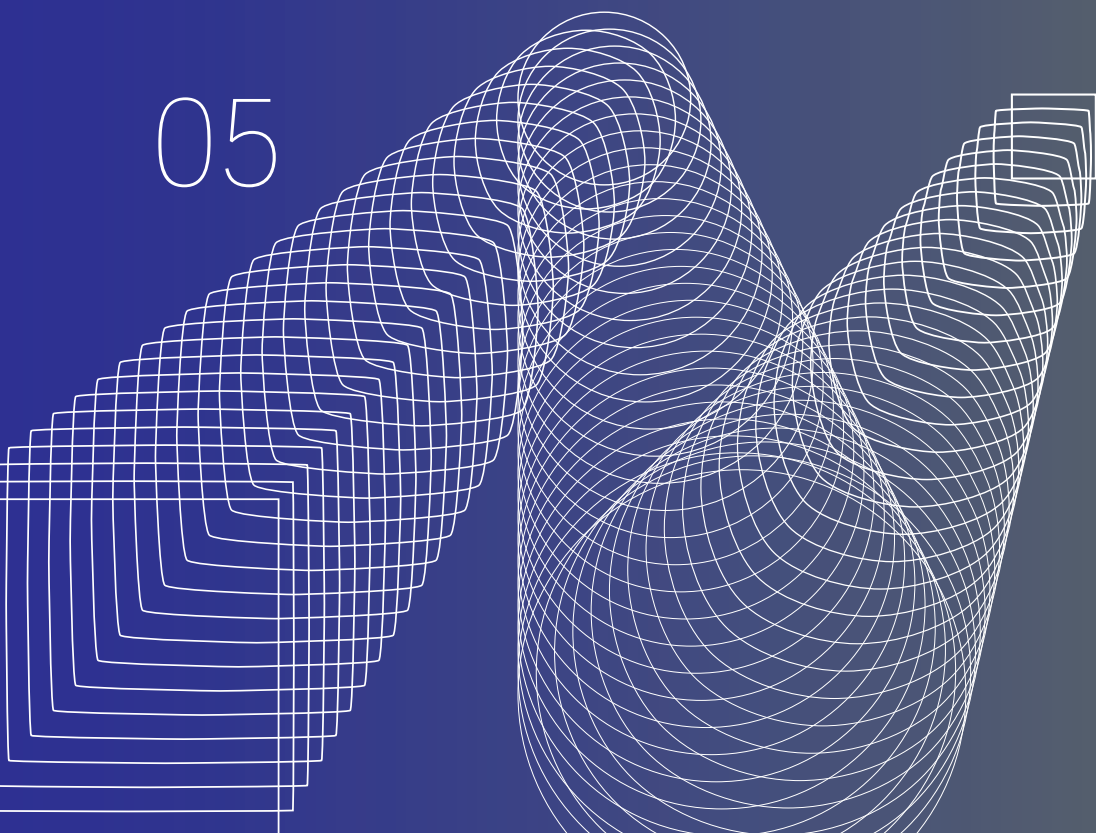


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Aleš Gabrič

THE CULTURE OF THE
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NON-ALIGNED COUNTRIES
ON THE SLOVENIAN
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Yugoslavia and the principles of scientific and cultural exchange among the non-aligned Countries

In Yugoslav foreign policy, the Non-Aligned Movement had first and foremost a political and, to a somewhat lesser extent, economic connotation, with cultural connotations far less prominent. Likewise, when emphasising cooperation with the Third World, the developing countries or the non-aligned countries, the leading Yugoslav politicians would typically highlight political issues, while cultural issues remained on the sidelines, struggling to make their way out of administrative frameworks into real life.¹ It was not until the 4th Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement, held in Algiers from 5 to 10 September 1973, that cultural issues were given significant consideration at the highest levels. The declaration of the conference stressed the need for eliminating “the harmful consequences

* The article is a result of the research project J7-2606, *Models and Practices of Global Cultural Exchange and Non-Aligned Movement: Research in the Spatio-Temporal Cultural Dynamics*, which is financed by the Slovenian Research Agency (ARRS).

