

From Tel Aviv to Belgrade and Back

Monday 12 October 2009, by [WARSCHAWSKI Michael](#) (Date first published: 2 June 2009).

During the early 1990s, Sarajevo, which has been an example of peaceful and creative cohabitation between Muslims, Orthodox Christians, Catholics, and Jews, became synonymous with bloody ethnic confrontation and war.

Last week, during my trip to Kosovo and Serbia, at times I had difficulties knowing where I was: was I home in Jerusalem, or in Prishtina, the capital of Kosovo? Ethnic states with the practice of ethnic cleansing and “homogenous societies” started to blur together. Yugoslavia has always played an important role in my life: in my childhood, I was fascinated by the stories of Tito and his Partisans Army that liberated Yugoslavia from the Nazi occupation and its local collaborators. Later on, I became interested in a communist regime independent from Soviet Union and developing an imaginative system of “self-management socialism.” When I was a student, I studied the independent Yugoslavian Marxists organized in the “Praxis” group, and was even supposed to come to their yearly summer school.

Above all, I focused my interest on the national issue in Yugoslavia and the ways to combine a federal state with national, regional, and local enlarged autonomies. In particular, the 1976 Yugoslavian constitution which, in many aspects, was a theoretical model of true recognition of the national rights for national minorities. This included the rights of national minorities living within a broader national minority, like the Albanians of Kosovo among the Serbs, or even like the Serbian minority living in Kosovo. Complicated? Maybe, but it remains fascinating.

Over the years, and thanks to the many articles and profound analysis of my friend Catherine Samary, a world-known expert on the Balkans, I was able to follow the political evolution of Yugoslavia. Such as the dismantling of the federation; the ethnic-cleansing wars in Croatia, Serbia, and Bosnia; and the constitution of “ethnic-pure national entities” and states. Sarajevo, which has been an example of peaceful and creative cohabitation between Muslims, Orthodox Christians, Catholics, and Jews, became synonymous with bloody ethnic confrontation and war.

At the age of 60, I had for the first time an opportunity to see Yugoslavia, or what remains, with my own eyes, and to join a delegation of the CCFD, a French NGO-partner of the AIC, visiting their own partners in former Yugoslavia.

Of the multi-national federation, nothing remains, and from the multi-ethnic society, close to nothing remains. The Israeli dream, like the dream of all the chauvinistic politicians of the world, has been finally realized: each nation with each ethnic group on its own. As Ehud Barak used to say, “we are here, they are there,” and a seven meter wall makes sure that the separation will last.

The ethnic cleansing war of Palestine was waged from 1947 to 1949 and the ethnic cleansing wars of Yugoslavia were between 1990 and 1992. The results of these wars: an almost entirely pure ethnic Jewish state in Palestine and forty years later, close to ethnically pure states in Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, and Bosnia.

However, there are two very important differences between the present situation in Yugoslavia and in Israel-Palestine. The first is while Yugoslavia is in a post-war situation and struggling to rebuild a

new type of normality, here in Israel-Palestine we are in an existing conflict that is defined by military aggression, death, and destruction. The second difference between the two region is the Yugoslavic nostalgia towards the “good old days” of the Yugoslavian federation, including its multi-ethnic character. In Palestine, there have never been “good old days” of peaceful coexistence between Israelis and Palestinians—the colonial character of the Zionist enterprise did not allow for this.

These differences are why I have heard many times in Israel, often with a smile of victory and satisfaction, “you know what happened in Yugoslavia? It didn’t work!” Poor Israel.

P.S.

* From Michael Warschawski’s blog:

<http://www.alternativenews.org/michael-warschawski/1960-from-tel-aviv-to-belgrade-and-back.html>