

# **Internationalization and Decentring of UNESCO: Representation and Influence of “Non-Western” Countries, 1945–1987**

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## **RESÜMEE**

Die UNESCO wurde 1945 ins Leben gerufen, um durch Bildung, Wissenschaft und Kultur zum Weltfrieden beizutragen, wobei sie in den ersten Jahren ihres Bestehens hauptsächlich in Europa agierte. Zunehmend jedoch weiteten sich die Aktivitäten auf Asien, Lateinamerika, den Nahen Osten und schließlich auf Afrika aus. Diese Ausweitung ist im Wesentlichen das Resultat des politischen Drucks von Vertretern aus nicht-westlichen Ländern, die die eurozentrische Geisteshaltung und Politik der Gründungszeit bzw. der Anfangsjahre kritisierten. Eine Voraussetzung dieses Einspruchs war die sich ausweitende Mitgliedschaft der UNESCO, die sich vor allem in Hinblick auf die Teilnahme von nichteuropäischen Staaten pluralisierte. Dieser Prozess wird im ersten Teil detailliert beschrieben. Anschließend werden Kooperationen zwischen den neuen Mitgliedern nachgezeichnet, einschließlich der Grenzen, auf die das gemeinsame Handeln stieß. Im dritten Abschnitt wird gezeigt, wie sich in der UNESCO eine offenere Haltung gegenüber Forderungen und Anliegen nicht-westlicher Gesellschaften durchsetzte. Zum Schluss wird diese Öffnung beispielhaft am Engagement in Afrika belegt.

## **A Quantifiable Increase of Influence: Membership, Venues of the General Conference, and the Elections of the Director-General**

During the first decade of its existence, European countries and the US dominated UNESCO, not only in terms of the representation of world regions but also in regard to the pursued policy. To give just one example, France, Great Britain, and Belgium – still possessing colonies in Africa and Asia – were reluctant to see UNESCO engaging in these regions, being afraid it would threaten their control as the organization advocated the general UN principle of promoting national self-determination. Such a position

could, however, be less and less preserved – it became challenged particularly by the increasing number of “non-Western”<sup>1</sup> countries entering UNESCO.<sup>2</sup>

Set up in 1945 by 37 countries signing its Charter, the organization came into force in November 1946 after the ratification by 20 signatories. By the end of that year seven Latin American countries, four Middle Eastern, and three Asian states had applied and been granted membership, together with Australia and Turkey.<sup>3</sup> In parallel, the first national commissions were established, first by Brazil, followed by France, Great Britain, Norway, Poland, and the US. Already this development illustrates that what later came to be called the “Third World”<sup>4</sup> saw in UNESCO an important arena for promoting their concerns and thus took the necessary steps to become a member. The scope of the lands and regions represented increased in the years to come (table 1), and comparing the globalization of membership one sees that the world regions entered in different rhythms (table 2).

Many Latin American countries joined UNESCO shortly after the organization had been established, while only two states from Africa, Ethiopia and Liberia, also joined at that time.<sup>5</sup> A few years later, at the beginning of the 1950s, an Asian-African group established itself in UNESCO, and immediately pushed for the adoption of a resolution on the right of peoples to govern themselves (1952). Numerous African countries entered the organization between 1960 and 1962 once they had gained independence. This new composition, together with the fact that representatives from non-Western countries held the majority for that time, considerably altered UNESCO.

- 1 The term “West” is used to refer to North America and (West) Europe despite its problematic nature, among others the homogenizing tendency and the differentiation between the “own” and “other” (“West” and the “Rest”), the latter being the non-western world. I am aware that both conceptions are constructions and serve a dichotomic imagination of a world, divided into “west”/“east” or “North”/“South”.
- 2 Accession to UNESCO membership is codified in Articles II and XV of the Constitution of UNESCO and Articles 98 to 101 of the General Conference’s Rules of Procedures. UN member states have the right to become member states of UNESCO. States that are not members of the UN can be admitted as UNESCO member states upon recommendation of the Executive Board by a two-thirds majority of the General Conference. UNESCO’s member states contribute to the organization’s budget in proportion to their wealth and can benefit from UNESCO’s activities on their territory.
- 3 The Latin American countries being Bolivia, Brazil, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Mexico, Peru, and Venezuela; the members from Asia being China, India, and the Philippines; and the Middle Eastern group consisting of Egypt, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and Syria.
- 4 The concept of the “Third World” was coined by the French demographer Alfred Sauvy in the article “Trois mondes, une planète” published in the *Observateur* on 15 August 1952. It applied at that time to countries that did not align with any of the two power blocs. It alluded to the third estate, the overwhelming yet powerless majority of the French population at the beginning of the French Revolution. “Third World” became a popular label for African, Asian, even Latin American countries, and eventually a synonym for “poor” or “underdeveloped countries”. With the end of the Cold War, it lost parts of its meaning and is increasingly replaced by the term “global South”, see V. Prashad, *The darker nations. A people’s history of the third world*, New York 2007; I. Wallerstein, *C’était quoi, le tiers-monde ?*, in: *Le Monde diplomatique*, August 2000, pp. 18-19; A. Escobar, *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World*, Princeton 1994.
- 5 This may have to do with the fact that Latin America was of special importance to the UN in terms of representing also the “developing world” and strong signals were sent out to countries from that region.

Table 1: Membership of countries from Latin America, Asia and Africa (1947–1983)

1947	Colombia, Cuba, Ecuador, Honduras, Liberia, Uruguay
1948	Afghanistan, Argentina, El Salvador, Iran, Iraq
1949	Burma, Israel, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Thailand
1950	Costa Rica, Guatemala, Indonesia, Jordan, Korea, Panama
1951	Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam
1952	Nicaragua
1953	Chile, Libya, Nepal
1955	Ethiopia, Paraguay
1956	Morocco, Sudan, Tunisia
1958	Ghana, Malaysia
1960	Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo-Brazzaville, Cote d'Ivoire, Gabon, Guinea, Kuwait, Madagascar, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Somalia, Togo, Zaire
1962	Algeria, Burundi, Jamaica, Kenya, Mongolia, Mauritania, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Uganda, Yemen
1964	Malawi, Zambia
1967	Guyana, Lesotho
1968	Mauritius
1972	Bahrain, Bangladesh, Oman, Qatar, United Arab Emirates
1973	Gambia
1974	Bissau-Guinea, Democratic People's Republic of Korea
1975	Granada
1976	Suriname, Mozambique
1977	Angola, Comoros
1978	Cape Verde, Namibia, Swaziland
1979	Dominica, Equatorial Guinea
1980	Botswana, Maldives, Zimbabwe
1981	Bahamas
1982	Bhutan
1983	Fiji

Table 2: Membership of non-European Countries per World Region (1947–1983)

Africa	Asia
	1949: Burma, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Thailand 1950: Indonesia, Korea 1951: Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam
1955: Ethiopia 1956: Morocco, Sudan, Tunisia	1953: Nepal
1958: Ghana 1960: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo-Brazzaville, Cote d’Ivoire, Gabon, Guinea, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Somalia, Togo, Zaire	1958: Malaysia, Madagascar
1962: Algeria, Burundi, Kenya, Mauretania, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Uganda 1964: Malawi, Zambia	1962: Mongolia
1967: Lesotho 1968: Mauritius 1973: Gambia 1974: Guinea-Bissau, Democratic People’s Republic of Korea 1976: Mozambique	
1977: Angola, Comoros 1978: Cape Verde, Namibia, Swaziland 1979: Equatorial Guinea 1980: Botswana, Zimbabwe	1980: Maldives  1982: Bhutan 1983: Fiji

Latin America	Middle East
1947: Colombia, Cuba, Ecuador, Honduras, Uruguay 1948: Argentina, El Salvador 1950: Costa Rica, Guatemala, Panama	1947: Liberia 1948: Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq 1949: Israel 1950: Jordan
1952: Nicaragua 1953: Chile 1955: Paraguay	1953: Libya
	1960: Kuwait
1962: Jamaica	1962: Yemen
1967: Guyana 1975: Grenada 1976: Suriname	1972: Bahrain, Bangladesh, Oman, Qatar, United Arab Emirates
1979: Dominica 1981: Bahamas	

