

LIVING LIES: LIVING UNDER THE LIE - DEALING WITH THE LIE

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If someone else could have written my stories, I would not have written them. I have written them in order to testify. And, since testimony cannot be simply relayed, repeated, or reported by another without, thereby, losing its function as a testimony, there is a need for personal testimonies, as I already indicated.

—Elie Wiesel

MY CONTEXT

In 1987, I was 21 years old and had just graduated from my first university—Moldova State University—when I started teaching in a high school located in one of the little, beautiful villages of Orhei district, in the heart of Moldova. Now, we can say that Moldova is a small country in Eastern Europe, but at that time, it was still a part of the biggest communist empire—the USSR. Gorbachev’s “Perestroika” and “Glasnost” were just picking up speed, and National Renaissance was on its way. After five years of instruction and indoctrination, I stepped into my classroom. I wanted to continue my education in a PhD program, but the Communist Party of the USSR decided for me, as well for most of my classmates and other graduates, that I was to embark on a widespread literacy campaign. I did not have another opportunity or option. The power was not in my hands. The Communist Party was in charge of my future, dictating where to go, what to do, how to do, etc. Yet, I thought the cause was a noble one. I swallowed the knot and deeply hid my aspirations about doing research in archeology and history, but I did not cease dreaming that a time would come sometime in the future when I could follow my dream. I had some knowledge in my head, although it was mostly lies and forgeries related to our history that had been conceived in the Soviet propaganda laboratories. I had *minimum minimorum* power in my hands to challenge the mythologies, to change the social arrangements and the political status quo. I was viewed as merely a passive knowledge consumer, prepared and expected to fill students—empty vessels (Freire, 1970)—with “precious” knowledge that the oppressor (the Communist Party and the regime in general) had decided I should deliver in order to create a new generation of “Homo Sovieticus,” a new cohort of communism builders—obedient, loyal, unquestioning, and happy people.

And, here I am now, in 2017, a second year PhD student in the Educational Leadership department at Miami University. Finally. After almost 30 years, my dream came true—I do my research in peace education in one of the ivory towers of the U.S. Exciting. Here, I challenge myself to build a new type of curriculum so that I may later implement it in Moldova, that it may change the current state of affairs in public education and in society at large and with a hope that it will bring harmony and peace among all ethnicities living there—unifying, instead of dividing my country.

Moldova signed an Association Agreement with the European Union in 2014 and was regarded as its star pupil in terms of reforms. Despite being a champion of reform, Moldova is now involved in a series of financial and political scandals. A recent report by the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project claims that Moldova has been a money-laundering hub, and over \$80 billion passed through its territory from 2010 to 2014 (NEOnline, 2017). News of the corruption shocked Moldova and

undermined the trust the EU had in the country. The quality of the justice system, as well as the quality of life in general, degraded seriously, provoking a mass emigration of young people from the country, leaving me to wonder whom am I going to teach about peace in few years time.

Unfortunately, Moldovan scholars are not motivated to write about the current promulgation of lies by the Moldovan media. It seems that this has become as dangerous as it was during Soviet times. The censorship is drastic. Most Moldovan media institutions, owned by certain interest groups and oligarchs, serve as tools for manipulating public opinion, unscrupulously and without shame spreading a series of lies and forgeries, convenient for those on power (Cer Si Pamant, 2017). The political power structures took control over the whole court system, such that national legislation does not provide effective measures to counteract dominant positions in the media market (Botnarene, 2017). Vladimir Plahotniuc—leader of the Democratic Party of Moldova and the biggest oligarch in the country—is, de facto, the master of Moldova, “the jester that defies all European leaders” (Butnaru, 2015, n.p.).

Instead, there are many works speaking about how our national history was falsified or offered in half-truth during the Soviet era (1944-1991) (Cașu, 2007, 2010; Musteață, 2000, 2001; Tanasă, 2009; Țăranu, 2013). At the time, we did not hear anything about the crimes of communism in Europe and all over the globe (such as exporting communism and supporting lots of coups d'état). We had no clue; we were not allowed to know about the crimes and different communist experiments committed in our country, such as deportations, organized famine, forced collectivization, banning all religions and denominations, banning other parties and organizations besides the Communist one, denationalization, russification, etc.

MY CURRERE

I perceive *currere* as a time-machine expedition to my past education and to my phantasmagorical future at the same time. It will help me to consider their impact on shaping my own present and, afterwards, to synthesize critical judgment across these moments. Subsequently, it is a resolute way of engaging in self-conscious conceptualization through a multidimensional conversation with myself, in a hope to better understand my life, my mission as an educator, to disclose the relation between me and the Self, and my evolution and education.