1 More on that in: Gabrič, *Kulturno in znanstveno sodelovanje neuvrščenih* [Cultural and scientific cooperation of among the Non-Aligned countries]; Ramšak, *Neuvrščenost, jugoslovanska diplomacija in ustvarjanje transkulturnih vezi z Afriko* [Non-Alignment, Yugoslav Diplomacy and the Establishment of Transcultural Links with Africa].

of the colonial era” and called for “the preservation of [...] national culture and traditions.” The liberated peoples are to defend from “cultural alienation and the imported civilization imposed by imperialism and colonialism”, which should be countered by “repersonalization and by constant and determined recourse to the country’s own social and cultural values which define it as a sovereign people, master of its own resources”.²

Reiteration of similar conclusions at subsequent conferences of the Non-Aligned Movement and the lack of agreement at ministerial level meetings serve as evidence that the ideas enshrined in the political declarations were having a hard time finding fertile ground for the development of more authentic connections.³ Common ground was, in any case, more readily found in the area of scientific and technological cooperation, which often represented the logical continuation of the strengthening of economic cooperation. In the cultural–artistic sphere in the narrower sense, the difficulties in establishing genuine cultural cooperation were far greater. Beginning with the second half of the 1970s, Yugoslavia’s position was that, much like in politics and economics, the non-aligned and developing countries should coordinate the new principles of international cooperation in the fields of education, science and culture “to establish a common front in the international organisations, especially in UNESCO”.⁴

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It was only after the 6th Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement in Havana in 1979 that calls for scientific, technical and cultural cooperation became more explicit. The agreements of the 1980s, the last decade of Yugoslavia’s existence, when it was mired in a deep economic crisis, were therefore in many ways limited in scope. Even so, they certainly articulated the Third World’s initiatives and aspirations towards forging closer links in these areas. When the last Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement during Yugoslavia’s existence took place, which was held in Belgrade in early September 1989, the country had already been embroiled in major internal political conflicts. The following years saw the collapse of the country that hosted both the first and—at the time—the most recent NAM conference, and with this, the story of scientific, technical and cultural cooperation between Slovenia—in the form of Yugoslavia—and the non-aligned countries as it had emerged in the context of the movement came to an end.

2 Osolnik, *Jugoslavija v gibanju neuvrščenih*, p. 43.

3 SI AS 1149, t. e. 107, a. e. 1539/7, Medjusobna saradnja nesvrstanih i zemalja u razvoju u oblasti obrazovanja i kulture, p. 1.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 2.

As one of the leaders of the Third World and the Non-Aligned Movement, Yugoslavia encouraged the signing of intergovernmental agreements on scientific, technical and cultural cooperation. When dealing with those less developed countries that lacked democratic traditions, such agreements presented fewer problems. By contrast, representatives of developed Western democracies often pointed out that the state cannot dictate the content of scientific and cultural institutions' work programmes. As a result, some agreements ended up becoming more abstract, containing fewer specifics. In its report for 1980, the Institute for International Scientific, Technical, Educational and Cultural Cooperation of the Socialist Republic of Slovenia (ZAMTES) described its activities as taking place within a framework defined by "a number of documents adopted in recent years at international conferences, such as the Summits of the Non-Aligned Movement in Colombo and Havana and the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe, as well as by the meetings of the group of 77 developing countries, or in the framework of the United Nations".⁵ That the conferences of the Non-Aligned were listed first was a clear indication of priorities. That said, even in these frameworks, the Yugoslav, and by extension Slovenian, policy was quite selective:

Efforts to develop closer co-operation with individual developing countries that were at higher stages of development, as well as with oil-exporting countries, manifested in initiatives taken by Slovenia together with the other republics and the two provinces in terms of more complex arrangements at the expense of these countries, in particular for co-operation with Libya, Algeria, Iraq, Nigeria, Mexico and China.⁶

In the cases of countries that could not offer oil or something similarly attractive to Yugoslavia in return, there was a considerable gap between aspirations and their translation into serious proposals. Yugoslavia, a country more economically developed than most other non-aligned members, often ended up torn between the desire to obtain "free technical assistance on the one hand, and the actual, limited capabilities on our part, especially in light of the limited financial resources, on the other hand".⁷

The proposal for the formulation of a more detailed strategy in the fields of education and culture, adopted at the conference in Havana in 1979, was developed further at the subsequent meetings

5 *Poročilo o znanstveno-tehničnem, prosvetnem in kulturnem sodelovanju [...] v letu 1980*, p. 15.