Telling of the growing prominence of the world outside of the US and Europe are the meeting places of the General Conferences (GCs), which are highly symbolic and also influential for agenda setting and outlook. Initially organized annually, from 1952 the GCs were held biennially, usually taking place at the UNESCO headquarters in Paris; yet on particular occasions it was held elsewhere. Already in 1947 the GC gathered outside of Paris in Mexico City, the year after it moved to Beirut, and in 1954 to Montevideo, which signifies – and was meant to account for – the increasing influence of non-Western countries in the UN agency. At the same time, being requested (or allowed) to organize the GC was seen as an acknowledgement of the internal development and international status of a country. Reflecting upon the GC meeting in Beirut in 1948, then Director-General Jaime Torres Bodet assessed that by securing the organization on its territory Lebanon had displayed “genuine progress”.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, the Italian delegation in a confidential cable to its foreign minister judged that it was a great asset – in terms of international publicity and commerce<sup>7</sup> – for

6 J. Torres Bodet, *El desierto internacional*, Memorias, III, Mexico 1971, p. 47.

7 Note of the Secretary for Foreign Affairs, General direction of cultural relations with other countries, 9 February 1950, in: Italian diplomatic archives [in the following IDA], Carte di Gabinetto, 1943–1958, pacco 99.

the young state to host UNESCO, even more since it was the first time that an international summit was held in the country.<sup>8</sup> During the 1956 GC in New Delhi, Athelstan F. Spilhaus, the US representative of the Executive Board, underlined (in a quite questionable manner) the symbolic capital it brought for India by stating that it “is the first multilateral conference of this importance in India”.<sup>9</sup> Surely the decision for New Delhi was a reaction to the Bandung conference of 1955 at which the Non-Aligned Movement had its beginnings. Still, it shows that India and other non-Western countries had become recognised powers and players on the international scene. The next GC outside of Paris occurred in Nairobi in 1976, and was presented by Amadou Mahtar M’Bow, in his concluding remarks as Director-General, as having been fully in the “spirit of Nairobi”,<sup>10</sup> by which he referred to a strong pan-African character that reflected the creation of the Organisation of African Unity in 1963.

Another indication for the growing role of non-Western countries at UNESCO is the election of the Director-General, whose responsibilities include the budget and programme planning. His origin may not have influenced his policy – often actors in international politics belong to a cosmopolitan elite that had some distance to their home political contexts – but it surely was assigned symbolic meaning. It is thus not surprising that already at the 1948 General Conference representatives from non-European regions agreed upon Jaime Torres Bodet, the Mexican Secretary of Foreign Affairs, as a common supported candidate for the Director-General.<sup>11</sup> In a confidential cable, a French diplomat accounted the support of Bodet to the “semi-conscious yet very powerful, and probably racially connoted, impression that M. Torres Bodet, a Mexican of French descent yet of noticeable Indian appearance, is one of them, that he is one of the brilliant ambassadors of the world of men of color with whom they strongly sympathize. Thus Torres Bodet needs to be defended against the attacks of the old world that persists in maintaining the white man’s domination.”<sup>12</sup>

Torres Bodet – a scholar, writer and librarian, politician, and diplomat – seemed to many the best man for the job because of the high esteem he held in Latin America as well as in international politics.<sup>13</sup> As minister for education since 1943, Torres Bodet restructured Mexico’s national literacy campaign, supervised the building of many schools

8 Telespresso 2042/483 of the Italian delegation in Beirut, 11 October 1948, in: U.S. National Archives, Diplomatic Records, US, College Park [in the following US DR], Decimal file 398.43, RG 59, Department of State, 1950-54, Box 1603.

9 A. F. Spilhaus, Report to the Secretary of State, 20 April 1956, in: US DR, Decimal file RG 59, Entry CDF 1955-59 (NND 907444, international organizations, conferences VI), Box 1556; Confidential Letter, US Embassy in Rio de Janeiro to the Department of State, 4 March 1958, in: *ibid*, Box 1564; Confidential Cable, Dulles to US Embassy in Paris, 2 January 1957, in: *ibid*, Box 1560.

10 UNESCO Archives Paris [in the following UAP], 19 C/INF, 23, 18 January 1977.

11 Confidential Report, Holland to Thomson, 27 October 1948, in: US DR, Decimal file, RG 59, Entry CDF 1945-49 (NND 760050, 501.PA/3-147 to 501.PA/4-1647), Box 2252.

12 Confidential Document 17 July 1950, in: Archives Diplomatiques, Paris [in the following ADP], Nations Unies Organisations Internationales, Secrétariat des conférences, 1960-1968 [in the following NUOI], Carton 835.

13 M. H. Holcroft, Lebanon. Impressions of a Unesco Conference, Christchurch 1949, p. 47; J. Huxley, Memories II, New York 1973, p. 67.

and libraries, and propagated the view that each literate person had a moral obligation to teach how to read and write to an illiterate person.<sup>14</sup> Within a few years, thanks to this campaign, 1.2 million Mexicans learned to read.<sup>15</sup> Not least because of this success, he was nominated president of the Mexican delegation to the founding conference of UNESCO.

Torres Bodet<sup>16</sup> won the election, on the one hand because France supported him, and on the other hand since he was built up as the candidate of the “weak” against the Australian Ronald Walker. The latter was initially promoted by the US, being considered most open to issues of relevance to non-Western countries, but was finally asked to withdraw from his candidacy.<sup>17</sup> For G.V. Allen, then president of the US delegation, “in contrast to the bitter struggle attending the election of [Julian] Huxley two years earlier [as UNESCO’s first Director-General], the practical unanimity which governed the choice of Torres Bodet augured well for the future of UNESCO.”<sup>18</sup> It is indeed remarkable that almost all Latin American and Asian members united and voted for Torres Bodet, and that in consequence the US gave up its preferred option.<sup>19</sup> Equally important to note is the fact that Torres Bodet – unanimously supported by the Executive Board and the Secretariat – was able to ease the tensions and antagonism between the “Latin bloc” and the “Anglo-Saxon bloc”, which had divided UNESCO from its very beginning<sup>20</sup> (at least in the eyes of French and American diplomats), and also due to his credo that “there can be no absolute boundary between the educationalist’s duties and the diplomat’s obligations”.<sup>21</sup> In 1952 Torres Bodet resigned, disillusioned by the Executive Council’s refusal to vote for the budget he had made and which he saw necessary for his programme plans.

The second Director-General from outside of Europe and the US was the Senegalese Amadou Mahtar M’Bow, who was elected over two decades later in 1974. Before he was member of the Executive Board and Assistant Director-General for Education (1970–1974)<sup>22</sup>, and through these positions he had been closely involved in efforts in reforming

14 J. L. Martinez, *Semblanzas de Académicos*, Ediciones del Centenario de la Academia Mexicana, México 1975; on Torres Bodet see: S. Spaulding / L. Lin, *Historical Dictionary of the UNESCO*, Lanham 1997, p. 48.

15 En deux ans, 1 200 000 Mexicains apprennent à lire. *Biographie de M. Torres Bodet*, in: *Courrier de l’Unesco*, December 1948, p. 2.

16 Confidential Letter, Sargeant to Lovett, 20 November 1947, in: US DR, Decimal file RG 59, Entry CDF 1945-49 (NND 760050, 501.PA/3-147 to 501.PA/4-1647), Box 2244.

17 Doc ML/77, Annexe I, Paris, 4 June 1948, in: UAP, X 07.531 DG; Confidential Report, US delegation to the 1948 General Conference, p. 10, in: US DR, Decimal file RG 59, Entry CDF 1945-49 (NND 760050, 501.PA/3-147 to 501.PA/4-1647), Box 2254.

18 G. V. Allen, Memorandum to the Secretary on the UNESCO Conference at Beirut, 17 November - 11 December 1948, p. 18, in: US DR (16).

19 Columbia Center for Oral History, New York [in the following CCOH], interview Luther Evans, pp. 372, 386; Doc ML/77, Annexe I, Paris, 4 June 1948, UAP, X 07.531 DG; Confidential Report of the American delegation to the Unesco General Conference, 1948, p. 10, in: US DR (16).

20 Confidential Report, Holland to Thomson, 10 January 1949, pp. 1f.; Confidential Report, Holland to Thomson, 21 January 1949, p. 1; Confidential Report, Holland to Thomson, 28 January 1949, pp. 1f., in: US DR (16).

21 UAP, DG/1, Paris, 10 December 1948, p. 2.

22 Report of the US delegation to the 84<sup>th</sup> session of the Executive Board, June 1970, p. 14, in: US DR, Subject Mumeric File, 1970-73, Special Organizations, Box 3222; UAP, biographic file of M’Bow.

