of them were yelling at us at the same time, telling us not to move. Their guns were pointed at us. I fell to my knees. I could not understand what was going on.

Although I could hear what was being shouted at us, I could not react. I froze. It was like I was completely paralysed. I looked at them without understanding anything. I heard the brutal commands, but I could not understand them. I was completely terrified. One of the gendarmes rushed at me very violently, pulled me away and slammed me face down on the ground. He kicked me very hard from the side with his boot on my right breast. I started screaming in pain, and then he pulled my hair and ordered me to shut up. I was almost out of breath. My mouth felt tight. They forced me to the ground. I held my hands to my chest because my breast, which was kicked with so much cruelty, was hurting so badly. I closed my eyes, childishly hoping that maybe this terrible nightmare would end. I could not breathe due to the terror. In those moments, I thought they were going to shoot us, and I was going to die. For several hours, they would not let me get up off the floor, not even for a moment. If I moved, they screamed at me. Some masked men kept their guns pointed at us. During all this time we were filmed. We were not allowed to get dressed. I was only wearing the clothes I had been sleeping in. I was only wearing a T-shirt and knickers.

Mirona was wearing only knickers, and her breasts were uncovered. We both stayed like this for a long time, lying on the floor naked, face down, with a gun pointing at us while we were filmed. At one point, a gendarme put his boot on Mirona's head and pressed hard with the sole of the boot. There were about five gendarmes guarding us at that time. At one point, a policeman supported his gun on my head. I think he was also tired. It crossed my mind then that maybe the gun would go off, that anything could happen, and I thought that maybe, in this way, everything would come to an end.

They beat our dog, who was barking loudly and finally hit him so hard that the poor dog fainted. I didn't even dare ask for a handkerchief to wipe my face. I asked for water, and one of the men, who I later found out was a prosecutor, asked me if the urine I drank that morning was not enough. But he did not say the word urine, but the very ugly word used by thugs... I then asked them to let me call my mother, but they pretended not to hear me.

They told us not to stand up to them because they had a warrant. I could not understand a word they were saying. My friend asked them to show us their IDs. One of the women waved a sheet of paper in front of our eyes.

The thunder of the gendarme's boots walking around the house terrorised me. They opened the closets noisily, and, every time, I flinched because I had the sensation that something could fall on me and crush me at any moment. I did not even realise anymore how much time had passed. We were kept lying on the floor for several hours while some of the gendarmes who were not guarding us packed everything valuable in the house into

cardboard boxes. At one point, I heard one of the gendarmes pouring water into a glass, and I wanted to ask him to give me a sip, but I could not say a word. I just couldn't. I felt I was about to faint. I was very thirsty and dizzy. My whole body was hurting. From my room, the ringing of the mobile phone could be heard several times. One of the gendarmes came over with the phone in his hand and, reading from the screen, commented sarcastically:

– My love! Ha ha ha! Whose love is this? Whose mobile phone is this? It's mine! I turned to the side slightly, looking up towards him. I replied, looking at him worriedly, and I stretched out my hand, hoping he would give it to me. My beloved Remus had called me.

Laughing sardonically, he dismantled it in an instance and, looking at me fiercely, threw it at me:

– Enough about love! Face to the floor!

And turning towards another gendarme who was watching the whole scene, he said:

– What a mess... Look at them!

Then, a state of panic set in. I had no way of telling my beloved Remus about the anguish and terror I was going through. I felt like I was suffocating. I was completely helpless. I felt sick, and I wanted to throw up. My whole body was stiff. I managed to say that I felt sick and needed to go to the bathroom. I was pulled up from the ground by two gendarmes and taken to the bathroom. In the hallway, I saw two other gendarmes rummaging through the fridge, and I overheard them encouraging each other to taste the food that was there, saying:

– Have some of this, try it. It is good, it is really very good.

One of the two gendarmes who were taking me to the bathroom called two women who also had black balaclavas over their faces. They went into the bathroom with me and closed the door. I leaned over the toilet, and I started to vomit. During this time, the locket around my neck fell into the toilet. One of the two women watching me in the bathroom from a distance of 30-45 cm simply pushed me to the side, leaned over the toilet and reached into the toilet, thinking that I want to flush or hide something. When she saw it was the locket, after a short discussion with the other woman, she washed it and put it in her pocket. She said:

– Is it made of gold? Don't worry, we will take care of it! That gold jewellery was a gift from my beloved Remus. The locket was gone. I've never seen it again.