6 *Ibid.*, p. 16.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 18.

through the appointment of a working group whose objective was to draw up a proposal for a joint approach by the members of the movement in the aforementioned fields. The ten countries in the working group included Yugoslavia. Their first meeting was called at the UNESCO headquarters in Paris by Cuba, the presiding member of the Non-Aligned Movement, on the 8 and 9 October 1981. At the second meeting in January 1982 in Paris, they elected to discuss the draft action programme at the meeting of experts and high-ranking national representatives for the fields of education and culture that was hosted by Cuba between 26 and 20 April 1982 in its capital Havana. Yugoslavia's starting point was a programme that had been approved by the Federal Executive Council in August 1980. Involved in its preparation, in addition to the competent state authorities, were the Federal Institute for International Scientific, Educational, Cultural, and Technical Cooperation and the Yugoslav National Commission for UNESCO.⁸ Another reason that Yugoslavia was given an important role in shaping the cultural and political positions of the Non-Aligned Movement was that Belgrade hosted the UNESCO General Assembly in September and October 1980, with a Yugoslav representative subsequently assuming the presidency of the UN for the next three years.

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Yugoslavia's platform was thus to a large extent shaped by the cultural policy positions of the Non-Aligned Movement, who also hoped to secure more favourable positions in the drawing up of the UNESCO budget. At the UNESCO General Assembly in Belgrade, representatives of non-aligned and developing countries had already advocated certain common principles, including in particular the need to increase UNESCO's budget, the bulk of which would, in line with UNESCO's primary mission, be devoted to the educational, scientific and cultural development of less developed countries. Leaders in the Yugoslav Commission for UNESCO reported that representatives of developed countries were strongly opposed to increasing the organisation's budget and were striving to narrow UNESCO's focus on fewer tasks. They were, for example, not moved by the less developed countries pointing out that more than 90% of scientists were working in developed countries, where their scientific and technological achievements are subsequently retained, and are not willing to share the latest findings with the world.⁹

8 SI AS 1140, t. e. 107, a. e. 1539/1, Platforma za rad jugoslovenske delegacije na sastanku eksperata i visokih funkcionera za obrazovanje i kulturu nesvrstanih zemalja u Havanu od 26. do 30. IV 1982 godine, pp. 1-2.

9 Učešće Jugoslavije na XXI zasjedanju Generalne konferencije Uneska, pp. 436-437.

This was the international context in which the Non-Aligned attempted to develop a unified platform. A draft action programme was to be jointly endorsed at the UNESCO World Conference on Cultural Policies in July and August of 1982 in Mexico City, Mexico. Yugoslavia proposed expanding the programme, so that in addition to the general principles, it would also include some concrete actions. Yugoslavia's own contribution was to take over the operation of the Josip Broz Tito Gallery of Art of the Non-Aligned Countries, which was established in Titograd (modern-day Podgorica) and was also due to be presented at the conference in Havana.¹⁰

The basic principles of the cultural policy action programme of the Non-Aligned Movement (and, by extension, of Yugoslavia) were that each country has its own cultural dimension, which defines its specifics in accordance with its economic, political, social and cultural characteristics. It should strive to preserve its cultural identity and thus demonstrate a break with the past by embracing cultural diversity and cultural pluralism as phenomena worthy of recognition in modern times. By acknowledging the equal worth and interdependence of different cultures, the need would arise to improve intercultural communication, and programmes of mutual cultural cooperation should accordingly be developed within the framework of UNESCO and other international organisations. In the draft action programme, the non-aligned countries highlighted their anti-colonial and anti-imperialist character, as well as their struggles against apartheid and racism, all forms of aggression and attempts at domination and hegemony. They pointed to the Declaration of Human Rights, which defines education and culture as a basic human right, and cited the high degree of illiteracy and the high number of children around the world who did not have access to education. Accordingly, the non-aligned countries supported UNESCO's actions to eradicate illiteracy and other UN actions in the field of education and culture.¹¹

The Non-Aligned Movement was to promote bilateral and multilateral cooperation between the non-aligned countries and developing countries. Cultural exchange between themselves would act as a kind of bulwark against the importation of cheap Western products that represented a channel for the spread of the "American way of life". In education, they were to foster mutual exchange, organise joint seminars and scientific conferences, and, most importantly, take care of the training of cadres for the least developed

10 SI AS 1140, t. e. 107, a.e. 1539/1, Platforma za rad jugoslovenske delegacije na sastanku eksperata i visokih funkcionera za obrazovanje i kulturu nesvrstanih zemalja u Havanu od 26. do 30. IV 1982 godine, pp. 1–5.