UNESCO.<sup>23</sup> M’Bow’s skills and the strong support his predecessor René Maheu account for his success in the election. Similarly influential was his African origin and his biography. He came from an illiterate Wolof family<sup>24</sup> and his childhood was overshadowed by a famine that occurred in Senegal between 1928 and 1930, out of which his later commitment to development aid and technical assistance to Third World countries arose.<sup>25</sup> During World War II, M’Bow served in the French air force, returning shortly to Dakar in October 1940 before fighting for the French De Gaulle’s government-in-exile. After the liberation of France he went to Paris to study at Sorbonne University,<sup>26</sup> where he became the leader of the Federation of African Students in France and worked to “rehabilitate the African heritage”.<sup>27</sup>

UNESCO officials considered M’Bow a “great” and “remarkable” Director-General during his first term (1974–1980), but less during the second term (1980–1986), mainly because of his advocacy for the controversial “community-ism-concept”, a passionate promotion of non-European cultural identities and traditions, and because he appeared to be increasingly securing and widening his personal power.<sup>28</sup> Before his support decreased, he argued for a broadening of UNESCO’s self-understanding. In his view UNESCO should not only devote itself to universalism but also to multiculturalism – mankind should be seen in its “unity and diversity”.<sup>29</sup> To him, UNESCO’s objective was a “true cultural osmosis that would neither be the domination of a particular type of culture nor some sort of cultural cosmopolitanism drawing on common yet non-essential features of each culture and thus prone to trivialization.”<sup>30</sup> In the duality of universalism/multiculturalism he saw “UNESCO’s vitality” grounded.<sup>31</sup> However, in the later years of his presidency M’Bow emphasised multiculturalism, engaged in projects to foster African cultural identities, and distanced himself from the universalist thinking that had been driven UNESCO’s programmatic lines and policy.<sup>32</sup> Presenting himself now first and foremost as a spokesman of the Third World, he considered his re-election as “a sign of consideration and respect towards regions and people – Third World people – that, for a very long time, were kept away from the centres of decisions and of universal influence.” Openly he declared that his mission now stems from “the genius and wis-

23 UAP, biographic file of M’Bow.

24 S. Groussard, *Un Africain à la tête de l’Unesco. Amadou M’Bow: de la cause du petit paysan oulof au Palais de la Culture*, interview of M’Bow, in: *Le Figaro*, 15 November 1974.

25 A. M. M’Bow, *D’un village du Sahel à la direction générale de l’Unesco*, in: *Educafrica*, 1, 1977, pp. 5-11, p. 8.

26 S. Groussard, *Un Africain à la tête de l’Unesco* (24).

27 A. M. M’Bow, *D’un village du Sahel*, p. 9 (25). He repeatedly returned to Senegal to teach, see: S. Groussard, *Un Africain à la tête de l’Unesco* (24).

28 Personal interviews with Jean Larnaud (4 March 2004), Harold Foecke (19 March 2004), Acher Deleon (24 February 2004), by Chloé Maurel (Paris).

29 “Unité et diversité” is the title of the first chapter of Amadou-Mahtar M’Bow’s book “*Le Temps des peuples*” (Paris 1982).

30 A. M. M’Bow, *L’Unesco et le monde, idées pour une action de large portée*, p. 10, quoted in: A. Monclus/C. Saban, *La Escuela Global: La educación y la comunicación a lo largo de la historia de la Unesco*, Madrid 1997, p. 142.

31 DG/74/15, Speech by the DG of Unesco, 23 November 1974, p. 1, in: UAP.

32 G. Sluga, UNESCO and the (One) World of Julian Huxley, in: *Journal of World History*, 21 (2010) 3, pp. 393-418.



dom of the African people”,<sup>33</sup> while developing concepts for strengthening the “cultural dimension of development” and arguing for a “cultural finality of development”. Along this line UNESCO had to help an “integrated development” in the Third World, in which “highly interconnected economic, social and cultural factors contribute together to progress”,<sup>34</sup> and it should commit itself to creating a “new world information and communication order” (NWICO), because in this sphere African capabilities (the mastering of information technologies) could come out strongly. Of little surprise, M’Bow’s radical defence of the economic and cultural interests of Third World countries brought criticism and as a result multiculturalist arguments were met with opposition, especially by European and North American members. It is, however, also an example that African and other non-European concerns could be pursued directly and vigorously.

### **Non-Western Collaboration and its Difficulties**

Representatives from Latin America, Asia, and Africa became more influential especially due to their collaborative action. As early as 1948/49 they expressed joint demands: the election of a Director-General from their ranks, the venue of the General Conferences being in their regions, the recognition of a non-Western language as an official UNESCO language, and the expansion of the organization’s activities beyond Europe and the US. Altogether they requested a thorough decentring and de-provincialization. In the following years one can observe the formation of three regionally based lobby groups: the Latin American, the Arab, and the Asian states.

After Latin American representatives had already engaged with a common voice in the debates of the 1946 General Conference, supported by Director-General Julian Huxley,<sup>35</sup> at the meeting two years later Arthur Compton (heading the US delegation) observed not only the growth of steady exchanges and links between them, but saw a group that “has developed a strong and united front on major issues which is very hard to break”.<sup>36</sup> Taking up on that, Middle Eastern states formed a solid group within UNESCO a few years later, with Egypt a driving force.<sup>37</sup> Here the cohesion resulted less from their opposition to the hegemony of the Western countries and more from a shared stance against Israel. The attitude towards the neighbour had already been debated at the General Conference

33 F. Valderrama, *Histoire de l’Unesco*, Paris 1995, p. 224.

34 A. M. M’Bow, *Le Temps des peuples*, pp. 165, 177-181 (29).

35 At a press conference in June 1947, Huxley criticised Western influence within UNESCO and wished that non-Western states gained the influence they deserved, see: Confidential Letter, Cody (cultural attaché, Mexico) to US Secretary of State, 16 June 1947, in: US DR, Decimal file missing information, RG 59, Entry CDF 1945-49 (NND 760050, 501.PA/3-147 to 501.PA/4-1647), Box 2241. In June–July 1947, Huxley visited many non-Western states in order to promote UNESCO and to encourage membership in his organization, see: Direction of Cultural Affairs, UNESCO Service, No. 3, 25 August 1947, in: ADP, NUOI 1946-59, Carton 333.

36 Compton to Allen, Confidential Report on 3<sup>rd</sup> session of UNESCO General Conference, Nov.-Dec. 1948, p. 1, in: US DR (16).

37 At the 1948 General Conference Arthur Compton still noted dissension within the group on particular issues, *ibid.*

of 1948 in reaction to the foundation of Israel and the first Arab-Israeli war that year, which had increased the hostility between the two camps.<sup>38</sup> Shortly before the opening of that meeting, a Lebanese Foreign Office employee proclaimed publically that Lebanon would prefer a withdrawal from hosting the conference to see a “Zionist representative” participating.<sup>39</sup> And at the opening of the conference, the representatives of Israel, the Jewish World Congress, and the World Union of Jewish Youth were banned from entering by Lebanese authorities, which caused serious political tensions that UNESCO was with difficulty able to minimize.<sup>40</sup> Already in UNESCO’s third year, two non-Western alliances, the Latin American and the Arab, had formed and stood together against the Anglo-Saxon and the Latin blocs (with France and Italy in the centre). Arthur Compton wrote in a confidential report of “a marked display of Arab-Latin-American solidarity on major political issues”, strong enough to make up “a formidable bloc”.<sup>41</sup> Equally the Egyptian press observed – and praised – the “collaboration between Arab and Latin American states.”<sup>42</sup> Nevertheless, such joint actions were not welcome everywhere, the least by US diplomats.<sup>43</sup> In the spring 1949 – according to Torres Bodet – members from Asia started to band together under India’s leadership,<sup>44</sup> which has to be seen in relation to the recent entry of Thailand, Burma, and Sri Lanka.

Thus at the beginning of the 1950s “the increasing influence in conference debates of economically under-developed countries”<sup>45</sup> had become widely noted and soon led to a divide between industrialized countries – specially the US, the UK, and France – and economically less advancing and/or politically less powerful ones.<sup>46</sup>

Collaboration was not the only way through which African, Asian, and Latin American members fought for larger recognition and better status. Especially in the early years they criticised the highly unbalanced world regional representation in the UNESCO staff; for example, the Indian representative Radakrishnan deplored at the 1947 General Conference the marginal position of non-Western countries in the Secretariat.<sup>47</sup> Added

38 3C/VR 2, Beirut, 19 November 1948, pp. 14-16, in: Columbia University Rare Books and Manuscript Library, New York [in the following CU RBML], Charles Ascher Papers, Box 148.

39 Telespresso No. 2042/483 de la délégation d’Italie à Beyrouth, 11 October 1948, in: US DR (8).

40 Bidault to Schuman, Confidential Report, 26 April 1949, pp. 20-22, in: ADP, Mission permanente de la France auprès des Nations Unies, carton 117; Telespresso No. 1152, adressé par Valdenaro au ministère des affaires étrangères italien, 26 November 1948, in: US DR (7).

