

Socialist Yugoslavia and the Antinomies of the Non-Aligned Movement

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This is a revised version of a talk given by the author at the Workshop ‘Dialoguing Between the Posts 2.0: (im)possible dialogue between the progressive forces of the ‘posts’’, Belgrade, Serbia 15 June 2019. He expresses his gratitude to workshop participants for their comments, and to Čarna Brković, Konstantin Kilibarda and Christian Axboe Neilsen for their helpful feedback on an earlier draft.

INTRODUCTION

Two moments from the archive serve to illustrate some of the points I want to make here, focusing on socialist Yugoslavia’s role in the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) between 1961 and 1979. In the first, Tito reads a draft Position Paper prepared by an unnamed author or authors from the Federal Secretariat for Foreign Affairs (SSIP), dated 2 April 1973 [1], regarding the Fourth Non-aligned Summit to be held in Algiers later that year. The first time Tito sees the word ‘emancipatory’ in the text, he puts a question mark in the margin. The word recurs about a dozen times after that, and Tito methodically crosses it out each time but leaves the author(s) guessing as to what word he would prefer [2]. The second occurs in 1970 during the Third Summit in Lusaka. During Tito’s meeting with representatives of various liberation movements, he shows great interest in, and affinity for, the struggle of the MPLA (The People’s Movement for the Liberation of Angola) and appears in a nostalgic mood when he is shown pictures of guerrillas in the woods fighting against the Portuguese Army [3].

Of course, both anecdotes show the intimate relationship between the non-aligned movement and events at home in Yugoslavia: after 1974, it was extremely common to describe ‘self-management’, ‘brotherhood and unity’ and ‘non-alignment’ as the three pillars of Yugoslav socialism. Tito’s aversion to ‘emancipation’ is, surely, not unrelated to his hostility towards various struggles from below that gripped parts of Yugoslavia between 1968 and 1974, and his affection for the MPLA undoubtedly relates to the Partisan movement and the nature of Yugoslavia’s own national liberation struggle (NOB).

Please understand that I did not choose these moments to suggest a simple temporal progression from radicality to conservatism; much less to construct a crude binary between events within socialist Yugoslavia and outside. Rather, I want to argue that any nuanced understanding of socialist Yugoslavia’s relation to the non-aligned movement has to acknowledge paradoxes, contradictions, and antinomies, and needs to explore diverse socio-economic imaginaries within socialist Yugoslavia and in relation to global geo-politics, in different conjunctures. The phrase I am currently using to best describe this is the concept of ‘**liminal hegemony**’, an apparent oxymoron that serves as a referent for Yugoslavia’s ‘soft hegemony’ of the movement and, at the same time, its liminal position in relation to what were termed ‘developing countries’ or what, using the lexicon of today, we might term ‘The Global South’.

A PRIOR GLOBALIZATION

My recent focus on NAM emerges directly from my interests in globalization and post-coloniality [4]. As Johanna Bockman has suggested, NAM's very existence challenges the assumption that "the modern, the cosmopolitan, and the global are European in origin" [5]; NAM is a kind of prior globalization, a globalization otherwise, an alter-globalization before alter-globalization, in a sense. One of NAM's paradoxes, however, is its rootedness outside of Europe and the Global North, whilst from the very beginning, having one European state, socialist Yugoslavia, in a leading role. Linked to this, NAM is both a product of, and catalyst for, the moment of struggle against colonialism, and, therefore, in a sense, a relevant empirical testing ground for a post-colonial theoretical concern with the relationship between modernity, development and forms of economic and social order. It also serves, in Catherine Baker's terms, to decentre the "East-West axis", treating it as "only one of the historical-geopolitical hierarchies in play during the Cold War" [6].

Whilst socialist Yugoslavia's involvement in NAM can be characterized as a kind of instrumentalization of economic self-interest, part of a search for 'new and emerging markets' through which 'export-led growth', a central mantra of 'market socialism', could be pursued, this is not, at all, the whole story. Indeed, although economic questions did become more central to the Movement over time, the initial emphasis on 'self-determination', described by many as 'active co-existence', although initially the Serbo-Croatian term used was '*neangažovani*' (non-engaged) rather than '*nesvrstani*' (non-aligned), combined a genuine support for freedom from colonialist and imperialist oppression, the right to sovereignty and non-interference for new nation states, resistance to the domination of the two main power blocs, and an emphasis on general and complete disarmament in a world in which the threat of nuclear annihilation was ever present.

