

Toward an Anticolonial, Non-Aligned Yugoslav Museum: Concept, Institution, Meta-Exhibit

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In recent decades, provenance research has become one of the most interesting areas of academic enquiry, particularly in response to the reorganization and establishment of new “museums of world cultures” amid globalization. However, critical examinations from a Western-centric perspective in museology often overlook the fact that the demand to decolonize museum theory and practices, as well as to establish new institutional forms—such as collections designed to fulfil this vision—was first raised in the second half of the 20th century through the cultural politics of Non-Alignment. The impact of the Non-Aligned Movement’s efforts to “decolonize the museum” remains invisible. This paper seeks to address this gap in the literature of museum studies by analyzing in detail the political and museological negotiations behind the establishment of the Museum of African Art: The Veda and Zdravko Pečar Collection in Belgrade (1977).

Keywords: Non-Aligned Movement, Yugoslavia, Cold War, anticolonial museum, Museum of African Art.

The recent surge in academic interest in the legacy of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) has coincided with a revival of public and scholarly discussions on the decolonization of the museum sphere.¹ This chapter, which bridges both academic areas, will demonstrate how the Non-Aligned Movement's cultural diplomacy elevated calls for the decolonization of museum theory and practice during the Cold War, focusing on the example of the Museum of African Art: The Veda and Zdravko Pečar Collection (MAA) in Belgrade. The analysis of historical, political, and museological entanglements in the institutionalization of the Non-Aligned Movement's cultural politics will explore curatorial strategies related to the establishment of the first museum institution in Yugoslavia founded on the idea of Non-Alignment. It will be argued that to fully understand the causes of the post-1989 decolonial turn in museology, it is essential to place the development of museology as an academic discipline during the Cold War within a broader global context—one which includes not only East-West rivalry but also the world's multiple Souths.

The Museum of African Art: The Veda and Zdravko Pečar Collection opened in 1977 with the intention of being the first anticolonial museum in Europe.² As the name of the museum suggests, Veda and Zdravko Pečar—diplomats and art collectors who spent twenty years in West Africa—created and donated their collections of sculptures, textiles, ritual and everyday objects, films, and books to the City of Belgrade on February 27, 1974. These donations formed the basis for the Museum of African Art.³ Zdravko and Veda Pečar obtained these objects over a short period between 1966 and 1973. The first 430 objects, which made up the core of the museum's collection, were either gifts or purchases made with the approval of the authorities in the countries from which they were exported.⁴ These objects were artworks intended for sale at the time the Pečars

1 The authors who deal with the relation between the cultural politics of the Non-Aligned Movement and the "decolonialization project of the museum field" in the (post-)Yugoslav context include: Ana Sladojević (2011, 2012, 2014, 2023), Bojana Piškur (see Piškur 2016, 2019 and 2019a, 2019b), Teja Merhar (2019 and 2019a), Bojana Videkanić (2020), Ličina Marija (2017), Epštajn Emilia (2017, 2021), and Jagdhuhn (2021).

2 On the anti-colonial discourse of the MAA, see Sladojević, "Muzej afričke umetnosti u Beogradu i njegov antikolonijalni diskurs," 92–103.

3 Jagdhuhn, "Yugoslavia's Window to Africa."

4 Epštajn, "Priče o autentičnosti. Poreklo predmeta u Muzeju afričke umetnosti i kako je nastala zbirka Pečar," 21.

acquired them, in contrast to the principles of the colonial collecting policy that focused on “authentic objects” as evidence of African culture, rather than contemporary art.