41 Compton to Allen, Confidential Report, p. 2; US delegation 3<sup>rd</sup> session of General Conference, Beirut, December 1948, Report on General Political Relations during 3<sup>rd</sup> session of UNESCO General Conference, 31 December 1948 (confid.), p. 4, in: US DR (16).

42 M. Perrier, Avec la nomination d’un directeur général mexicain à l’Unesco: La collaboration entre les pays arabes et ceux d’Amérique latine va entrer dans une phase nouvelle, in: Le Journal d’Egypte, 27 November 1948.

43 R. S. Smith, The formulation of Unesco programme, Harvard University, 31 January 1949, p. 111, 125, in: CU RBML, Charles Ascher Papers, Box 149.

44 J. Torres Bodet, Memorias III, pp. 163, 175 (6).

45 US National Commission for Unesco, Informal Report of the US Delegation to the seventh session of the General Conference of Unesco, 12 November-11 December 1952, p. 2.

46 Torres Bodet in allusion to the Christian native scene nicknamed the ones the “Magi” and the others “shepherd states”, and deplored that the latter predominantly sought after material benefits with UNESCO, see: J. Torres Bodet, Memorias III, pp. 361, 364, 210 (6).

47 Diary of the 1947 General Conference, vol. 1, 4<sup>th</sup> plenary session, 8 November 1947, Intervention by S. Rada-

to that there was large sensitivity as to the origins of the experts sent by UNESCO to non-Western countries, which in several cases were former colonial administrators. For instance, in 1952, the government of Liberia – one of the few African countries then being in UNESCO – opposed the intention to send a British expert for inspection who had worked for the Colonial Office in London. This was successful since in the end an Indian expert was sent to Liberia.<sup>48</sup>

The collectively articulated demands had also institutional effects, for example the establishment of regional offices. The initiative in this direction had started early, in fact by Julian Huxley in March 1946. Then Executive Secretary of the Preparatory Commission he wanted to create a decentralized organization, operating from headquarters in ten regions. Although his proposition was considered favourably by the US State Department, in whose hands the organization of the founding conference had been, the idea was not realized. Despite of that, during his visits to Latin America and the Middle East in 1947 and 1948, Julian Huxley repeatedly heard the call that his organization should expand its operations.<sup>49</sup> Jaime Torres Bodet also experienced this call, which, among others, Jawaharlal Nehru expressed the expectations about a more global anchor of UNESCO.

At the 1947 General Conference the idea of regional centres was revived, among others, by Paulo E. Berrêdo Carneiro (Brazil). He advocated “decentralization” and “regionalization” and activities “disseminated worldwide”.<sup>50</sup> In 1948 the request was taken up by a group of Latin American representatives who proposed a regional centre to be established in Cuba, an idea that “was backed solidly by all the Arab states”, while a similar proposal by Arab representatives for a cultural centre in their region “was backed solidly by the Latin Americans.”<sup>51</sup> Notwithstanding opposition – notably from the US – the General Conference enacted the establishment of a “UNESCO regional centre for the western hemisphere” in Havana,<sup>52</sup> which opened in July 1949.<sup>53</sup> The struggle went on; and although it escalated in 1951 due to fierce opposition from the US,<sup>54</sup> the Regional centre of fundamental education in Latin America (CREFAL) in Mexico and the Arab States

krishnan, pp. 61-62; UAP, SC/ADM/12, quoted in: G. Archibald, *Les Etats-Unis et l'Unesco, 1944-1963*, Paris 1993, p. 170. In 1950, among the 345 senior positions at the Secretariat, 156 were held by US, French, and British representatives.

48 Capper to Allen, Confidential Letter, 3 May 1952; Capper to Allen, Confidential Letter, 29 July 1952, in: UK National Archives, Kew [in the following UK NA] FO 371/97165.

49 J. Huxley, *Memories II*, p. 39 (13).

50 Diary of the 1947 General Conference, vol. I, 5<sup>th</sup> plenary session, 10 November 1947, Intervention by Carneiro, p. 72, in: UAP.

51 US delegation, Confidential Report, 31 December 1948, p. 4.

52 Bidault to Schuman, 26 April 1949, p. 15-16; G. V. Allen, Memorandum to the secretary on the UNESCO conference at Beirut, 17 November-11 December 1948, p. 14, in: US DR (16).

53 *Création d'un bureau régional de l'Unesco pour l'hémisphère occidental*, in: *Courrier de l'Unesco*, July 1949, pp. 1f; *Constituye un éxito la creación de la Unesco*, in: *El Mundo*, 26 February 1950, pp. 1, 12, in: US DR, Decimal file 398.43, RG 59, Department of State, 1950-54, Box 1601.

54 Holland to Thomson, Confidential Report, 6 January 1950, in: US DR, Decimal file 398.43, RG 59, Department of State, 1950-54, Box 1600; C. Asher, Program-making in Unesco, 1946-51, Chicago 1951, p. 33; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Confidential Note, 27 March 1953; Note for the Conference Secretariat, 19 July 1951, in: ADP, cultural relations 1951-52, Carton 242.

Fundamental Education Centre (ASFEC) in Egypt opened in 1950. Apart from these three main and few other regional offices, UNESCO remained centralized, being run from the Paris headquarters.

Another issue on the agenda was the recognition of Spanish and Arabic as UNESCO’s official languages. To establish Spanish as a working language was discussed first in 1946 when Ecuador had officially requested that documents be translated into Spanish. Again it was mainly the US delegation, flanked by France, who objected drawing on the administrative and financial costs of such a step.<sup>55</sup> A year later the Mexican delegation, supported by the whole regional group and backed by favourable press at home, tried it again, voicing loudly the resentment about the rejection.<sup>56</sup> In 1948 Arab and Latin American like-minded representatives joined and achieved a compromise. Spanish was to be used when interpreting is available, yet documents and reports would continue to be published only in English and French.<sup>57</sup> This success can clearly be attributed to the collaboration between delegates from non-Western regions.

### **Increasing Action (from the mid-1950s until the mid-1960s)**

Representatives from the “global South” were strengthened by the experience of the success of united action and thus the continued to make use of it, even more often from the mid-1950s, then in many cases led by India, and other delegates from Asia.<sup>58</sup> The first conference of the Indian National Commission for UNESCO, held in January/February 1954, at which educational experts from the whole region and from Africa participated, constituted a landmark in efforts to profile African and Asian concerns in UNESCO. It offered an occasion to get to know each other, to assure oneself of the developing significance of the Third World in international affairs, and to take stock of the cohesiveness of their demands. It also allowed for the coordination of views on UNESCO’s policy as well as for the preparation of joint interventions and demands for the 1956 General Conference.<sup>59</sup> Thus the conference can be described as a “pre-Bandung” summit in reference to the meeting at which the Non-Aligned Movement was formed. The partaking of Indian parliamentarians and of the Indian minister of education, Maulana Azad, in the

55 General Conference 1946, C/30, 13<sup>th</sup> plenary session, p. 88-90, in: UAP; Noyes to Benton, Confidential Report, 24 December 1946, p. 4, in: US DR, Decimal file, RG 59, Entry CDF 1945-49 (NND 760050, 501.PA/3-147 to 501.PA/4-1647), Box 2241.

56 Fisher, First Secretary of the US embassy in Mexico, to the Secretary of State, Confidential Letter, 5 December 1947, p. 4; Fisher to the Secretary of State, Confidential letter, 19 December 1947, in: US DR, Decimal file, RG 59, Entry CDF 1945-49 (NND 760050, 501.PA/3-147 to 501.PA/4-1647), Box 2244.

57 US delegation to the 3<sup>rd</sup> session of the General Conference, Beirut, Confidential Report, 31 December 1948, pp. 4f., in: US DR (16); Bidault to Schuman, Report, 26 April 1949, pp. 16-17, in: ADP, French permanent mission to the UN, carton 117.

58 Letter by the Embassy of the German Federal Republic in India, 13 September 1954, in: Bundesarchiv Berlin [in the following BA], Bestand B 91, Bd. 252; P. Lengyel, *International Social Science: The Unesco experience*, New Brunswick 1986, pp. 28f.

59 *Unesco in Schools*, New Delhi 1964, pp. 55f.