11 Ibid., pp. 6–10.

countries. Yugoslavia had by that time less of a need for concrete actions in the field of education, as it no longer had to contend with mass illiteracy, the introduction of primary education or education in general, having already solved the fundamental problems regarding the school system in the preceding decades.¹²

116 With respect to cultural cooperation, the members of the Non-Aligned Movement referred to the part of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that affirms the right of everyone to participate in the cultural life of the community. They often referred to the right to one's own cultural identity, rejecting both attempts to establish domination through multinational industries and the stereotypical assessments ("exported" by the developed Western world) of cultural values. High on the list of priorities for the Non-Aligned were the finalisation of the decolonisation process by promoting restitution or the return of cultural property to the country of origin and combating the illicit trade in cultural property. In the area of exchange of experiences, they advocated cooperation at the inter-regional level among culturally related traditions, counting on UNESCO's assistance in this endeavour. Member States were to facilitate the training of indigenous cultural cadres; once again, this was something that Yugoslavia already had experience with, unlike many of the—until recently—less developed colonies. They were mainly referring to bilateral cooperation projects. News-sharing was also to be handled bilaterally, with a special role reserved for the Non Aligned Countries Documentation Centre (NAMDC) in Sri Lanka. In proposing concrete actions they limited themselves to those not requiring too much financial investment, such as book translations, guest appearances at festivals and fairs, and exchanging films, both fiction and documentary.¹³

Yugoslavia suggested that countries include in their agreements as many concrete actions as possible, in addition to general principles. Cooperation in the field of fine arts would, for example, be in the remit of the Gallery of Art of the Non-Aligned Countries in Titograd, and the possibility would be explored of setting up a joint translation and publishing association and organising a film festival for the non-aligned countries. Finally, Yugoslavia reiterated a principle that had been pervasive throughout the period of drafting the action programme for the cultural cooperation of non-aligned countries, namely that all actions should be coordinated within the UN system, in particular within the framework of the UNESCO programmes.¹⁴

12 *Ibid.*, pp. 11–15.

13 *Ibid.*, pp. 16–18.

14 *Ibid.*, pp. 19–20.

The non-aligned countries' demands in the cultural, political and economic spheres introduced a number of new elements that went against the principles driving the cultural industries of the developed world. The repeated demands for funding for an increasing number of international educational, scientific and cultural programmes within the UNESCO framework, of course, boosted the flow of funds from the developed countries to the underdeveloped world in this area, as well. Repeated calls for the establishment of new evaluation criteria represented a rejection of the domination of the Western cultural canon and the developed world's preconceptions in which "high" culture is contrasted against the "folkloric" character of cultural goods from the less developed world, and of the cultural dominance of the Christian part of the world on the international scene. Another way that the developed world maintained and extended its advantage was through new scientific advances, which it was unwilling to share freely for the purposes of accelerating the development of less developed and developing countries. An even more delicate matter was the demand for restitution—this was about the cultural artefacts of the less developed countries that had in the past been expropriated by the developed countries or former colonisers without regard for the needs and wishes of the locals. Returning cultural goods would entail diminishing the cultural institutions in the developed countries, which is why this issue is still a difficult one for their leaders to face today.

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Scientific and cultural cooperation between Slovenia and the non-aligned countries

The actual practice of establishing contacts with members of the Non-Aligned Movement belied the declared principles of Yugoslav foreign policy. Scientific and technological cooperation, especially in terms of foreign students studying at Yugoslav universities, certainly played a greater role than cultural cooperation.¹⁵ The detailed annual report on Slovenia's international cooperation for 1982, which is when the Non-Aligned Movement's action plan on cultural cooperation was drawn up, yields some insight into what the scientific and cultural cooperation with the Non-Aligned Movement really looked like. The statistics only show trends, not an exact picture, as the non-aligned countries were not recorded as a separate category. Instead, the figures summarised from the tables refer to cooperation with developing countries in general. Slovenia hosted 328 scholarship holders from developing countries. Of those, 154 received scholarship from Yugoslavia, 35 held scholarships from

15 Strani državljani na studijama i usavršavanju u Jugoslaviji, pp. 247–250.

118 their countries of origin, and 139 held private scholarships. Roughly two-thirds of the scholarship holders were from African countries, followed by Arab (15%) and Asian (13%) countries, with a few from Latin America and Cyprus. The students' choices of study programmes were commended as suiting both their countries of origin and Slovenian companies in terms of establishing economic contacts with partners. 149 experts from developing countries came to Slovenia for study trips and training, as well as international scientific meetings, courses or seminars organised in cooperation with international organisations. On the other hand, there were also 136 Slovenian specialists who travelled to the developing countries for work, short-term missions, or UN missions, or to attend international scientific conferences. In Libya and Kuwait, Slovenian specialists helped to organise hospitals and medical services, while in Angola, there were experts from Splošna plovba Piran, who cooperated with the Angolan marine company and marine agency. Slovenian experts also assisted Sudan in the development of a marine company. In Guyana, within the framework of Inter-American Development Bank projects, experts from the Urban Planning Institute of SR Slovenia assisted the locals with project planning. In Cyprus and Ethiopia, Slovenian consultants provided assistance in business management; they also participated in the development of poultry farming in Yemen and Tunisia, fishing in Tanzania, mining in India, cement production in Algeria and mountain climbing in Nepal. Most of the projects represented the culmination of several years of cooperation, but the lack of funds forced the cancellation of some of the missions.¹⁶