Within the UNESCO International Fund for the Advancement of Culture, a program was created “for the supply of art objects for the ‘Museum of African Arts.’” Through this program, UNESCO financed the purchase of photographs by Marli Shamir (taken during the same period when the Pečars were building their collection), which depict nature, architecture, and scenes from everyday life.⁵ One year after the museum’s opening on March 29, 1978, a meeting took place between Zdravko Pečar and Juan Carlos Langlois (the executive secretary of UNESCO’s International Fund for Cultural Development), Albert Bottbol (a senior UNESCO official), and Milovan Matic (a retired official at UNESCO’s headquarters in Paris), which concluded that the “MAA should be provided with all possible further financial assistance and support, and it should be viewed as a pilot project for the co-operation of [a]ll Africans around an African museum in Europe.”⁶ Although the Pečars initially collected objects with the intention of donating them to an ethnographic museum, the city authorities in Belgrade decided to take over the collection to establish a museum dedicated to the art and culture of Africa. As a result, the MAA became a mediator of the values associated with the Non-Aligned Movement, a place where African culture was presented to the Yugoslav and broader public, not as the *Other* but as *another* equal part of the civilized world.⁷ However, as noted by art theorist Ana Sladojević, the reliance on a collecting policy based on (diplomatic) gifts and official purchases is not enough for MAA to be characterized as an anti-colonial museum.⁸ Despite the legal acquisition of the objects, the Pečars were guided by the collecting methodology established in Western practices at that time, especially evident when the objects were catalogued in museum collections and assigned ethnographic records. Additionally, the very concept of the museum—as a Western construct designed to reproduce the image of the “Other”—was not bypassed in the conceptualization of the MAA. On

5 Epštajn, “Priče o autentičnosti. Poreklo predmeta u Muzeju afričke umetnosti i kako je nastala zbirka Pečar,” 19.

6 Epštajn, “Priče o autentičnosti. Poreklo predmeta u Muzeju afričke umetnosti i kako je nastala zbirka Pečar,” 21.

7 Radović, “Muzej afričke umetnosti u Beogradu.” MAA’s newspaper archive.

8 Sladojević, “An Anticolonial Museum.”

the contrary, the construction of the museum was, according to Pečars, “a direct result of Yugoslavia’s Non-Alignment,”⁹ which reflects MAA’s incompleteness as a self-proclaimed “first anti-colonial museum.”¹⁰

The Museum of African Art: The Veda and Zdravko Pečar Collection as product and reflection of Yugoslav non-aligned cultural politics

In the context of the Cold War, the NAM did not represent a third bloc, but rather the coming together of the Third World a “moral power”¹¹ and a political subject that sought to balance the ideological, political, and military bipolarization of the world. The idea of Non-Alignment, embedded in the very title of the movement, was a warning to the great powers that “the world’s fate cannot be in their hands alone.”¹² While “much of the argument for Non-Alignment has been couched in moral terms,”¹³ the political idea of Non-Alignment did not imply passivity or isolation. The NAM supported the anticolonial revolution as a process of global emancipation and, through various forms of engagement, constantly highlighted the “North-South antagonism”¹⁴ as a consequence of colonial exploitation.

One of Yugoslavia’s biggest foreign policy successes was the “management role”¹⁵ it played in the NAM movement. From hosting the first NAM conference in Belgrade in 1961 to the death of President Josip Broz Tito (1980), Yugoslavia, as the co-founder and leader of the movement, enjoyed special status on the global political stage as the “balancer” between the “First,” “Second,” and “Third World,” as it was often called. Its engagement in creating transnational institutions,¹⁶ which promoted “NAM’s

9 Epštajn and Sladojević, “Nyimpa kor Ndizizi,” 34.

10 Sladojević, “Muzej Afričke umetnosti u Beogradu i njegov anticolonijalni diskurs,” 97–98.

11 On the use of the term “moral power” in the explanation of NAM’s “neutrality,” see Cairo Information Department 1964: VIII.

12 See the statement by Josip Broz Tito, President of the Federal People’s Republic of Yugoslavia, at the first NAM Summit, Belgrade 1961, available online: <https://www.jfklibrary.org/asset-viewer/archives/JFKPOF/104/JFKPOF-104-004> [accessed January 23, 2022].