The gendarmes were also on the upper floor where both of us were, and on the ground floor, where another person lived, who was the owner of the house. They searched the entire house and tore down closet after closet, with all the things inside, throwing everything on the ground and then trampling over them with their feet. I saw them climbing on the office table with their boots and the kitchen furniture. They simply destroyed everything they found. At one point, I heard some gendarmes asking the others:

– Which one is the minor? This one or the other?

Then, some of them opened the fridge door again, which was in the hallway. At one point, a fat gendarme exclaimed while eating our food:

– Boy, if I was to build a house, I would make it like this one!

Another, gulping down the juice on the shelf, kept him company, laughing out loud.

They were like a couple of escaped lunatics. They ate all the food in the fridge and what they found in the closets and threw the leftovers around everywhere. They took with them almost everything we had in the house.

I found out later on, after the house search, that the legal procedure requires that everything which is taken away has to be presented for identification and signed for so that it will not be changed afterwards, meaning it needs to be registered. Moreover, according to the search warrant, they were only supposed to take computers, hard disks, and CDs. Therefore, the things they took had nothing to do with the provisions of the search warrant.

Those goods were, in fact, stolen from us. We never saw them again.

A female prosecutor ordered the gendarmes to load everything they could take onto a huge, dark-coloured army truck parked in front of the entrance gate. They took away our vacuum cleaner, books from our library, the stereo, TV, jewellery, the money they found among our things, bathrobes, perfumes, hairdryer, teas, medicinal plants, medicine, my school notebooks and books, pictures, personal diaries, etc. The name of this female prosecutor is Nica Andreea. The judge who gave the green light for that house search is Lia Savonea. But I found out about all this later.

At the time, I was just terrified and did not understand anything that was happening to me. All the noises that I heard in the house terrified me.

After I was taken to the bathroom, they forced me to lay back down on the floor. I started to shake. Then, Mirona wanted to come to me to calm me down, but the gendarmes would not let her move from her place. Then, they forbade her to look at me. She wanted to talk to them, to convince them that it was a mistake. They told her that if she did not shut up, they would shoot her in the head. Mirona wanted to say something again. In that moment, a gendarme stamped on the floor so violently that, for a few moments, I thought they had shot her. I felt my head pounding. I started to cry loudly. Mirona did not say anything anymore to the masked people. She just whispered to me to calm down:

– Everything will be alright, it will be alright...

After a while, we were separated. I was left in Mirona's room, and she was taken to my room, still guarded by the masked men pointing their guns toward us. Towards evening, two men in civilian clothes came into the house. They spoke with the female prosecutor, and I heard them asking her:

– Where is the minor? Which one is the minor? We must take her away.

The female prosecutor came to me and said:

– You will go with these gentlemen. And don't make any noise. Do you understand?

– Where will they take me? I asked her fearfully.

– You will see when you will get there, she replied insistently.

– I don't want to go anywhere! I shouted and burst into tears.

Two gendarmes grabbed me and lifted me from the floor. I had been lying face down for many hours, and my chest was hurting terribly. My arms and legs were almost completely stiff; I felt as if my temples were pulsating, and I could not stop crying. They warned me that if I dared to resist them, they would take me away by force. I didn't want to go with them. I didn't know where they would take me. I was afraid and, at first,

resisted. The female prosecutor then said to me in a harsh and sharp tone:

– Hey, stop whining, give them your ID, and leave with them immediately! If you do not obey, it will be very bad for you!

Then, I got even more scared and resisted as much as I could. I was very shocked and disoriented. I felt dizzy, I was moving around the room, and I was unable to get dressed. They had kept me lying down on the floor for hours. I felt terrible. My legs were shaking. Dazed with fear, I was wandering around the room and couldn't get dressed. It was as if I did not recognise the house. I didn't know where my clothes and my purse were and where my ID card was. I was moving in slow motion. One of the gendarmes shook me and yelled at me to get dressed immediately. My whole body was trembling with fear. After I managed to get dressed, I started walking slowly. One of the civilians got angry because I was not walking as fast as he wanted me to, so he punched me in my back while I was going down the stairs, yelling at me that I am clumsy. He shouted at me while he was shoving me:

– Come on, go down faster! What do you think, clumsy girl? Are we at the boarding school?