In the cultural field, there were no major changes compared to previous years, and the assessment that cooperation with African countries was least developed was not new. Cooperation with Arab countries was equally modest, with a few Slovenian films screened at the Week of Yugoslav Film, while Slovenian institutions were, as usual, present at certain traditional events, such as the Cairo International Book Fair and the New Delhi World Book Fair, or at the Alexandria Biennale. Cooperation in the fine arts was somewhat more extensive, with an exhibition of works by France Slana organised in Syria under an intergovernmental agreement and Slovenian artists participating in the Fifth Triennale in New Delhi. Slovenia hosted an exhibition from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and, as usual, the International Festival of Sport and Tourist Films included several titles from the non-aligned countries. A few exhibitions and

16 *Poročilo o znanstveno-tehničnem, prosvetnem in kulturnem sodelovanju [...] v letu 1982*, pp. 25–29.

musical exchanges with Cuba, Colombia and Ecuador did not end up improving the final assessment, which was that “cooperation with developing countries is unsatisfactory, especially in terms of individual exchanges, and in the field of culture we are yet to move beyond individual exhibitions and ensemble performances”.¹⁷

Only a few Slovenian scientific and cultural institutions ended up intensively pursuing programmes of scientific, technical, educational and cultural cooperation with the Non-Aligned Movement member countries. Among them were the two Slovenian universities of Ljubljana and Maribor, both of which hosted many students from the non-aligned countries and whose professors often helped in the development of particular disciplines in those countries. Specific to Slovenia within Yugoslavia was the long-term cooperation of the Alpine Association with Nepal, where they conducted courses and training for mountain guides. In terms of exposing people to literature from less developed countries, the Pomurska Publishing House from Murska Sobota and its book collection *Mostovi* (Bridges) were highlighted. Among the dozens of foreign authors invited to the International Writers’ Meeting in Bled, effort was made to include representatives from less developed or non-aligned countries. Accordingly, the invitees in 1982 included two Cypriots. While guest performances by Slovenian musicians or theatre artists in developing countries were a rarity, Slovenia did host a few foreign individual artists or ensembles every year. In 1982, visitors to Slovenia had the opportunity to see performances of Indian theatre (in Ljubljana, Maribor and Bled) and Nepalese theatre (in Ljubljana and Maribor), as well as Cuban Ballet and Indian shadow puppet theatre (in Ljubljana). Slovenian audiences were also treated to performances by folklore groups from Guinea and Ghana. Slovenian film production was more prominently represented in the less developed world than music and theatre. In 1982, per intergovernmental agreements, screenings of Yugoslav films were organised in eleven foreign countries, which included no less than five NAM member countries, and in each of them, at least one Slovenian film was screened. Less was happening in the reverse direction, as films from countries where cinema was still in its infancy were quite rare. In terms of exhibitions and museum activities, the Museum of Non-European Cultures in Goričane had a marked focus on Third-World cultures. Each year, it organised several ethnographic exhibitions that introduced Slovenians to previously unfamiliar cultural environments (in 1982, for example, exhibitions on the art of the DPR of Korea and Ecuador were organised). Participation of artists

from the Third World was also a consideration in the preparation of the International Biennial of Graphic Arts in Ljubljana and the international sculpture symposium *Forma viva* in Kostanjevica na Krki, where six artists were hosted in 1982, including one each from India and Venezuela (although at the time, the latter had not progressed beyond the status of observer in the Movement).

In searching for the reasons for such a modest record of cultural cooperation with non-aligned countries, ZAMTES staff noted the following:

Naturally, the implementation and planning of this cooperation has been beset by a number of objective problems, and organisational difficulties have accompanied the realisation of individual actions. We are insufficiently informed about the cultural and other achievements in these countries, and about their education policies.