13 Shepherd, *Nonaligned Black Africa: An International Subsystem*, 3.

14 For discussions on “North-South antagonism,” see Petković, *Non-Aligned Yugoslavia and the Contemporary World*, 293.

15 On Tito’s ambitions to resolve domestic issues through NAM’s foreign policy, see Jakovina, *Treća strana Hladnog rata*, 650–651.

16 See Jankowitsch and Sauvart, *The Third World Without Superpowers: The Collected Documents of the Non-Aligned Countries*, 2222–2223.

diversity as an element of its universality,”¹⁷ was particularly significant because NAM’s concept of “unity in diversity” aligned with Yugoslavia’s own domestic policies.¹⁸ Yugoslavia viewed its activities in NAM as a historic opportunity to leave its “semi-peripheral position”¹⁹ and assert itself globally in the political, economic, and cultural realms. In this context, museum diplomacy served to promote the authentic path to socialism and its vision of political neutrality, which was not passive but, on the contrary, entailed an engagement in the realization of anti-imperialist and anti-colonial goals. Seven years after the break with the Soviet Union (1948), Tito made his first State visit to Africa in 1955. The independent path to socialism became the ideological framework Tito sought to “export” to the African continent. By supporting and assisting the anti-colonial struggle, both economically and militarily, Yugoslavia positioned itself as a revolutionary ally to its African friends.²⁰

While the political elite focused on building relations between the socialist and non-aligned states, the Yugoslav cultural elite worked on bridging the cultures of these distant peoples.²¹ From 1950 to 1980, the Yugoslav Committee for Foreign Cultural Relations organized and supported more than a hundred exhibitions featuring artists from NAM member states.²² In the early 1970s, the ambition to musealize the political idea of Non-Alignment emerged as one of Yugoslavia’s strategic moves on the global stage, specifically within professional museological circles.

As a symbol of the bond between decolonization and Non-Alignment in the cultural field, MAA, in its founding acts, sought to implement “decolonial methodologies” in the collecting, exhibiting, and communicating of cultural artefacts from African states. In addition to the military

17 Savić, *Yugoslavia in the Struggle for Action Unity in the Non-aligned Movement*, 10.

18 Braveboy-Wagner, “The Non-Aligned Movement: Collective Diplomacy of the Global South,” 281. See also Savić, *Yugoslavia in the Struggle for Action Unity in the Non-aligned Movement*, 10.

19 For an explanation of the term “semi-periphery,” see Blagojević, *Knowledge Production on the Semi-Periphery: A Gender Perspective*.

20 Radonjić, *Slika Afrike u Jugoslaviji (1945–1991)*, 33.

21 See, for example, Turajlić, “Filmske Novosti: Filmed Diplomacy,” 483–503, and Vesić, “Trajectories of Solidarity in Time: The Week of Latin America in Belgrade, Students’ Cultural Center,” 243–262.

22 Videkanić, *Nonaligned Modernism: Socialist Postcolonial Aesthetics in Yugoslavia, 1945–1985*, 166.

and political support provided by Yugoslavia, this was another way for the country to demonstrate its anti-colonial and anti-imperial solidarity with those struggling to liberate the Third World. Accordingly, the MAA became Yugoslavia's window to Africa.

At the opening on May 23, 1977, Belgrade's mayor at the time, Živorad Kovačević, stated:

This museum, both as a collection and as a projected activity, frees us from inherited Eurocentric and ethnocentric views and cultural prejudices and strides, inspiring a deeper and broader understanding of culture, history, and humanity. Unlike many museums of African art worldwide, which were often the result of imperialist conquests, the MAA is a symbol of a time when the Non-Aligned Movement fostered a new spirit in political relations between nations and a new approach to valuing the artistic achievements of folk art.²³

At the same event, Jelena Arandelović Lazić, the author of the first permanent exhibition and first director of the MAA, also delivered a speech. From her words, we can gain valuable insight into the concept itself behind the MAA:

Cultural ties between countries and peoples offer a deeper understanding of the hidden treasures of the world. We are now facing the possibility of such an approach. Generations of scholars will have the opportunity to work with the authentic material collected for the Museum of African Art. Here, old theories, interpretations, and assumptions will be questioned and new ones will be created.²⁴

The first professional associate invited to the museum (on June 4, 1977) was art historian Kwasi Myles, who was, at the time, the director of the National Museum of Ghana in Accra. On this occasion, he remarked that the museum's architecture was authentically African and aligned with African philosophy of life:

23 Čelar, "Mesto ljubavi i prijateljstva."

24 Arandelović Lazić, excerpt from the text in the MAA's first catalogue published on the occasion of the MAA's opening, 1977; see the archive of the MAA.

The flat roof is reminiscent of the roofs of our houses made of earth, on which vegetables are grown. Just as here, there is a meadow on the roof. Light enters the Museum's interior through openings in the roof, much like in our homes.²⁵

In the museum's courtyard, before entering, visitors would encounter one of the first artefacts—the anchor of a ship from Ghana that had been used to transport slaves. Resignified in the Yugoslav context, this object communicates with the visitor in the following way:

The 'admiral' anchor belonged to the *Negriera* (slave ship), which sank in the Bay of Guinea 150 to 200 years ago. At one time, while fishing, the Spanish captain Jesus Armandi from Accra recovered the anchor from the sea in the vicinity of Puerto Nuevo and presented it to the Pečar collection in 1975. Over three centuries, 20 million black people were transported to the Americas, while 200 million perished during the hunts and transportation. The people of Yugoslavia never partook in these acts of human trafficking.²⁶

Already, with this first MAA exhibit, one could observe Yugoslavia's ambition to musealize the idea of Non-Alignment. In addition to the museological effort to build an "anti-colonial methodology of museum practice"²⁷ when presenting African heritage, socialist Yugoslavia sought first and foremost to present its own desired geopolitical position. When advocating for the "decolonization of cultural institutions," Yugoslav political elites often emphasized that, precisely because of its "lack of a colonial past,"²⁸ Yugoslavia was uniquely positioned to act as an honest ally in the effort to eliminate the divide between the developed and undeveloped countries.²⁹ The MAA prioritized the expression of solidarity with people recently liberated from colonial ties. The position of "Yugoslav exceptionalism," demonstrated by this installation, is quite problematic on many levels, but above all because

25 Radović, "Muzej afričke umetnosti u Beogradu."

26 See MAA's exhibition catalogue *Nyimpa kor ndzidzi*, 151 (no identified author).

27 On the successful implementation of the anti-colonial method of exhibiting African art in the MAA's permanent exhibition, see Sladojević, *Muzej afričke umetnosti: Konteksti i reprezentacije*, 65–66.

28 Sladojević, *Muzej afričke umetnosti: Konteksti i reprezentacije*, 65.

29 See West, *Tito and the Rise and Fall of Yugoslavia*.

it reproduces the asymmetrical relation between the represented and the representer.

Another exhibit, located at the very entrance to the museum, is a boat given to Zdravko Pečar in 1975 by the chief of Mankoadze village in Ghana. On it is inscribed the national saying: *Nyimpa kor ndzidzi* (translated as “Man cannot survive alone”). This exhibit highlights another important aspect of the Yugoslav concept of the “anti-colonial museum”: the universalization of human activity to create a sense of solidarity between geographically distant nations. In this context, the exhibit, as stated in the exhibition itself, symbolized the friendship between Yugoslavia and the non-aligned countries of Africa.