I lost my balance and I fell. One of the gendarmes caught my arm and pushed me to walk faster.

I started to cry even louder, and I became very agitated. I was frightened because I didn't know what was going to happen to me, and seeing how violently they treated me, I shouted to Mirona:

– Help me, don't leave me, please! Don't let them take me away! Mirooonaa!

I was struggling, shouting, and yelling out loud. Those merciless civilians forcefully snatched me from the house, covered my mouth with their hands, and pushed me into a van with small windows covered with metal bars, like in the movies with dangerous criminals.

What I didn't know at the time was that this was just the beginning...

Massimo Introvigne, MISA, Grigorian Bivolaru, and Persecution: A New Book by Mădălina Dumitru⁶

It all started with an underage girl the Romanian spiritual master was accused of having a sexual relationship with. Now, she tells her truth.

It was the night of March 18, 2004. Two girls were quietly sleeping in a cozy Bucharest apartment. The apartment was warm, and they were partially undressed. Suddenly, they heard the sound of broken windows and a smashed door, and more than twenty masked men and women stormed into the apartment. At first, the girls believed they were thieves.

6 Massimo Introvigne, "MISA, Grigorian Bivolaru, and Persecution: A New Book by Mădălina Dumitru," *Bitter Winter*, 2/24/2024 - <https://bitterwinter.org/misa-grigorian-bivolaru-and-persecution-a-new-book-by-madalina-dumitru/>.

Then, they realized they were dealing with gendarmes. The girls were immobilized, photographed and filmed in their night attire, the oldest of them with her breasts exposed. The officers broke all the furniture and confiscated computers and correspondence, as well as personal items and jewelry the girls would never recover.

“I heard the brutal commands,” the younger girl recalls, “but I could not understand them. I was completely terrified. One of the gendarmes rushed at me very violently, pulled me away and slammed me face down on the ground. He kicked me very hard from the side with his boot on my right breast. I started screaming in pain, and then he pulled my hair and ordered me to shut up. I was almost out of breath. My mouth felt tight. They forced me to the ground. I held my hands to my chest because my breast, which was kicked with so much cruelty, was hurting so badly. I closed my eyes, childishly hoping that maybe this terrible nightmare would end. I could not breathe due to the terror. In those moments, I thought they were going to shoot us, and I was going to die. For several hours, they would not let me get up off the floor, not even for a moment. If I moved, they screamed at me. Some masked men kept their guns pointed at us. During all this time we were filmed.”

The younger girl’s name was Mădălina Dumitru. Both girls were members of a new religious movement known as MISA, the Movement for Spiritual Integration into the Absolute (MISA). The group was founded by Romanian spiritual master Gregorian Bivolaru, who was at that time the boyfriend of the older girl in the apartment. Unbeknownst to the two girls, this was just one of 16 raids carried out simultaneously against MISA targets throughout Romania by special forces, masked and armed with machine guns and Makarov pistols, in some cases accompanied by prosecutors and TV camera personnel. It was a typical example of the early morning militarized raids against “cults” where media are invited studied by Susan Palmer and Stuart Wright.⁷ They rarely serve any useful law enforcement purpose, and mostly function as a sort of baroque theater, showing to media and society that politicians are vigilant about “cults,” and that they will not be tolerated.

In 2022, I published the first scholarly book in English on MISA⁸. I was aware of Mădălina Dumitru’s important role in the history of the movement but protected her privacy by referring to her simply as “M.D.” Now, she has decided to go public and tell the story in her own words, in a 585-page book called “The Broken Flight.” It is clearly an emic book, with details readers may find hard to believe. However, the essential points of Mădălina’s story have been confirmed by decisions by the European Court of Human Rights, the Supreme Court of Sweden, and an appellate court in Romania.

The raids of March 18, 2004, nicknamed as “Operation Christ,” were advertised by Romanian authorities as “the largest operation against drugs and human trafficking in the history of post-Revolution Romania.” However, no drugs were found, charges of human trafficking were later dismissed by Romanian courts, and no woman complained of having been sexually abused by Bivolaru. Among MISA teachings is a practice of sacred eroticism based on continence, or orgasm without ejaculation, but it was not imposed

7 Stuart A. Wright and Susan J. Palmer, *Storming Zion. Government Raids on Religious Communities*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2015.