Organising art and other exhibitions, music tours and other events in these countries is accompanied by problems involving transport and communications, inadequate venues, difficult climatic conditions and long distances, all of which lead to high costs. Also evident is a necessity for greater involvement of our diplomatic, consular and other missions in these countries in the planning and realisation of the projects.¹⁸

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Analysts at ZAMTES did not delve into the more subjective circumstances, such as the degree of interest in cooperation with these countries, or how much improvement could be expected in terms of cultural cooperation if at least some of the objective barriers that had hindered deeper cultural cooperation with third world countries were removed. Even in the simplest form of cooperation—the translation of books—publishers were faced with a shortage of translators for languages of small nations. In the case of art exhibitions, it was certainly not encouraging for further networking that many of the works exhibited abroad were found to be kept in inappropriate conditions, returning damaged or even destroyed.¹⁹ That said, the Western-art-based standards for evaluating works of art had not been shaken off in the preparation of exhibitions in Slovenia, with the consequence that works from the non-aligned countries were often given a subordinate position compared to works from the Western world.²⁰ Even in film, where cooperation was better developed, the Yugoslavian organisers of cooperation found that the results after several years of effort fell short of expecta-

18 Ibid., pp. 48–49.

19 Merhar, *Mednarodno kulturno sodelovanje*, p. 55.

20 For more see: Piškur and Merhar, *Tretji svet*, p. 165.

tions, partly due to the fact that in the expansion of cinema in the underserved African world they faced competition from the world's most powerful cinematic industries, which were able to offer more financially favourable conditions.²¹

A model example - the publishing project of Pomurska založba

Yugoslavia's foreign policy orientation gave rise to numerous translations, exhibitions, expert exchanges and the establishment of co-operations with the resulting expansion of horizons, despite the numerous factors constraining cultural cooperation. The Non-Aligned Movement member countries were diverse in terms of culture, language, religion and level of development, and for the majority of the population, these distant countries were completely unknown. Another factor that often influenced the (in)ability to cooperate was geographical distance, with the steep financial requirements associated with hosting larger ensembles or exhibitions a constant impediment to familiarisation. The 1980 ZAMTES annual report stated that "the policy of educational and cultural cooperation of the SR of Slovenia with developing countries has not yet been sufficiently defined. It needs to be taken into account that developing countries need primarily educational experts, scientists and technology, as well as assistance in the formation of their cultural institutions." They added that "the least amount of cooperation has been with African countries" and that cultural cooperation has seen most development "mainly in the field of fine arts [...] and literary activity".²²

In the latter case—literary cooperation involving translations of foreign works into the languages of the Yugoslavian nations—Yugoslav publishing houses extended their translation repertoire from the countries of the West and East to the Third World countries, with a particular focus at that time being the countries of Latin America. This was as early as the 1950s, before the establishment of the Non-Aligned Movement. This was an easier endeavour, of course, as translating books written in Spanish by Latin American authors was not as difficult as translating books by writers from some of the other countries of the Non-Aligned Movement. In the four decades after the war (1945–1985), 89% of all foreign works published in Yugoslavia were translated from five languages (English, French, Russian, German and Spanish). There simply weren't enough translators available to enable learning about the literature of smaller nations, especially non-European ones. The reading

21 Vučetić, *Uspostavljanje jugoslovenske filmske saradnje sa Afrikom*, pp. 77–79.

22 *Poročilo o znanstveno-tehničnem, prosvetnem in kulturnem sodelovanju [...] v letu 1980*, p. 33.

repertoire did start expanding beyond the major literary traditions that the regular reader would have been familiar with, but in terms of literature from countries who were members of the Non-Aligned Movement, this was limited to individual works. The best opportunity to explore previously lesser-known literary horizons was offered by the numerous anthologies. In terms of countries with significant influence on the Non-Aligned Movement, Yugoslav publishers had, since the second half of the 1950s, been the most receptive to translations of Indian literature.²³

122 In the aforementioned ZAMTES report from 1982, as well as in several other places, a publishing project undertaken by Pomurska založba from Murska Sobota has been highlighted as an example of good practice. Established in 1954, Pomurska založba was not a major publishing house. It took on the challenge, however, differentiating itself by paying particular attention to the translation of literature from the Third World. In 1976, it expanded its core tasks of publishing literary works by authors from north-eastern Slovenia and cultural mediation between Slovenian and Hungarian culture by introducing the collection *Mostovi* (Bridges). It was edited by the translator Jože Hradil, author of several Hungarian–Slovenian dictionaries. In the first year, the collection still adhered to the core mission of the publishing house, publishing a translation of Ivan Cankar’s work into Hungarian and a translation of the Hungarian poet Zoltán Csuka into Slovene. But when he conceived the collection, the editor Jože Hradil had a broader view in mind from the start, writing: “The direct impetus was, of course, the realisation that the great efforts of the Yugoslav foreign policy—offering the right hand to all the nations of the world who can abide a comradely, egalitarian dialogue—need to be supported and complemented in publishing as well.” Every year, the new book collection was to publish six translated works from literary traditions that, due to cultural cooperation traditionally being oriented towards larger nations, had not yet received the attention of Slovene publishing houses. “These are nations suffering from the same fate as Slovenians, namely that they cannot present themselves in other linguistic guises due to language and other barriers”, Hradil said, subsequently explaining where the editor’s focus was: “Understandably, works from the non-aligned countries have become one of the main components of the collection.”²⁴