1. Fishing boat from Ghana “*Nyimpa kor ndzidzi*” (“One man, no chop,” i.e., “Man cannot survive alone”). Museum of African Art, Belgrade

Ganos žvejų valtis.
Užrašas ant jos: „*Nyimpa kor ndzidzi*“ („Žmogus vienas neišgyvens“),
Belgrado Afrikos meno muziejus

However, the museological conception (with the permanent exhibition curated by the museum’s first director, anthropologist Jelena Arandelović Lazić,³⁰ and designed by architects Slobodan and Saveta Mašić) justified in many respects the ambition to implement decolonial approaches to communicating heritage.³¹ Yet, it still perpetuated European matrices of musealization that it sought to overcome. These included “ethnic attribution,

30 Jelena Arandelović Lazić authored all museum labels and MAA catalogues during the Yugoslav period. She also contributed to drafting normative acts, museum work programmes, and establishing new job positions, etc. See MAA’s exhibition catalogue, 47.

31 Jagdhuhn, “Yugoslavia’s Window to Africa: The Establishment of the Museum of African Art Belgrade as a Product of the Cultural Politics of Nonalignment.”

generalized ethnographic labels, the petrification of meaning within an imagined primary social community, the atemporality of collections, the anonymity of the author, the representation of a whole through its part (*one style, one tribe*), and the neglect of urban forms of artistic expression – a static display.”³² Despite not being conceived chronologically, and thus lacking a clear beginning or end, the exhibition was organized into museum units representing different tribes: Dogon, Bambara, Marka, Malinke, Mosi, Bobo, Kisi, Baga, Dan, Gere, Senufo, Baule, Ashanti, and others.³³

In addition to this main conceptual framework, some exhibits are grouped into a “bronze ensemble” or “musical instruments,” showcasing objects that represent broader cultural contexts not confined to a single ethnic group. The exhibition predominantly features masks, sculptures, textiles, and jewellery. The original use of these objects spans a wide range, from magical and occult purposes to everyday functions and works of art.³⁴ These pieces are displayed within three types of exhibition frames: vertical freestanding panels, vertical freestanding showcases, and vertical mask holders. All three “pedestal” types are painted in green-blue, a colour that, according to the architects Mašić, was intended to evoke the colours of African grass and sky. While this design solution explicitly opposed the Western “white cube” principle, it was still an attempt to challenge the Eurocentric setting typically used to create an *image* of Africa in museums. However, the fact that most of the exhibits originate from West Africa³⁵ and that this was not reflected in the museum’s title complicates the notion, as proclaimed by the MAA curators and Yugoslav political representatives announced, of the museum as an anti-colonial institution.

Nevertheless, the pedagogical work of the MAA was focused on developing anti-colonial methodologies for museum education, both in practice and theory, thanks to its close cooperation with UNESCO and

32 Sladojević, *Muzej afričke umetnosti: Konteksti i reprezentacije*, 65–66.

33 See the first exhibition catalogue of the MAA, *Museum of African Art: Zdravko and Veda Pečar Collection* (1997), Belgrade.

34 The museum objects on permanent display can be viewed here: <https://izi.travel/en/de05-muzej-africke-umetnosti-zbirka-vede-i-dr-zdravka-pecara/sr#/browse/f9d2013b-4959-4034-a4dd-938a601b7f02/sr> (accessed on February 20, 2024). The virtual tour of the MAA is available here: <https://www.otisak.mau.rs/> (accessed February 1, 2024).

35 In the post-Yugoslav period, the collection was expanded to include objects from other regions of Africa.



2. View of the permanent exhibition. Museum of African Art, Belgrade

Nuolatinės ekspozicijos
vaizdas, Belgrado Afrikos
meno muziejus



3. View of the installation with musical instruments. Museum of African Art, Belgrade

Instaliacijos vaizdas su muzikos instrumentais,
Belgrado Afrikos meno muziejus

numerous partner institutions from the non-aligned African states.³⁶ Thus, if the MAA is viewed as a “performing museum,”³⁷ a space where visitors are offered a carefully crafted experience, the innovative aspects of its permanent exhibit become evident. These include “the integration of film, music, and dance as complementary elements to the exhibits, the showcasing of contemporary artists’ work, and the organization of conferences and lectures.”³⁸