REGRESSING INTO LIES AND FALSEHOOD

What intrigues me more when looking back on my past, besides many good things indeed, is the state of Lies and Falsehood in which I grew up. Charting my most important life events as I remember them now, I see the succession of Lies and Falsehood that hover over my life and education. How did I, as a child and adolescent, perceive the signs and “faults” of lies and how did I deal with them? How old was I when I understood that we live among lies? When did I clearly perceive this phenomenon?

In the 70s, in the midst of the 20th century socialist/communist era, I was in the 6th grade. My grandfather, Gregory, read me a poem, which he learned as a student in the 1930s in the Romanian school, when Moldova used to be a part of Romania. My grandpa knew the inferno of war. He had been a soldier in the Romanian army, fought in WWII, and endured Soviet captivity. After participating in WWII and spending 5 years in GULAG, he was one of the luckiest—he returned home. My grandfather went only as far as the 6th grade, which he was boasting about, comparing with my grandma, Ekaterina, who was illiterate. I was struck by the poem, which differed so much from the

poems we were forced to memorize and reproduce in school at that time, most of them dedicated to the communist party and its leader, Lenin. I quickly learned it by heart. One stanza read:

Romania, holy mother,
Your longing voice has been calling on me for a long time,
A dragon has stolen me
From your chest, and took me away.

The next day, I went to school eager to recite it to at least one of my teachers. So, I approached my favorite teacher, Mr. Alexander Savkov, the Russian language and literature teacher. Obviously, without suspecting anything out of the ordinary, he encouraged me to recite. I recited it passionately and waited for feedback. He listened carefully. Then, in a calm manner, without attracting the attention of other students, his colleagues, or the authorities, my teacher asked me how I knew this poem and who taught me. I answered honestly and fearlessly.

Then, he said, in a serious and paternal manner, “Tell your grandfather to not teach you such poems anymore.”

“Why?” I asked, puzzled.

“He’ll explain to you,” was his answer.

After school, I ran to my grandparents’ house to tell my grandpa what happened. He did not say anything back, but I have heard how my grandma scolded him. After that, he did not tell me such stories or poems again until Gorbachev came to power in 1985. Why did I choose Mr. Savkov of all my teachers as a person to whom to recite those verses? I don’t know. My intuition told me that this teacher was probably best suited for that mission.

Or, maybe, I first faced the state of Lies and Falsehood when I saw how my father, Stefan Goma, every single evening followed the same mysterious and blurred ritual. After listening to the official Soviet news on TV, he went into the *casa mare*—a special room in every Moldovan house, designed to celebrate the most important family ceremonies. He closed and locked the door behind him. I had no clue what he was doing there, but I was very intrigued and curious.

I asked my mom about that, but she said vaguely, “He is listening to the radio.”

But, why with the door locked? Why not do it together, like we did while watching the football or hockey games? Why, after exiting from his “retreat,” did he often look troubled but tried not to show it? Why was he whispering to my mother in the other room after that? I had to assume that there was something he didn’t want us to know.

Another story, which I remember from my history class, was also full of Lies and Falsehood. We learned about the evil of all types of colonialism, but nothing about the impact of the Tsarist Empire on Moldova. We studied about the Nazis and Fascism, but nothing about the Molotov-Ribbentrop treaty, mass deportations, forced collectivization, GULAG, and other inhumane Soviet experiments. We studied the vices of capitalism and imperialism, vehemently criticizing the Korean and Vietnam Wars. In contrast, we were celebrating the Afghanistan cause, when the Soviet troops were introduced and a socialist leader was installed, as we were told, “at the request of the Government of Afghanistan” and in accordance with the Treaty of Friendship, Good-Neighborliness, and Cooperation of 1978.

But, the most ridiculous in this plethora of lies was the 1980s prohibition of more than 30 Western rock bands in the USSR, which censored their music on TV, radio, and

in discos and outlawed the promotion and sales of their CDs. Among these groups were my favorites: The Beatles, AC/DC, Black Sabbath, Nazareth, The Sex Pistols, Kiss, Iron Maiden, The Scorpions, Genghis Khan, Pink Floyd, and on and on. Why? Like any teenager who loves music, I could not figure out why. I did not speak English at that time, so I did not understand the lyrics, but I adored the rhythms. If the songs were so dangerous, why was everybody listening to them and eager to pay a fortune on the black market to purchase their CDs? I did not understand, and I refused to accept the so-called “arguments” of Soviet leaders—those leaders considered that music aberrant and nonsensical: “for the reasons of instigating violence, sex, homosexuality, and eroticism; for anti-communism and anti-Soviet propaganda; for incitement to neo-fascism, vandalism, nationalism, and religious obscurantism,” etc. I did not have the feeling that somebody was urging me to do such things. So, it must be something else. An admixture of feelings...