In its second year, the *Mostovi* collection already featured translations from literatures less familiar to Slovenian readers. The

23 Prevodi strane književnosti u Jugoslaviji, pp. 460–466.

24 Hradil, *Od prve knjige do desetih zbirki Pomurske založbe*, p. 15.

six translated works for the 1977 year included two by authors from Non-Aligned member countries (Cuba, Nigeria) and one that originated from an observer country (Mexico). Printed in enviable runs of several thousand copies, the books met with critical and popular acclaim, going a long way to changing people's views of an unfamiliar world. Alejo Carpentier, a Cuban writer already well known in the Western world, was now available to Slovenian readers for the first time with a translation of his novel *Explosion in a Cathedral*. Through a chronicle of a revolutionary who had brought the ideas of the French Revolution to the Caribbean, it introduced the reader to the unfamiliar setting of the Antilles, and descriptions of the gains and wrong turns of the revolution offered an opportunity to reflect on the temptations faced by the new political elite. *Arrow of God* was the second work by the Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe to be translated into Slovenian—a translation of his debut novel *Things Fall Apart* was published in 1964 by the publishing house Obzorja. Achebe's second novel once again focuses on the confrontation between a traditional African village and Western civilisation, and the conflict between the older generation, portrayed through the character of a tribal leader opposed to innovations, and the younger generation, which includes one of his sons, who realises the need for changes in their local environment. On the one hand, there is the desire to be faithful to tradition and old patterns; on the other, the desire to break free—not only from colonial dependence, but also from the self-imposed shackles of rejecting modernity in the name of tradition. In the text accompanying the release, the publishing house described Achebe as representing "the true image of his homeland, unlike the one we have been accustomed to, which was of an exotic world as mediated by interpreters".²⁵ This is also how it was received by the critics, who also took into account the successes that the authors had already achieved with translations into the languages of major nations. On the occasion of the first translations into Slovene, France Forstnerič, the cultural section correspondent for the main Slovenian daily newspaper *Delo*, wrote that "*Mostovi* represent more than just a moral cultural debt to the Third World and to minor, lesser-known literary traditions; the works are for the most part modern and artistically interesting, offering a glimpse into cultures little known to us."²⁶

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In 1978, the six works in the collection once again included two novels from NAM member countries, written by authors from Mali and Zaire, and one from an observer country, Uruguay. 1979

25 *Knjiga*, 1977, No 12, p. 578, Chinua Achebe, *Božja puščica*.

26 Forstnerič, *Svet in domačija*, p. 7.

brought translations of Malawian and Indonesian novelists and notably—from the perspective of familiarisation of readers with the otherness of Africa—the translation of the South African writer and anti-apartheid activist Nadine Gordimer, which was also the first Slovenian translation of a book by the eventual winner of the 1991 Nobel Prize for Literature. The trend of publishing translations by writers from the Third World or the non-aligned countries was maintained—indeed, strengthened—and in 1982, five out of the six novels were from non-aligned countries: Algeria, Colombia, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Egypt. The books featured a foreword through which Slovenian readers could learn about the author, the country's literary tradition and the social changes that were often the subject of the novels, i.e. the consequences of colonialism, the changes after gaining independence and the tragic fate of people on the precipice between the primordial past on the one hand, and the challenges of the modern times on the other. Authors from other countries were also selected in line with the intent of presenting the issues of disadvantaged people and ethnic groups lacking equal rights within their countries. In addition to the aforementioned Gordimer, for example, the collection included novels by a Catalan author, as well as the first Maori writer. After the first few years of the collection, its editor and the editor-in-chief of the Pomurska Publishing House, Jože Hradil, pointed out proudly that “it frequently represented the first literary encounter with one of these countries, or the first translation into Slovene”.²⁷