Whilst NAM was never a kind of alter-Socialist International, it certainly contained some socialist elements and aspirations. For Kardelj, unarguably the most important Yugoslav theorist of non-alignment, whilst NAM was a function of both internal social processes and class struggles within its Member States, and the objective nature of international economic and political relations, and could, therefore, "exert positive influence both on internal social trends and ... mitigate world antagonisms", it was the insistence on "the non-imposition of social and political systems and non-interference in the internal affairs of other people" that was of paramount importance [7].

NAM's SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMAGINARIES

Kardelj grappled with his own antinomies of course; not least a neo-Trotskyist belief in the inevitability of world revolution combined with a deeply conjunctural understanding of the heterogeneous nature of the internal economic and social structures of NAM states, existing at very different levels of development. Perhaps surprisingly, there is almost no sense in which a Yugoslav road to socialism, including self-management, is ever being proffered, even as a translation term, to other NAM Members, although how far this is a conscious result of adhering to non-interference, and how far it is related to the fact that, by the time NAM was created, Yugoslav 'market socialism' was already 'more market, and less socialism' is, I think, still an open question [8].

Although there was no singular, stable, socio-economic imaginary within NAM, a concern with removing obstacles to what Kardelj termed "rapid economic and social development" [9]; how to reduce the gradient, and render less slippery, the 'slippery slope of modernization', if you like, was the broad consensus. And this, in line with a general focus within the UN at the time, involved a highly productivist, and somewhat narrow, understanding of industrialization as the cornerstone of development and growth, the two often seen as coterminous and existing as a universalising techne, a kind of monological project of modernity, in Escobar's terms [10].

Discursively at least, pronouncements on economic problems did contain progressive and innovative elements. The Statement on Economic Progress from the Third summit in Lusaka in 1970 referred to 'the poverty of developing nations' and their 'economic dependency' as a 'structural weakness of the world economic order', the colonial past leading to a 'neo-colonialism that poses insurmountable difficulties in breaking the shackles of economic dependency'. It called on the UN to bring about "a rapid transformation of the world economic system, particularly in the fields of trade, finance and technology, so that economic domination yields to economic co-operation" [11]. UNCTAD (The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development) and later, the New International Economic Order, largely conceived by non-aligned nations, became the main vehicles for this in the 1970s, albeit often, later, more talking shops than sites of real action. Indeed, many of the ideas on economic co-operation conceived at a time when NAM itself became more institutionalised, including ideas emanating from Yugoslavia on a non-aligned development bank and support to the twenty-five least developed countries, whilst prefigurative, were not transformative and some, such as a focus on terms of trade and commodity pricing, were not incompatible with a global free market liberalisation agenda.

YUGOSLAV CONSERVATISM

If we look at the who and the how of the Non-Aligned Movement, we often find a conservative stance promoted by Yugoslavia. The model of meetings tended to remain rather static: long speeches by heads of delegations; caucusing around final statements, the first drafts of which, at least until 1973, had been prepared by Yugoslavia and circulated in advance; and pre-meetings to decide who to give credentials to. Although liberation movements, trades unions, some Communist parties and even some religious movements were allowed to observe, sovereign nation states were of prime importance and little or no effort was made to involve broader publics. At the same time, the nature of NAM as a multi-nodal network meant that, both above and below the radar, exchanges in the realm of science, art and culture, architecture and industry, occurred on a large scale and with at least relative autonomy from the political master narrative.

There were occasions when threats to socialist Yugoslavia's soft hegemony needed to be answered. Tito, having largely done the same with the movement himself throughout the 1960s, albeit with the support initially of Nehru and Nasser, complained bitterly of then Algerian Foreign Minister Abdelaziz Bouteflika 'privatizing' the movement up to, during, and after the Algiers summit in 1973. Whilst arguing for the 'democratization' of decision-making within the movement, Tito resisted calls for the format to be changed, arguing that "the founding members, in particular, need time to develop their arguments" [12]. As an aside, the 1970 Summit in Lusaka, owes its conceptualization of delivering fresh momentum to the movement in no small part to Tito's charismatic diplomacy, convincing other leaders in a series of bilateral meetings of how successful the event was [13]. Tito sought constantly to balance interests inside the movement much as he had balanced interests at home: more Latin American countries were needed, he asserted, to counter the pre-occupation with Asian and African affairs. Consensus during summits was of prime importance, with any potential conflicts shifted to private bilateral discussions.