PROGRESSING INTO AN IDEAL WORLD

In the future, I see myself being much more vocal, having a sound, confident voice in the educational field, as well as in my community back in Moldova. My intellectual interests and my vision are related to contributing to the public good, supporting educational reform efforts at the national and grassroots levels. I see myself working to improve less desirable and powerless educational policies. I see how, working together with the whole pedagogic guild, we will discover inspiring, effective tools, maybe some miraculous, best-practice rules, and we will use them in our daily work.

I hope the Moldova Ministry of Education and the Parliament will not be perceived anymore as a graveyard where good bills and reforms die in the embryonic form. I hope and dream that we can live in an ideal world where all societal vices—such as corruption and nepotism, oligarchs, and social injustice—will be just archived stories; a world where justice will triumph for all; where social activism of citizens will be noticed; where coveted peace and harmony among ethnicities will be established due to coalition building and compromises found through dialogue and discourse.

I envision that my dissertation and my work will bring a considerable contribution to the area of education, especially in the domain of peace education, about which I am very passionate and for which implementation I will fight. I glimpse myself continuing my research (maybe postdoctoral studies?). The strategic option of those years is high quality education, and in the vanguard of this shift are the school, students, teachers, and community, of which I am a part. I am convinced that my PhD and my addiction to lifelong learning are responses to my need for self-development and that, so far, the benefits to me are much higher than those I might give back to the public.

ANALYZING INDOCTRINATION

By reflecting on my past and visualizing my future, I realize how my education is woven into the fabric of my personal and public life. It is shaped from the good and the bad parts. I witness how lies, half-truths, biases, and indoctrination have occupied a main part of my schooling during the USSR era, affecting my intellectual interests and emotional condition. I clearly see now how lies and mystification about one’s history and culture, combined with vast half-truths, biases, and subtle indoctrination, is common to thousands of kids living not only under the communist regimes, but also under the so-called postindustrial and democratic ones. I dare to describe these generations as highly molded and mutilated by the megalomaniac autocratic

systems controlled by parties, oligarchs, corporations, etc. I would call them “failed generations,” easy prey, isolated in silliness, influenced only by the “wisdom” of the “wise and beloved” leaders. I don’t know why it is so hard to explain to people that lying, malingering, and simulation are bad and become a reflex developed into an art form. When an ideology brings about disaster for so many, why do we hesitate to stand up and fight back?

Schools, colleges, social environments, and the whole society are the very means of indoctrination. The whole system works in unison. Indoctrination continues with its secret agenda, introducing many ‘-ist’ or ‘-ism’ viruses in both children’s and adults’ fragile minds. Indoctrination breeds an obedience syndrome in their credulous souls. It deforms our characters, for many of us, in an irreversible way. It teaches us to live a lie and not the truth, to accept it, to believe it or at least pretend to believe it. Young people do not understand when and how they are manipulated, so they feel completely helpless. The system expects us to think that all the bad things that happen are the fault of the opposite system—our inveterate enemies.

I see the immense frustration of our young generation who deal with “untruths” and falsehoods at home, in school, and in Mass-media, in a large society. When you are taught lies as truth, the “teachers” expect you to buy the lies, to live thinking they are the truth. It wakes up confusion, disgust, contempt, and resistance to what is required and imposed. Also, it teaches you to accept the lie as a survival factor.

Unfortunately, in a government-controlled system, education is used to indoctrinate young generations from the cradle to the workplace. The system strove long enough to convert and produce teachers teaching those lies and untruths to future generations—as a part of a big plan—educating the masses. This type of system intends to control everything: the minds, the bodies, and the souls. The system manages to turn its citizens into an obedient mass of “followers” and “believers” in the great cause of our leaders, by systemic brainwashing and pushing those who would rebel under the veil of surveillance, like the KGB.

Even though we strive to push progressive education, it is still viewed by many as the learning and memorizing of facts; speak, write, read, and work well with numbers; but less about what is the truth and what is not; less how to love and accept others. Instead of being taught how to think critically, looking at problems and finding solutions for them, students are simply indoctrinated by the educational system—which is a part of a political system. Indoctrination is aimed at influencing young minds to blindly believe in words and facts, without being able to back them up with anything but opinion. I think that today’s young generation is still subjected to the indoctrination practices that we witnessed during our youth. So, now we have what we have. Every nation has the leader, or tyrant, it deserves. We could do more. We are guilty.