Throughout the 1980s, the *Mostovi* collection continued enriching Slovenian bookshelves with around six works of lesser-known literature every year. Published in it were translations of novels by writers from Cuba, Cameroon, Peru, Senegal, Bangladesh, Benin, Guinea, India, Indonesia, Nicaragua, etc. Between 1977 and 1990, 65 translations in total of novels by writers from literary horizons that had previously been poorly known or almost unknown to Slovenes were published in the collection, 27 of them from NAM member countries; adding writers from observer countries and minority ethnic groups in larger countries, we exceed more than half of the works in the collection.²⁸ The changing cultural policy and the reversal in Slovenia's foreign policy also brought major changes both in publishing policy and Slovenian publishing as a whole. First, the *Mostovi* collection dried up in 1990; within a few years, the Pomurska publishing house was privatised and ended up in bankruptcy proceedings.

27 Hradil, *Od prve knjige do desetih zbirk Pomurske založbe*, p. 15

28 Data are summarised by individual lists in: Brumen, *Bibliografija Pomurske založbe: 1954–1978*, p. 172 and Brumen, *Bibliografija Pomurske založbe: 1979–1988 in 1989–1993*, pp. 82–84 and 169–170.

The *Mostovi* collection has been repeatedly cited as an example of good cultural cooperation with the less developed world. It was certainly a remarkable project within the context of Slovenian publishing. Further deepening of contacts was hampered not only by the lesser willingness of publishing houses in Yugoslavia to take on financially risky projects at a time of economic crisis, but also by the broader cultural and political problems faced by the less developed world. In April 1980, a book exhibition opened in Zagreb that featured publishers from some Sub-Saharan African countries, namely Senegal, Cameroon and Kenya. It showed the legacy of colonial times in publishing, which was only slowly dying. It was only in recent decades that literacy had started to expand, and with it the need for books. Even so, books in the languages of the former colonial powers, French, English and Spanish, still dominated, with the indigenous African languages struggling to gain a foothold. A comparative analysis by UNESCO shows that between 1955 and 1976, the number of book titles published more than doubled worldwide and in the developing countries, more than tripled in Africa as a whole, and more than quintupled in the Sub-Saharan Africa. The very low starting point of the developing countries, however, clearly showed that the gap between the developed countries and the underdeveloped Africa was also evident in the cultural field, with 565 books per million inhabitants published in Europe in 1976 and only 27 in Sub-Saharan Africa. The distribution of books in the former colonies was still dominated by multinational publishing houses, and it was difficult for local publishers and retailers to make a name for themselves in the face of such competition and the flood of imported literature.²⁹

Yugoslavia's efforts to boost the numbers of translations from friendly countries were also demonstrated by the exhibition "Non-Alignment and the Non-Aligned Countries in the Publishing Activity of Yugoslavia", which was organised in 1978 as part of the International Belgrade Book Fair, and was subsequently hosted in Cairo, where roughly 600 works were presented. Foreign language translation figures for the late 1970s still show a marked dominance of the world's major languages. Arabic and the languages of the Indian subcontinent accounted for the largest share of translations from the languages of non-aligned countries.³⁰ As this part of the world and culture—stretching from the Middle East to South-East Asia—was comparatively more familiar to Slovenians than the African world, it was the books by authors from Sub-Saharan Africa

29 Potokar, *Knjiga v Afriki* [Books in Africa], pp. 271–272.

30 Prosvetno-kulturna saradnja Jugoslavije p. 122.

that were the biggest novelties. It is estimated that in the three decades after the founding of the Non-Aligned Movement, some 40 books received Slovenian translations, with the collection *Mostovi* being particularly noteworthy, having published 12 titles from this part of the world.³¹ Judging by the reports of the federal or national institute for scientific, technological and cultural cooperation, book publishing houses, in this case Pomurska, needed to show considerable initiative, as the records regarding cooperation in the fields of visual, musical, theatrical and film art are much more detailed, suggesting that these fields received much more generous support. By introducing readers to a foreign, unknown world, however, books influenced the thinking of Slovenes in many ways. Chinua Achebe's writings were intended to influence and change the negative presentation of Africans.³² He was certainly not an exception, however. Through other similar works, stories told through the eyes of the natives—quite different, naturally, from the narratives of the colonisers—found their way onto Slovenian bookshelves.

31 Gacoin-Marks, Uvodnik v tematski sklop "Podsaharska Afrika", p. 8.

32 For more see: Babnik, *Roman Chinua Achebe Razpad kot odgovor na negativno prezentacijo Afričanov*.

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