A more serious threat to Yugoslav hegemony came in the early 1960s when Indonesian President Sukarno, a key instigator of the Bandung Conference of 1955 and, indeed, a leading figure in the early NAM story, attempted to outline a 'radical non-alignment', in opposition to its more conservative variant, to be institutionalized in CONEFO, The Conference of New Emerging Forces. CONEFO's agenda, front and centre, was anti-Imperialist, and no European states were to be allowed to join. The Yugoslav leadership realized that they could not afford to openly oppose Sukarno's idea, but quiet diplomacy, supported by both India and Algeria, led to a consensus that NAM should remain as a broader coalition of states committed to peaceful co-existence [14]. The CONEFO idea did not survive Sukarno's overthrow by Suharto who, famously, took Indonesia, along

with Malaysia and Laos, out of the 1973 summit in protest at the admission of the Provisional Revolutionary Government of the Vietcong and recognition of the exiled Prince Sihanouk as the representative of Cambodia [15]. What is striking throughout is the complexity of Yugoslavia and NAM's relationship to not only the United States and the USSR, but also China, Cuba (a NAM member state and host of the 1979 summit), and a range of regional conflicts, as well the rise of an Islamic identification amongst a number of member states.

A POST-COLONIAL LENS

Often, it is the flexible liminality of Yugoslavia's positionality that is striking: in some moments speaking on behalf of 'developing countries'; at other times standing back and differentiating themselves from those countries; and even, on occasions, presenting themselves as a developing country. The complexity of Yugoslav positionality is well illustrated at the onset of the oil crisis in 1973, being simultaneously supportive of OPEC's actions (with some key NAM states being members), concerned that the oil price issue should not obscure broader questions of the price of raw materials, and cognisant of its own exposure to price hikes and the fact that its exports were mainly to the socialist bloc countries in SEV, and that its trade with Asia and Africa had actually declined. It is only at this point that Yugoslavia, one of those seen as blocking the deeper institutionalisation of the movement, starts to suggest that criticism needs to be turned into action. In a transcript from a preparatory meeting of the Yugoslav delegation for the 1973 summit, Tito states: "Sometimes, we have held back from taking the initiative, because it would be unfortunate (*nezgodno*) if we were constantly to do that. ... We have been in the difficult situation that we always initiate things ... but we have to provide advice and come up with ideas" [16].

To conclude, it should be obvious that exploring socialist Yugoslavia and the non-aligned movement through a kind of post-colonial lens represents a valid way through a mass of material, allowing for the construction of a plausible story that refuses a singular master narrative. Exploring the multiple meanings of NAM and Yugoslavia, increasing in the 1980s as the Republics play an increasingly important role, linking the conjunctural, the structural, the institutional and the agentic, helps us to understand NAM as a pre-figurative post-national configuration, an imagined community both transgressing the spatial order of nation-states, as Akhil Gupta put it in 1992 [17], and reproducing a nation-state logic as a sort of United Nations light. NAM becomes a litmus test for the changing spatial and political contours of resistance by the colonized, as Gupta argues, albeit with its own silences and erasures, including, so far as I have been able to ascertain, a lack of any reflection on gender-based violence and oppression.

The complexities of socialist Yugoslavia's positioning of itself as in solidarity with, if not actually sharing, the post-colonial experience, and the nature of this in relation to global racialized formations, is a topic of heated debate, with Subotić and Vučetić [18] probably going too far in invoking Mills' notion of 'white ignorance'. Kilibarda [19] is, however, certainly correct to assert that the cornucopia of performative, discursive and aesthetic practices in play allow us to navigate "the shifting boundaries between 'white'/'not quite', 'European/non-European', and 'developed'/'underdeveloped'. Holding on to the ways in which NAM, and socialist Yugoslavia within it, in Rada Iveković's terms, was marked by "a certain social and political fluidity and flexibility" [20], and hence more of a dialogic 'translation zone' than a 'contact zone' in which asymmetries of power spill over into symbolic and real violence [21], has a deeper resonance in the upholding of the idea that 'another world is (still) possible'.