1956 meeting of their National UNESCO-Commission, as well as in the 1956 General Conference in New Delhi, which the Indian government had organized with pomp, was meant to demonstrate that India was to engage more actively in UNESCO – especially in urging it to become more involved in the Third World.<sup>60</sup> Amongst the Asian states aspiring to play a larger role was Japan, which envisioned itself as “a bridge between the western and Asian members.”<sup>61</sup>

Openly, non-Western members began to address the unbalanced composition of the UNESCO Secretariat.<sup>62</sup> Such criticism was on good grounds since in 1952 52% of senior staff positions were filled by French, British, and US-American officers.<sup>63</sup> In addition, non-Western states continued to oppose the stationing of experts from Europe and the US in their countries. For example, in 1957, in the context of the Suez affair, the Syrian government refused to host French and British cultural diplomats, and strongly urged for appointment of UNESCO experts and scholars from the region.<sup>64</sup>

But also Latin American engagement became more directed against the European domination of the organization, and sharper in tone. At the second conference of the ministers of education of the Organization of American States in Lima in May 1956, the Ecuadorian minister acerbically deplored UNESCO’s lack of action towards Latin America” and the Bolivian minister complained that Latin America “receives only crumbs” of the “UNESCO feast” while accusing UNESCO of being a “European organization ignorant of the Latin American realities and behaving towards Latin American countries like a ‘magisterat’ full of his doctrinal superiority”. According to the report of René Maheu, who observed the conference, these speeches were met with “salvos of applause”. Yet Maheu also returned to Paris with the impression of a general “sympathy” towards UNESCO, and although to him the expectations were far beyond what UNESCO can give, he conceded: “I tend to agree with our Latin American critics . . . namely that the UNESCO Secretariat, in general, has yet to develop sufficient knowledge and understanding of Latin American problems, people and customs.”<sup>65</sup>

As in the late 1940s and early 1950s representatives from Latin America, Asian, and Africa demanded material assistance, especially the opening of regional offices.<sup>66</sup> Throughout

60 Pfauter, Report on the sessions of the Indian national commission, 24 February 1956, in: BA, Bestand B 91, Bd. 16; Glaring Gap in UN Practice and Profession. Azad’s Criticism in Unesco Body. Speech by M. Azad, 6 February 1956, in: Hindustan Times, 7 February 1956; see also: Times of India, 7 February 1956, p. 1, and CCOH, interview with Luther Evans, pp. 437, 440.

61 Hackler, US Embassy in Tokyo, to the Department of State, Confidential Letter, 27 July 1956, in: US DR, Decimal file, RG 59, Entry CDF 1955-59 (NND 907444, international organizations, conferences VI), Box 1558.

62 UAP, SCX/PRIV. 2, 45<sup>th</sup> session, 5<sup>th</sup> private audience, 1 December 1956, p. 2.

63 They summed up to 182 out of the 349 positions, see: UNESCO archives, 42 EX/38, annex I, quoted in: G. Archibald, *Les Etats-Unis et l’Unesco*, p. 171 (47); Unesco activities in Japan, p. 16.

64 US embassy in Damas to the Department of State, Report, 16 November 1957, pp. 3f., in: US DR, Decimal file, RG59, entry CDF 1955-59 (NND 907444, international organizations, conferences VI), Box 1563. Requests to UNESCO to address their needs are documented in: K. Pfauter, Report, 24 February 1956; Glaring Gap in UN Practice and profession; Times of India, 7 February 1956, pp. 1, 7.

65 UNESCO archives, file X 07.83 Maheu, I, Maheu to Director-General, Confidential Report, May 1956, pp. 22-27.

66 See for this an interview with Luther Evans (Director-General from 1952 to 1958), in which he reports on the re-

the 1960s, they strove to transform UNESCO into an “instrument of cultural decolonization” – for which a significant increase of the budget and spending on projects in the newly independent states was seen as being primarily needed, alongside a better representation in the Executive Board.<sup>67</sup> The latter was met with success, as indicated by the observation of Oliver de Sayve, a French diplomat, who noticed that the African-Latin American group had become in 1965 an “essential element” in the Executive Board.<sup>68</sup> He had in mind in particular Paulo de Berrêdo Carneiro, who became the spokesperson of the Latin Americans in the Executive Board, later followed by M. Dell’Oro Maini. Also Carlos Chagas, a friend of Carneiro and permanent member of the Brazilian delegation at the General Conferences, played a significant role together with Malian Amadou Hampâté Bâ (Mali) and M. Tewfik.<sup>69</sup>

Still an issue in their engagement was the language policy; they argued that at least one of the widely spoken languages in the non-Western world should be used in UNESCO’s internal and public communication. For instance Pakistan, Iran, Egypt, Kuwait, and Sudan drafted for the 1962 General Conference a resolution on a wider usage of Arabic, which was only recognised as an official language, as were French, English, Spanish, Russian, Chinese, Hindi, and Italian.<sup>70</sup> At the meeting in 1964, finally important documents were interpreted and translated into Arabic at the expense of the Arab states. And in 1966 it was agreed to progressively use it as a working language besides French, English, Spanish and Russian.<sup>71</sup> In 1968 granting Arabic the status as official internal means of communication failed due to the refusal of the US.<sup>72</sup>

Nevertheless, significant changes were achieved: UNESCO spending became more global; non-Western concerns received larger attention; Latin America, Asia, and Africa were better represented in the Executive Board as well as in many of the undertaken projects; and the multi-language policy was broadened. Besides, UNESCO offered a “good training ground” for those who would later work for the government or in politics at home, and they became acquainted with strategies to gain visibility and influence in the international arena.<sup>73</sup>

sponses on a questionnaire the US Department of States had sent to embassies in Africa, Asia, and Latin America to inquire into the local expectation, see CCOH, interview with Luther Evans, p. 541.

67 H. Nafaa, *L’Egypte et l’Unesco*, Paris 1977, pp. 629, 636; N. Gaudant, *La politique de l’Unesco pour l’alphabétisation en Afrique occidentale (1946-1960)*, Master Thesis, Université Paris, 1990, pp. 158-160; doc AE/78 EX/3.1 (n°236), in: ADP, NUOI, carton 835.

68 Letter from O. de Sayve to M. Couve de Murville, 21 May 1965, pp. 2f., in: ADP, Mission permanente de la France auprès des Nations Unies, Carton 117.

69 US delegation to the 72<sup>nd</sup> session of the Executive Board, 2-31 May 1966, Confidential Report (Benton), pp. 11-14, in: US DR, Central foreign policy files, RG 59, 1964-66, special instructions (NND 959000), Box 3340; No. 404/A/5 in: FDA, NUOI carton 835.

70 UNESCO archives, document of the General Conference 14 C/8, pp. 3-4.

71 Political instructions for the French delegation at the 14<sup>th</sup> General Conference, 25-30 November 1966, in: ADP, France’s permanent mission at the UN, Carton 25.

72 Airgram, Department of State to all US diplomatic posts, 16 September 1968, in: US DR, Decimal file, RG 59, Entry CDF 1967-69 (special instructions), Box 3212.

73 Report of the US delegation to the 17<sup>th</sup> session, p. 4.

However, from the mid-1960s onwards, and especially during the 1970s, the unity began to fall apart. Frictions emerged, especially between Latin American representatives and delegates from Africa and Asia.<sup>74</sup> In addition tensions and different opinions within the groups arose. At the occasion of the 1968 General Conference, the head of the Pakistani delegation publically criticised (i.e., in the press) an alleged under-representation of Pakistan in the UNESCO staff, comparing it with the number of officials from India.<sup>75</sup> Rivalries also emerged between African diplomats from the former French colonies, the former British colonies, and the Maghreb, evident among others at an expert meeting on the development of information media in Africa in January-February 1962.<sup>76</sup> As the 1960s unfolded, the African group became “fragile”, at least in the perception of the French and US-American Executive Board members. In 1966 William Benton (US) on the one hand observed an “increasing maturity and cohesion of the African group”, yet on the other also saw “evidence of divisions within the group, not only along traditional language boundaries, but also in function of personalities and politics”.<sup>77</sup> These internal rifts as well as the disaccord in the non-Western bloc widened in the 1970s and 1980s.

### East-West Competition to Win the Third World

In the late 1950s the Cold War was increasingly fought over influence and control of non-Western regions, with decolonialization being the trigger of this expansion. Both the US and the Soviet Union (SU) competing for the alignment of Latin American, Asian, and African states, also in international organizations.<sup>78</sup> In 1956, as the New Delhi General Conference was approaching, the US member of the Executive Board, Athelstan F. Spilhaus, was confident that the meeting would “offer the US a stimulating occasion to gain a dominant position in this part of the world.”<sup>79</sup> At the General Conference four years later, the US delegation aimed to “affirm US domination over the conference, to marginalize the Soviets and to gain the trust and esteem of underdeveloped regions, especially Africa”, and the head of the American delegation, Robert H. Thayer, stated that “we have, I think, succeeded in taking the leadership in the Conference in offering assistance to the Africans in the field of education, without making our friends in Asia, the Arab States and Latin America feel that we have been doing it at their expense.”<sup>80</sup> Here, how-

74 De Sayve to Couve de Murville, 21 May 1965, pp. 2f.

75 Airgram, Rawalpindi to the Department of State, 17 October 1968, in: US DR, Decimal file, RG59, entry CDF 1967-69, special instructions, Box 3212.