Considering that the MAA was established with the idea of the “museum as a forum”³⁹ for the establishment and declaration of diplomatic relations,⁴⁰ the city administration strategically selected its location in Senjak, an elite part of Belgrade housing numerous embassies. In this context, the MAA’s activities in Yugoslavia were more aligned with the role of a cultural centre than a traditional museum. As such, the MAA became an important platform for advancing diplomatic ties between socialist Yugoslavia and other non-aligned states from the African continent.⁴¹

36 Ličina, “Programme development at the MAA,” 52–61.

37 For a definition of the term “performing museum,” see Casey, “Staging Meaning: Performance in the Modern Museum,” 78–95.

38 Sladojević, *Muzej afričke umetnosti: Konteksti i reprezentacije*, 66.

39 Duncan, “The Museum, a Temple or the Forum.”

40 Diplomatic relations with African states were intensively established through cultural means in the decade leading up to the opening of the MAA whose foundation was meant to be the “crowning moment” of an already developed network of cultural diplomacy. For cultural exchanges between Yugoslavia and individual African states from 1961 to 1971, aimed at promoting NAM values, see Korov, “Beograd kao jugoslavenski interkulturni grad u kontekstu kulturne suradnje s Afrikom (1961–1971),” 139–147. It should be noted that the founding of the MAA was preceded by the founding of another important institution, the Institute of African Studies in Zagreb, also aimed at strengthening ties with NAM members from the African continent, in 1963. For the history of this institution, its rich archive, and library, see Cvjetičanin, “Uloga instituta za razvoj i međunarodne odnose u Pokretu nesvrstanih,” 12–39.

41 In 1980 only, numerous diplomatic visits were made to the museum. Some of the officials who visited the MAA included: Mohamed Ben Ahmed Abdelghani, the prime minister of the Republic of Algeria, in January; a group of eleven African ambassadors, along with Jean Robert Fanguinovenz, the ambassador of Gabon, in March; Jean Keutcha, minister of foreign affairs of Cameroon, Fillie Faboe, minister of foreign affairs of Sierra Leone, in May; and Adenike Egun Oyagbola, federal minister for national planning from Lagos, Nigeria, in June. In the same year, the following experts visited the museum for consultations: Roger Dorsinville, writer and publisher from Kenya; Mohamed Diop, professor at the University of Senegal; Basil Kossou, director of the African Institute for Cultural Research in Dakar, Senegal; and prof. dr. Gvid Nonvejea. The event “Dani informacija u

In lieu of a conclusion

On the disintegration of Yugoslavia, the process of the ethnic-nationalization of museums was initiated. As a result, the Yugoslav model of cultural memory, including its museological framework that supported the implementation of an anti-colonial discourse, was discarded by the successor states of Yugoslavia as an undesirable part of socialist heritage.⁴² In this context, the Museum of African Art, which had emerged as a product of Yugoslav Non-Alignment politics, was transformed into a meta-artefact. The permanent exhibition of the MAA from 1977 remains unchanged.

The decision to preserve the museum's permanent exhibition in its original form, even after more than four decades, has proven to be the right one. It allows for the opportunity to examine the institution as a historical artefact. Visitors of the MAA, as an *in-between space*, are encouraged to examine the relation between Serbia and the dissolution of socialist, non-aligned Yugoslavia. Moreover, the museum raises critical questions about the challenges of implementing decolonial strategies in institutional settings, especially when such strategies are increasingly viewed as global imperatives. The difficulties in adopting decolonial approaches to the methods and methodologies of collecting and representing art from the African continent at the MAA stem from the fundamental challenge of deconstructing the concept of the museum itself (in its original form) as "an institution hostile toward anything that falls outside the Western narrative."⁴³ This issue is further complicated by the fact that in Yugoslavia, despite its foreign policy of Non-Alignment, the university programmes in the humanities occupied a liminal space between Western-centric approaches (Eurocentrism) and the strong influence of Marxist-Leninist theoretical methods, particularly in museography, where Soviet-style practices held significant sway. In this context, the MAA's early efforts to engage with museologists from the "non-aligned world" were not sufficient to overturn the dominant canons in the creation of the "exhibitionary complex."⁴⁴ While the museum's attempts