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P.S.

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Footnotes

[1] Of course, I cannot say with complete certainty that these were Tito's intervention, although the version of the text was in the Archive of the President, only one hand had inserted corrections and written corrections were in handwriting that appears to be Tito's. Incidentally, by the time of the Fifth Summit in Colombo, Sri Lanka, in 1976, Tito appears content for the word to be used, and even uses it himself in comments to journalists (Archive Yugoslavia, Belgrade, KPR I-4-a/26)

[2] Archive Yugoslavia, Belgrade, KPR I-4-a/12.

[3] Archive Yugoslavia, Belgrade, KPR-I-4/9

[4] Noemi Lendvai and Paul Stubbs (2009) 'Globale Sozialpolitik and Governance: Standpunkte, Politik Und Postkolonialismus' In H-J. Burchardt (ed.) *Nord-Süd-Beziehungen im Umbruch. Neue Perspektiven auf Staat Und Demokratie in der Weltpolitik*. Frankfurt: Campus, pp. 219-243.

[5] Johanna Bockman (2016) 'A Variety of Globalizations', *The Sociologist* online: <http://thesociologistdc.com/all-issues/a-variety-of-globalizations/> (accessed 13 June 2019)

[6] Catherine Baker (2018) *Race and the Yugoslav Region: postsocialist, post-conflict, postcolonial?* Manchester: University Press; page 108.

[7] Edvard Kardelj (original 1975) 'The Historical Roots of Non-Alignment' in *Non-Alignment*, Zagreb: Spektar, page 11.

[8] Cf. Vladimir Unkovski-Korica (2016) *The Economic Struggle for Power in Tito's Yugoslavia: from World War II to Non-Alignment*, London: I B Tauris.

[9] Edvard Kardelj 'The Historical Roots of Non-Alignment', page 12.

[10] Arturo Escobar (1995) *Encountering Development*, Princeton: University Press.

[11] Lusaka Summit Declarations (1970), web:

https://www.africaportal.org/documents/7241/SAIIA_RESOLUTIONS_OF_THE_THIRD_CONFERENCE_OF_NON-ALIGNED_STATES.pdf (accessed 13 June 2019)

[12] Archive Yugoslavia, Belgrade KPR I-4-a/12

[13] Archive Yugoslavia, Belgrade, KPR I-4-a/9

[14] Archive Yugoslavia, Belgrade, KPR I-4-a/6

[15] Ran Kochan (1972) 'Changing Emphasis in the Non-Aligned Movement', *The World Today* 28(11); 501-508.

[16] Archive Yugoslavia, Belgrade, KPR I-4-a/11

[17] Akhil Gupta (1992) 'The Song of the Non-Aligned World: transnational identities and the reinscription of space in late capitalism', *Cultural Anthropology* 7(1); 63-79.

[18] Jelena Subotić and Srđan Vučetić (2017) 'Performing Solidarity: whiteness and status-seeking in the non-aligned world', *Journal of International Relations and Development* online, web: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1057/s41268-017-0112-2> (accessed 13 June 2019)

[19] Konstantin Kilibarda (2010) 'Non-Aligned Geographies in the Balkans: space, race and image in the construction of new 'European' foreign policies' in *Security Beyond the Discipline*, York University Center for International and Security Studies, web: https://www.academia.edu/4724464/Non-Aligned_Geographies_in_the_Balkans_Space_Race_and_Image_in_the_Construction_of_new_European_Foreign_Policies (accessed 13 June 2019)

[20] [Rada Iveković (2010) 'The Watershed of Modernity: translation and the epistemological revolution', *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, 11(1); 45-63, web: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/14649370903403561?tokenDomain=eprints&tokenAccess=JSKSdg2AgTaxgvg9V67F&forwardService=showFullText&doi=10.1080%2F14649370903403561&doi=10.1080%2F14649370903403561&journalCode=riac20> (accessed 13 June 2019)

[21] The notion of a 'contact zone' is drawn from Mary-Louise Pratt (1992) *Imperial Eyes: travel writing and transculturation*, Abingdon: Taylor & Francis.