8 Michele Olzi, „MISA and Gregorian Bivolaru: A New Book by Massimo Introvigne,” *Bitter Winter*, 06/24/2022 - <https://bitterwinter.org/misa-and-gregorian-bivolaru-by-massimo-introvigne/>.

or forced on any member. The prosecutors and the police were thus left empty-handed. Their only hope was Mădălina. She was 17 and the age of consent for sexual relationship in Romania at that time was 14 (it is now 16). However, Romanian law regards sexual relations between a teacher and a pupil as a crime, and the prosecutors claimed that by teaching yoga Bivolaru could be regarded as her “teacher.” If they could prove that he had a sexual relationship with Mădălina, they believed they could charge him and send him to jail.

The problem, Mădălina explains, is that Bivolaru was never her yoga teacher (except indirectly, by being the leader of the movement). She also emphatically denies she ever had sex with him. She tells the story of how, after the terrifying raid in her apartment, she was taken to a prosecutor’s office, was denied the assistance of a lawyer, was physically and verbally abused, and threatened with dire consequences if she did not sign a short statement that she had slept with Bivolaru. She signed, went home, and the following day came again with a lawyer, giving the prosecutor a statement that she had signed the first one under duress and its content was not true.

Nonetheless, the prosecutor decided to ignore the second statement and consider only the first. Bivolaru was arrested, released, and escaped to Sweden. He was found not guilty in Romania in the first- and second-level trials but was sentenced by the Supreme Court to six years in jail for the single crime of the alleged sexual relation with his 17-year-old “student” Mădălina. However, the Swedish Supreme Court had ordered the Swedish authorities to grant him asylum, having heard the testimony of Mădălina and concluded that her story was eminently believable. The Swedish Supreme Court determined that Bivolaru’s prosecution in Romania was politically motivated and he deserved asylum in Sweden⁹.

In 2016, however, Bivolaru was arrested while he was traveling in France, a country not particularly friendly to “cults,” and extradited to Romania. He was freed in 2017 but accused in Finland of sexual abuse and human trafficking. He was included at the request of the Finnish authorities in the European list of wanted fugitives. He was charged with sexual abuse of female Finnish disciples in France. Although he never visited Finland, he was accused of having “brainwashed” devotees of the MISA ashram in Helsinki through videos and local MISA teachers, so that, by the time they met him in Paris, they had been led to consider sexual intimacy with Bivolaru as desirable. He denies all charges, but this is a story in which Mădălina is no longer involved.

What we learn from the book is the course of Mădălina’s life, and how she encountered MISA through a member of the movement called Grigore Țiplea, a client of her sister’s coffee shop where she worked as a waitress. They quickly became lovers. Although Grigore was not entirely honest with her and waited for months before confessing he was in a long-term relationship with another woman, Mădălina is still grateful to him for having introduced her to MISA. His first name, Grigore, is similar to Bivolaru’s, Gregorian, and when the police seized her journal with intimate details about Țiplea, whom she called Grig or G, they fed it to the media claiming she was confessing she had sex with Bivolaru.

⁹ Rosita Șorytê, „The Swedish Asylum Case of Gregorian Bivolaru,” *The Journal of CESNUR*, Volume 6, Issue 4, July-August 2022, pp. 62-74 - https://cesnur.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/tjoc_6_4_4_soryte.pdf.

In fact, the dates of the journal entries make this impossible, and Mădălina publishes in her book several pictures confirming her loving relationship with Țiplea.

Much more satisfactory was her subsequent relationship with another MISA student, Remus Lomoș, who supported her during the terrible days following the raid of 2004, despite the fact that the court ordered her to remain under the care of a hostile sister whose husband, she claims, tried to sexually abuse her. Unfortunately, while they were engaged and planning to marry, Remus died in a car accident in Germany.

Mădălina continued as a MISA student, and her testimony helped Bivolaru in being granted asylum in Sweden and in being found not guilty in Romania in the first and second level courts. She also tells the story of how the Supreme Court ruling that spectacularly reversed the previous decisions and concluded that Bivolaru did have sex with her was politically motivated and directed by a prosecutor involved in several political scandals.