76 Report, US delegation to the Unesco meeting of experts on the development of information media in Africa, submitted to the Secretary of State by R. E. Hartland, 26 March 1962, p. 7, in: US DR, Decimal file, RG 59, Entry CDF 1960-63, Box 825.

77 Document No. 404/A/5 in: ADP, NUOI carton 835; Confidential Report, US delegation to the 72nd session of the executive board, pp. 13f, in: US DR, Central foreign policy files, RG 59, 1964-66, special instructions (NND 959000), Box 3340.

78 O. A. Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times*, Cambridge 2007.

79 See the three documents stated in (8).

80 Thayer to Herter, 2 December 1960, in: US DR, Decimal file, RG 59, Entry CDF 1960-63, Box 822. The same goal



ever, attempts of the US to win the hearts and mind of the Third World – for ideological and economic reasons – were insofar contradictory as the advocacy for African concerns in the international arena were at odds with the racial discrimination at home.<sup>81</sup> Similarly the Soviet Union profiled itself as a advocate of the Third World.<sup>82</sup> To give a few examples: at the 1958 Executive Board meeting the Soviet delegates supported a Middle Eastern candidate for Director-General against Vittorino Veronese (Italy), considering that “it is time for a representative of the Middle East to lead UNESCO”.<sup>83</sup> And in June 1960, during a confidential meeting with Veronese, the Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko regretted that “the organization is still influenced by the residual interest of former colonial powers for their former colonies” and criticised that “colonizers impeding ... UNESCO’s activities aiming to assist newly independent countries.”<sup>84</sup> To counter that the Soviet delegation suggested in 1960 firstly a UNESCO Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, which was opposed by the US and its allies with the argument that the aim was the task of the UN not UNESCO. Eventually a more moderate declaration on “the role of UNESCO in the attainment of independence was adopted, which stipulated the necessity to overcome all forms of colonialism and hindrances to freedom and independence.”<sup>85</sup> Secondly, Soviet delegates proposed replacing the position of Director-General by a “collegial directorate” composed of three directors with equal powers, one representing socialist, one neutral, and one Western countries. Not surprising the move was supported by non-Western and East European representatives, but not from others.<sup>86</sup> It also failed in the second attempt, namely at the Executive Board meeting in 1961 where Alexei Pavlov sought to ensure “a fairer geographic distribution” of power and a larger influence for non-Western representatives concerning the governance of UNESCO via a collegial directorate.<sup>87</sup> Not giving up, the Soviet Union suggested five years later another draft resolution that would condemn “colonialism and neocolonialism” and request that independence being granted

orientated the US delegation to the Asian National Commissions for UNESCO, Manila 1960, which also meant to counter the pro-Third World attitude of the USSR, perceived as being implemented by “inject[ing] political and propaganda issues into the conference”; see: W. Dox, Report of the US national commission on the 2nd regional conference of the Asian regional commissions, Manila, 18-23 January 1960, in: US DR, Decimal file, RG 59, Entry CDF 1960-63, Box 819.

81 G. Archibald, *Les Etats-Unis et l’Unesco*, pp. 291, 323 (47).

82 Cable by Trutschler to Bonn, 22 November 1956, in: BA, Bestand B 91, Referat 601, Bd. 16.

83 10 C/VR.17 (secret), January 1959, pp. 9f. and pp. 22f.; Speech by Soviet diplomat Kuznetsov; Cable, 22 November 1958, in: ADP, NUOI, Carton 836.

84 Confidential Aide-Mémoire on the meeting between Veronese and Gromyko, 10 June 1960, in: Istituto Luigi Sturzo, Rome, Fonds Vittorino Veronese, Carton 32.

85 Resolution, *Le rôle de l’Unesco dans l’octroi de l’indépendance aux pays et peuples colonisés*, in: UAP 11C/Rés. 8.2; Note, French permanent representative to the Secretariat General of DGACT, 8 December 1960, and Note for the Secretary General of DGACT, 10 December 1960, in: ADP, NUOI, carton 834.

86 11<sup>th</sup> General Conference, Note, DGACT to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, 22 November 1960, in: FDA, NUOI, carton 834; *Le Monde*, 26 November 1960, p. 2.

87 UAP, document of the Executive Council 60 EX/PRIVSR.1 (prov.), 29 January 1962, pp. 6f., in: UAP, SCX/PRIV.5.



without delay to all colonized people.<sup>88</sup> Again it was refused on the ground that it would “lead UNESCO to drift towards a political path diverging from its mission.”<sup>89</sup>

In comparison, the American strategy focused on provision of material and technical assistance and subsidies, while the Soviet strategy promoted resolutions and declarations on political, economic, and social rights as well as against colonialism.<sup>90</sup>

Overall the sessions of the UNESCO’s General Conference and Executive Board as well as other meetings became arenas of competition between the US and the SU to see who supports the most as well as in the best manner non-Western representatives and their concerns. The Kennedy government institutionalized development assistance in 1961 – not the least to promote US culture and US political principles in Africa as part of consolidating American hegemony. Merging distinct agencies, the International Development Association, the Peace Corps, the Alliance for Progress, and the Food for Peace Program were created, in response also to the announced “United Nations Development Decade”.<sup>91</sup> These concerted efforts intensified the relation between the US and UNESCO;<sup>92</sup> the US used UNESCO as a means to spread its own culture and it is striking how explicitly – in confidential papers as well as in Congress speeches – it was linked with the ambition to rule the world. For example, Eugene Sochor, assistant director of the US National Commission, acknowledged in 1964 that UNESCO was seen as an instrument against Soviet propaganda, hoping it would “become a powerful voice for our ideals and concepts which will be heard by many uncommitted nations.”<sup>93</sup> This application promoted by the US could now even be used to challenge the organization’s own policies. Donald B. Eddy (UNESCO delegate) among others bemoaned that the US had lost influence in the Executive Board as well as popularity among non-Western representatives because it had opposed the increase of the budget for projects in their parts of the world.<sup>94</sup> Reacting to that, President Lyndon B. Johnson informed René Maheu of his decision to transfer funds that had been hitherto allocated to bilateral aid to development projects conducted by UNESCO and substantiating that the US would engage more in the future in multilateral assistance, as provided by UNESCO.<sup>95</sup> Along this line

88 UAP, document of the General Conference, UNESCO, 14 C/71.

89 See on that: G. Bourreau, *La politique française à l’Unesco durant la période gaullienne, 1958-69*, in: R. Frank et al. (eds.), *L’Unesco: un instrument pour le prestige français*, Paris 2002, p. 77.

90 C. Maurel, *L’Unesco de 1945 à 1974*, doctoral thesis, Université Paris 1, Paris 2005, pp. 274-280.

91 At the 1962 General Conference, the US delegation encouraged UNESCO to fully devote itself to the UN “Development Decade”, see: Cook, US embassy in Niamey, to the Department of State, Confidential Letter, 2 January 1962, in: US DR, Decimal file, RG 59, Entry CDF 1960-63, Box 824.

92 US Report at the 1962 General Conference, p. 52; G. Archibald, *Les Etats-Unis et l’Unesco*, pp. 287-288 (47). In September 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson presented a five-point programme, which to Olivier de Sayve seemed “very close to UNESCO’s mission in many respects”, see: de Sayve to Couve de Murville, 30 November 1965, in: ADP, Délégation permanente de la France auprès de l’Unesco, Nantes, carton 6.

93 E. Sochor, *A New Look at Unesco*, April 1964, quoted in: US National Commission for Unesco (eds.), *Congress Reports*, vol. 110, 88<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, Senate Meeting, 8 April 1964, pp. 7273-7275.