In terms of risk, obviously, my father and many others maintained great courage and hope. They were determined that I see the light at the end of the tunnel. Only after Gorbachev’s accession to the Kremlin, in 1985, and his plans to liberalize—Perestroika and Glasnost—did I understand what my dad was doing every night in the *casa mare*. He listened to the real radio: “Radio Free Europe,” “Radio Liberty,” and “Radio Vaticana,” transmitted in Romanian and Russian (and other Eastern European languages), and he listened to the “Voice of America” broadcast resent to Central and Eastern Europe from Tangier and Munich. These four channels provided correct and consistent information for Eastern Europeans. The motto of the station “Voice of America” was, “We will tell the truth.” It is well known how much these stations were

listened to. The Romanian department of “Radio Free Europe” functioned between 1950-1995. Information was sipped as if it were water, breathed as if it were pure air by those who lived in the giant socialist concentration camp. Without these radio channels, millions of people, including my father, would not have known that there was an alternative. Over time, on their air, hundreds of protesters and dissidents of the communist regime have been heard, including my father’s cousin, Romanian writer Paul Goma. People came to these broadcasts hoping for a better future—not only those in the diaspora, but also those still living in the Soviet bloc countries who listened or dared to send letters to these stations. The KGB always attacked these broadcasting stations, trying to jam and kill the “slander” and “lies” of capitalists. Misinformation took ridiculous shape.

The truth was this: in order to survive, we needed the lies! Do we still need them? Is it because “the end justifies the means”? Take, for example, politics, where the lie has a thousand faces. It is a whore who leads our destinies. Yet, we go to vote, breathlessly follow the news, and support one party or another, and so on. Why? Because we have hope that something, sometime, could change. What chances would a politician have if he would say, “I am a crook. I just want money and power. I do not care about you. What I do want is just to lie to you.”? None! Everyone would say he’s crazy. But we believe them, because we do not have any choice. Do we? Lies are not only tolerated in society, they are inevitable and often practiced. Why? Because they are easier to accept than some truths. Many of us prefer a beautifully packaged lie to the disappointment of the truth, or because the lie may bring certain benefits. In many cases, the truth would hurt and would do more harm than good. And, that would make those who choose to always say “only the truth” to be excluded.

SYNTHESIZING MY LIFE & WORK

I reproach myself for the fact that, in the 1970s, I was not old enough, and, in the early 1980s, I was not smart enough or I did not find the strength to fight openly and firmly. Like most intellectuals, I sat in the kitchen criticizing our life. I do not want, at the end of my life, to live with this heavy conscience, with this horror that we all know about our past, about that period of terrible, dramatic history. I think that many of our troubles are due to the fact that my homeland has not completely abandoned Leninism, communism, and Sovietism. Thus, we will remain an ineffective, sick society. I am ashamed that, today, our children and grandchildren still see the monuments to Lenin—symbols of the regime with which we fought.

The Muskie Scholarship (a PhD fellowship offered to students from Eastern Europe) and the PhD program in Educational Leadership at Miami University have changed my life. They opened new horizons for me and strengthened my pledge to promote social justice and equal education to the world—to combat violence and uphold peace and harmony among people of all sorts. Nelson Mandela once stated: “Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.” I strongly believe it. I still feel that I have conflicts within myself—feeling like a prisoner of my own project, or feeling guilty toward my students and colleagues whom I “abandoned” in Moldova, or my “inner revolution” that will generate the need to continue, to keep a balance, and to go on.

Exercising *currere* helped me to better understand and to confirm to myself why I am here. I did not enroll myself in the PhD program because I wanted to escape a dissatisfying situation or because I was at a special intersection of my life. I did not enter into this game because it is in my comfort zone or just to seek a

new diploma. I don't want a doctorate to be only another item in my biography, which offered me an occupation and identity, or an illusion, or a miraculous "key" which would open invisible doors for me. I have chosen my path because I made my commitment to the field of education almost 30 years ago. And, today, I am still focused on bringing my contribution to increasing the quality in this field. I chose it because I want to be inspired by and to inspire people who really want to develop their personalities and characters, their human capital, people who may clarify my own doubts, interests, questions, and dilemmas. Education begins by educating yourself as a person. Only after that can you begin educating those next to you, sharing knowledge, experience, courage, responsibility, and a commitment to a long-life learning.

The multivoiced discussions and rhetoric designed to modernize the whole educational system are stringently required across the globe, but I think that is not enough. In the interminable dialogue, we can fall into the trap of complacency. As an educator, I need to fight, take more decisive actions, involve myself in policy decision-making and political change so that I might continue to strive for the real goal—making the classroom a place where true democracy and social justice dominate, where unpleasant truth and controversial issues are discussed, without lies and falsehood.

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