The situation of the Romanian justice system, however, is described by Mădălina as not hopeless. While she emphasizes the enormous pressure of the media, who slander everybody who dares raise doubts about the prosecution of MISA, including politicians, judges, and scholars, she notes as a positive development the repeated decisions, now final, clarifying that neither Bivolaru nor other MISA leaders were guilty of human trafficking. As judge Ariana Ilieș of the Criminal Section of the Cluj Court wrote in her 2015 decision, “The real and obvious purpose of the indictment and prosecution of the defendants [for human trafficking] was not to hold them criminally responsible, but to dismantle this school of yoga by discouraging its members from exercising their freedom of conscience.” While the words “human trafficking” immediately evoke forced prostitution and organized crime, in the case of MISA they referred to the fact that based on a concept of “karma-yoga” members worked as volunteers for the movement without receiving a salary. “Practically,” Judge Ilieș wrote in her decision, “this case is based entirely only on the completely illegal and out-of-context interpretation that the Prosecutor’s Office gives to the term ‘karma-yoga’ which it defines as ‘compulsory labor.’ However, the statements of both the prosecution and defense witnesses, taken by the court, show what this concept means and why it cannot be associated with any form of exploitation.”

MISA is not the only movement against which accusations of human trafficking and even of organized prostitution have been raised. While she does not mention the Argentinian case of the Buenos Aires Yoga School¹⁰, which has many similar elements, nor the Guru Jára Path¹¹ in the Czech Republic, Mădălina discusses parallels with several movements and even false accusations against Falun Gong in China. Here, she relies mostly on published sources, which may not always be entirely accurate, although she is right in identifying a general pattern of hostility generating persecution.

She also raises the difficult question of why MISA was subject to such extraordinary persecution in Romania. She identifies two reasons. One is the Communist legacy. Alternative spirituality and its leaders, including Bivolaru, started being persecuted during

10 Susan J. Palmer, „The Tragedy of the Buenos Aires Yoga School. 5. Why There Is No ‘Cult,’ No ‘Brainwashing,’ and No ‘Victims,’” *Bitter Winter*, 08/02/2023 - <https://bit.ly/3A0pI2r>.

11 Massimo Introvigne, “Sex, Magic, and the Police: The Saga of Guru Jára,” *The Journal of CESNUR*, Volume 3, Issue 4, July-August 2019, pp. 3-30.

the Ceaușescu regime, and several police officers and prosecutors of Communist times kept their positions in democratic Romania. The second is the attempt of corrupted politicians, including social-democrat Prime Minister Adrian Năstase, who ended up in jail, to divert the public's attention from political scandals by having the media focusing on "cults" in general and the juicy sex-connected story of MISA in particular. Politicians were also accused of tolerating very real human trafficking of minors forced into prostitution, and prosecuting MISA for its non-existent human trafficking gave the impression they were "doing something" about the issue.

The reference to Năstase is a good example of aspects of Mădălina's book readers can find hard to believe but that are supported by documents or court decisions. At the end of 2004 1,500 pages of transcripts from internal meetings of the PSD, Năstase's party, were leaked to the media and posted on the Internet. The MISA case was repeatedly mentioned as a "bread and circus" operation created to divert the attention from the PSD's own scandals.

That Mădălina told her story in a reliable way was confirmed by the Swedish Supreme Court, and that the Romanian police and special forces acted with unbelievable brutality in the raids of March 18, 2004, was the conclusion of the European Court of Human Rights in the decision "Amarandei and Others v. Romania" of 26 April 2016. 26 members of MISA who had been mistreated in the raids were granted € 291,000 in damages. Parenthetically, Mădălina also mentions the European Court of Human Rights 2014 decision rendering justice to Dana Ruxandra Atudorei, a girl she knew that at age 19 was forcibly interned in a psychiatric asylum and kept under heavy psychopharmacological drugs in the attempt of "deprogramming" her and persuading her to leave MISA. Clearly, Mădălina writes from an emic perspective as a MISA student, but the most horrific details of her story have been confirmed by courts of law.

Mădălina's life has been ruined by those who tried to use her against Bivolaru and MISA. When she visits her native village, she claims, she is insulted and has been physically assaulted by people calling her a prostitute and a fallen woman. It is not because of anything she did herself. "I was an unwilling pawn," she writes, "in a much larger plot aimed at the destruction of the MISA Yoga School."