94 Letter Donald to Eddy and Benton, 13 May 1963, in: UCA, William Benton Papers, Box 404.

95 De Sayve to Couve de Murville, 20 December 1965, in: ADP, Délégation permanente de la France auprès de l’Unesco, Nantes, Carton 6.

the Johnson administration generously subsidized UNESCO’s special fund projects,<sup>96</sup> while initiating and funding projects in Africa to prevent African countries from taking the socialist path and to win their sympathy.<sup>97</sup>

The self-interest and the competition with the SU driving this engagement was naturally noticed, and countered. René Maheu, Director-General from 1962 to 1974, and being the first head of a UN agency to visit the newly independent Algeria, where he initiated projects,<sup>98</sup> emphasised in 1963 vis-à-vis the US National Commission that “no European state remains a great colonial or world power” and was “held in high esteem by representatives of under-developed countries” for that position,<sup>99</sup> which helped him to be re-elected in 1967 despite the rival candidacy of Humayun Kabir (India), who was supported by the British government.<sup>100</sup> But also those whom the US policy targeted voiced disagreement. In 1960 Amadou Hampâté Bâ (Mali) stated that “African countries are not ashamed of being the students of more developed countries, yet they ask them to not fight to be the first to help them and to let African countries carefully examine the presents that they wish to offer.”<sup>101</sup> This shared attitude comes out clearly in confidential letters and reports, especially those African delegates sent to their governments.

This understandable refusal to let their own interests fall victim to the geopolitical rivalry between the superpowers helps to explain a growing distance and finally division between the global North and the global South. At least one can observe an ambivalent position towards the demands of non-Western delegates by representatives of the “First” and “Second” World. General sympathy runs parallel to a reluctance to significantly increase the budget and to focus the organization’s programme on developing countries. In contrast to the jubilant and united atmosphere of the 1960 General Conference, at which new, post-colonial member states were prominently promoted, the following General Conference was “very rough, violent even”, riddled with frictions between Western and non-Western states while not approving the requested budget of US\$50 million.<sup>102</sup> And in 1963 France, the UK, and the US collaborated in the Executive Board

96 Report of the visit of the Director-General to Washington, October 1967, pp. 1-3, 6-8, in: UNESCO archives, file X 07.83, Maheu, V.

97 Confidential Report, US delegation to the 72<sup>nd</sup> session of the Executive Board, p. 11-12, in: US DR, Central foreign policy files, RG 59, 1964-66, special instructions (NND 959000), Box 3340; Confidential Letter M. Cook (US embassy in Niamey) to the Department of State, 2 January 1962, in: US DR, Decimal file, RG. 59, entry CDF 1960-63, Box 824.

98 UAP, file X 07.83 Maheu, IIa: Communiqué from Algiers, 12 November 1963; Généralités sur la République algérienne démocratique et populaire, November 1963, pp. 5-9.

99 See the text “The New Europe” of the international conference organized by the US National Commission for UNESCO which took place in Chicago, 2-3 October 1963, in: UAP, X 07.83, Maheu, IIa; Record of conversation, Peter Thomas and René Maheu, 13 April 1964, in: UK NA, ED 121/1163; R. Maheu, Confidential Note on Record of meeting with Prime Minister, 10 April 1964, in: UK NA, PREM 11/5185.

100 Confidential Letter Pridham to Martin, 6 April 1966, in: UK NA, DO 163/65; Confidential Letter, A. R. Thomas, 9 May 1966; Letter Laurent to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, 24 October 1967, in: ADP, French permanent delegation to UNESCO, Carton 6.

101 UAP, document of the General Conference, 11 C/PRG/SR.6 (prov.), p 4.

102 M. Prévost, *L’île des Uneskimos, Mémoires d’un ancien fonctionnaire de l’Unesco, 1949-1983*, January 1996, unpublished manuscript, pp. 105-106, in: UAP.

to counter the repeated demand.<sup>103</sup> It surely played a role that Maheu was finally able to enforce his budget proposal – seen by many as “clear emergence of a doctrine and the implementation of policies” directed by non-Western states<sup>104</sup> – which European and US-American delegates adopted a “reserved attitude” towards. Dissatisfied with not being able to “impose their views” in face of a very cohesive and extremely determined African group, both groups had more “fear of offending the Africans [and] of being seen as defending rich nations.”<sup>105</sup>

Two further issues exemplify the split: Firstly throughout the 1960s and 1970s, France, the UK, and the US refused to fundamentally change the composition of the Executive Board, trying to it keep it as a stronghold for the West, which was important since it affected the nominations for senior positions in the Secretariat, which in these years were heatedly fought over internally.<sup>106</sup> The second example is the debates about the New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO). In the 1970s developing countries began criticising the dominance of Western press agencies in the international public and demanded the adoption of fairer, more equitable, and democratic structures of production and diffusion of information and of knowledge, which would allow for greater participation. In 1977 UNESCO established an international commission, headed by Sean McBride (founder of Amnesty International and Nobel Peace Prize winner in 1974), to give a report on critical issues in regards to information and communication at the global level.<sup>107</sup> The report *Many Voices, One World* (1980) revealed serious North-South inequalities in regards to the production, access, and circulation of information. To counter that, it suggested to adopt the right to communicate as a new social right, and demanded the establishment of the NWICO, which would be more favourable to non-Western information and news agencies, especially African ones. Instantly the recommendations were opposed by those whose dominance it sought to reduce; they wanted to maintain their control over the main modes of international information and communication. Especially the US violently attacked NWICO and presented it as an attempt to impose totalitarian control over the freedom of press and opinion, and an unacceptable restriction to individual freedom. Together the US and the UK, where neoliberalism was then on the rise, insisted on the principle of the free flow of information in the spirit of *laissez-faire* and opposed any state, or intergovernmental intervention fostering a more balanced circulation of information. As the US threatened to suspend

103 De Leusse, to the direction of NUOI, 18 December 1963, in: ADP, NUOI 1106, contributions obligatoires de la France; Minister of Foreign Affairs to the French ambassador in Washington, 27 December 1963, in: *ibid.*; Alphonand, to the DGCAT, 10 January 1964, in: *ibid.*, NUOI 836, programme et budget 1961-66.

104 Note of the general direction on cultural and technical affairs on the 13<sup>th</sup> general conference, 7 January 1965, pp. 49f., in: ADP, French permanent mission to the United Nation, carton 117.

105 De Sayve to Couve de Murville, 21 May; Rapport of the DGCAT on the 13<sup>th</sup> general conference, in: ADP, NUOI, carton 834.

106 Confidential Letter Martin to Cohen, 14 July 1966, and numerous other letters, in: UK NA, OD 24/15.

107 The commission included Hubert Beuve-Méry, Gabriel Garcia Marquez et Marshall McLuhan. Yet of its 15 members, only one was from sub-Saharan Africa, namely Fred Isaac Akporuaro Omu (Nigeria).

its financial contribution to UNESCO and even to leave the organization, the NWICO project was abandoned.<sup>108</sup>

### **Africa: A New Field of Engagement and its Problems**

With many newly independent African countries joining UNESCO from 1960 onwards, the organization engaged intensively in this continent, especially in the field of education but also technology and culture.

Right from the beginning it pursued literacy and schooling in Africa. More than 20 training schools for schoolteachers (*écoles normales*) and 12 regional education centres were built on this continent, followed in 1963 by the Dakar-based Regional Group for Educational Planning and Administration, which became in 1970 the UNESCO Regional Bureau for Education in Africa, in charge of the planning of educational activities in sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>109</sup> However, financial difficulties, internal rivalries, bureaucratic inertia, and competition with other structures contributed to disappointing outcomes. Several UNESCO centres that aimed at training African administrative staff failed in their mission. For instance, Training Centre for Administrative Civil Servants of African Countries, established in Tangier in 1965, could not function as planned and was rapidly assigned to other purposes.<sup>110</sup> Still the efforts continued: UNESCO organized a series of international regional conferences, among others, a meeting of African Ministers for Education (MINEDAF) in Addis Ababa in 1961. It resulted in the adoption of the “Addis Ababa Plan”, which reviewed the situation of education in 1960 and listed needs in regards to financial resources, building and equipment, staff training, and development of school curricula. Attended by many African ministers for education, ambitious and broad objectives were set.<sup>111</sup>

During the 1960s, using modern technologies such as radio and television to facilitate the transmission of knowledge in Africa was in vogue. In this context, UNESCO became increasingly interested in educational radio and TV programmes. In Cote d’Ivoire, it launched the Educational Television Programme (PETV) in 1969, which was implemented two years later. The objective of the programme was to compensate for the lack of African teachers through television and to harmonize the teaching curricula in the entire country in order to strengthen the Cote d’Ivoire’s national identity. Schooling programmes were filmed in a production studio in *Bouaké* and then televised to primary schools throughout the entire country. The numbers of pupils with access to this form

108 The advocacy for NWICO was one of the factors leading to US withdrawal from UNESCO in 1984, the US being more generally displeased with M’Bow’s Third-Worldism. The UK followed suit and withdrew from UNESCO in 1985.