kulturi afrike" (Information Days on African Culture), held from 24 to 29 March, was also organized that year. See the archive of the MAA.

42 Jagdhuhn, 2022.

43 MAA's exhibition catalogue *Nyimpa kor ndzidzi*, 50.

44 For the more on the phrase "exhibitionary complex," see Bennett, "The Exhibitionary Complex."

to integrate anti-colonial narratives within its permanent exhibition were experimental, they lacked concrete role models. However, it is essential to recognize that the MAA's mission was a pioneering undertaking and many other museums during this transitional period faced similar challenges. For comparison, in the same period, even in Ghana, where anti-colonialism was a political imperative, the newly established national museum struggled to successfully incorporate anti-colonial demands into its museological practices.⁴⁵ Several factors contributed to this difficulty, including limited financial resources, a small staff, and insufficient consultation with both domestic and international museum theorists. Given these constraints, it seems that the MAA ultimately prioritized the institutionalization of the cultural politics of Non-Alignment, with anti-colonial museography being a declarative aspiration rather than an immediately realized practice. Therefore, the MAA, in its essence, remains a historical trace of an attempt to create an anti-colonial museum in socialist Yugoslavia. Today, the MAA functions as a "time capsule," preserving a crucial aspect of history that is often overlooked in literature: the NAM's commitment to the decolonization of cultural heritage and the institutional structures that were designed to fulfil this vision.

Received — 2024 02 29

45 See Olav, "A Contested Global Memory Space: The Establishment of the National Museum of Ghana."

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Santrauka

Kuriant antikolonijinį, „neprisijungusį“ Jugoslavijos muziejų: koncepcija, institucija ir metaekspozicija

Nataša Jagdhuhn

Reikšminiai žodžiai: Neprisijungimo judėjimas, Afrikos meno muziejus, Šaltasis karas, Jugoslavija, „antikolonijinis muziejus“, Afrikos meno muziejus.

Vienas pagrindinių Neprisijungimo judėjimo principų buvo kova su kultūrinio imperializmu. Jugoslavijos muziejininkai suprato, kad muziejai – tai ne tik buvusių kolonijinių valstybių projektas, bet ir šalių, neturinčių kolonijinės praeities, kolonijinis konstruktas. Todėl „muziejaus dekolonizacija“ jiems reiškė ne tik metodologinę praktiką, bet ir muziejaus „pasaulio vaizdo“ tyrimo, kūrimo ir reprezentavimo vakarietišku akademinių principų atkūrimą. Tokį intelektualinį klimatą iliustruoja Belgrado Afrikos meno muziejaus veikla.

Jugoslavijos antikolonijinio muziejaus muziejinė ir politinė koncepcija, pabrėžiant panašumus, sąsajas, tarpusavio priklausomybę ir integraciją, siekta sužadinti lankytojo emocines reakcijas – pagarbą, simpatiją ir draugiškumą, mažiau susitelkiant į žmonijos būvio ir veikimo bendroje planetoje skirtumus. Šių tikslų daugiausia buvo siekiama ne tiek (eksperimentuojant) ekspozicinėje aplinkoje, kiek siūlant edukacines programas. Nors tokia institucijos koncepcija labiau priminė kultūros centrą nei muziejų, ji buvo sumanyta kaip diplomatinis projektas, turintis aiškiai apibrėžtą tikslą – neprisijungimo kultūrinės politikos institucionalizavimą.