109 C. Maurel, *Unesco Educational Programs*, in: A. Iriye/P.-Y. Saunier (eds.), *The Palgrave Dictionary of Transnational History*, London 2008.

110 Report of the Director General for the year 1963, p. 35, in: UAP; M. Smieton, Report, July 1965, pp. 2, 5, in: UK NA, OD 24/041.

111 Document of the General Conference 11 C/PRG/1, 12 August 1960, in: UAP.

of teaching grew significantly. In 1980 schooling programmes on TV reached more than 650,000 pupils, that is, 80% of Cote d'Ivoire's primary school students.<sup>112</sup>

If the method was innovative and aimed to be accessible to many, its implementation by teachers proved difficult. The programmes were criticised as not being enough "African" and being too rigid. Indeed, the system was imposed; the programmes were conceived under the supervision of experts from Europe and the US, resulting in several negative effects. Many students who had completed primary school through televised schooling found themselves later marginalized as their formal knowledge was too limited to continue in secondary school. In addition, PETV challenged the traditional role of the teacher, as he seemed to lose prestige and authority, becoming auxiliary to a machine. After enthusiastic beginnings, PETV was also confronted with many technical problems as well as significant opposition, especially by teachers and the French-speaking intelligentsia of Cote d'Ivoire. This provoked the programme's demise in 1982,<sup>113</sup> while UNESCO's enthusiasm for new technologies as a means of knowledge diffusion generally decreased in the 1980s.

Another area of activities in and for Africa, which was demanded by African politicians, was the provision of technical and scientific knowledge, conceived as an instrument of economic and social development. Particularly needed were financial resources and help to build infrastructures in order to improve the scientific, technical, and technological training of African people.

In this context, the UN organized in Geneva in 1963 the *Conference on the Application of Science and Technology for the Benefit of Less Developed Areas* (UNSCAT). In his address to this conference, UN Secretary-General U Thant stressed that UNESCO should play a significant role in the promotion of science and technology as instruments of development.<sup>114</sup> René Maheu shared his view and began to promote the concept of "endogenous development", which was based on the assumption that unidirectional knowledge technology transfer from the global North to African countries was not sufficient. What mattered more was to help these countries take ownership of scientific and technological knowledge in order to develop methods and tools modified for their cultures and specific needs. For Maheu, "endogenous development" was the only way to "attack the roots of underdevelopment and finally overcome it."<sup>115</sup> Equally, Victor Kovda, director of the Science Department of UNESCO, recommended that UNESCO help developing countries to nurture their own "scientific and technological potential". The latter was defined as "an operational bundle of talent and resources that a state should possess in order to solve its problems" as well as to reach "scientific and technical autonomy."<sup>116</sup> In

112 A. J. Tudesq, *L'Afrique noire et ses télévisions*, Paris 1992, p. 167; M. Egly, *Télévision didactique*, Paris 1984.

113 J. C. Pauvert/M. Egly, *Le 'complexe' de Bouaké, 1967-1981*, in: *Les Cahiers d'Histoire* 1 (2001), Unesco, AAFU.

114 A. W. Cordier/W. Foote (eds.), *Public Papers of the Secretary General of the United Nations*, New York 1976, vol. VI, pp. 372-374.

115 Press release ECOSOC/1595, 9 July 1963, in: UCA, William Benton Papers, Box 394.

116 Document NS/ROU/27, 11 February 1963, in: UAP.

order to implement this plan, UNESCO created in 1964 a Department for the Application of Science to Development.

Within a few years, and with the support of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), established in 1966, Maheu oversaw a rapid and significant expansion of UNESCO’s operational scientific activities in Africa, including, for instance, a pilot project for teaching biology in Africa, launched in 1967; the publication of studies such as the *Inquiry on the Scientific and Technical Potential of African Countries*, released in 1970; the organization of conferences, such as the Conference of African States on Education and Scientific and Technical Training in Development in Africa, which took place in Nairobi in 1968; the Conference of Ministers on Application of Science and Technique to the Development of Africa, organized in Dakar in 1974; and the establishment of training centres, such as the Regional Office for Science and Technology for Africa in Nairobi in 1965.<sup>117</sup>

In parallel, UNESCO promoted African cultures, which marked a decisive change. During the 1940s and 1950s, the organization followed a universalist approach, advocating closer links between cultures as a way to overcome differences. Yet a conceptual shift occurred from 1960 on. In the context of decolonization, and what was soon to be known as “globalization”, UNESCO strove to collect, preserve, and promote cultural manifestations, especially African cultures that appeared under threat. The latter also resulted from impulses by African representatives. At the 1960 General Conference, they advocated the development of African studies centres in their region, backed by Amadou Hampâté Bâ – Malian Executive Board member between 1962 and 1970 and leading figure in UNESCO’s shift towards the preservation of African cultural knowledge – who urged to “save from destruction a considerable oral heritage, so far only preserved in human memory”, and arguing that “preserving oral traditions from African countries” was “a pressing need”.<sup>118</sup> Along these lines he declared in 1962, at an International Council of Museums (ICOM) meeting, that African museums “must become sanctuaries for African culture”.<sup>119</sup>

Part of the UNESCO’s engagement in this regard was the support to the collection of African oral traditions and to the transcription of African languages; Amadou Hampâté Bâ supported, for example, the development of a unified system of transcription. Together these efforts mounted in numerous achievements: the publication of grammar handbooks, dictionaries, and reading material in nine African languages that had yet to be transcribed, and the collection of historical and cultural texts, especially the oral initiatory tale *Kaidara*, transcribed and published in 1968 by Hampâté Bâ.<sup>120</sup> In 1972 UNESCO adopted even a “ten-year plan for the study of oral tradition and the promotion of African languages.”

117 Similar centres were established in Tanzania (1968), Nigeria and Sudan (1970), Senegal (1974), and in Kenya (1975).

118 Document of the General Conference, 11 C/PRG/SR.6 (prov.), p. 4, in: UAP.

119 Bâ A. H., *Nos musées doivent devenir des hauts lieux de la culture africaine*, in: *La vie africaine*, (1962) 29, pp. 40f.

120 *Kaidara, récit initiatique* peul rapporté par A. H. Bâ, Paris 1968.

Without doubt the shift towards Africa's cultures was influenced by the Negritude and Pan-African movement. Illustrative is the World Festival of Negro Art organized in Dakar in 1966 with UNESCO support, which sought to make a "wide international audience" aware of "African artists, writers, painters, sculptors, dancers, actors, filmmakers and craftsmen" and to let Africa appear "as a producer of cultures, thus marking the beginning of a new era, the era of cultural independence."<sup>121</sup>

In general UNESCO engaged in disseminating knowledge about African cultures to audiences in Europe and North America while also highlighting cross-cultural entanglement. For instance, a supported travelling exhibition on African arts in 1971 considered that "African visual arts have played a stimulating role for western artists during the entire first half of the 20th century" and that "the contribution of African arts to the universal history of art has been and will remain of considerable significance."<sup>122</sup> During the 1970s the *UNESCO Courier*, the organization's flagship periodical distributed in numerous countries, intensely introduced African cultural heritage to its worldwide readership; and in 1979, for the first time, the *Courier* devoted an entire issue to Africa.<sup>123</sup>

In connection, African representatives began in 1970 to underline that many African artworks as well as historical, and archaeological artefacts had been transferred to imperial home countries during the colonial era and had remained there. Seeing them as necessary to develop knowledge on African history, they asked that "artistic and cultural treasures from Africa, which have been taken from their countries of origin before independences, be returned."<sup>124</sup> This demand became more vocal over the following years due to support by Amadou Mahtar M'Bow,<sup>125</sup> which took in 1978 the form of restitution claims when M'Bow officially appealed to the return of "stolen" African heritage.<sup>126</sup> It met resistance: the US and several European states denounced a Third-Worldist shift within UNESCO, while the North-South dissensions deepened.

Also in 1970 the agency fostered the organization in Timbuktu of the Ahmed-Baba Documentation and Research Centre. Its task was to list, restore, and protect thousands of ancient manuscripts found in the region, which were threatened with decay and loot-

121 Leaflet "Premier festival mondial des arts nègres", in: UAP, file 7 (96) A 066 (663) « 66 », ll.

122 Arts africains, Exposition en 34 panneaux, Unesco, Paris 1971, pp. 7-11.

123 See the following issues of *Le Courrier de l'Unesco*: January 1971 (L'Afrique et la décolonisation culturelle), May 1977 (Visages de l'Afrique), July 1977 (Freiner l'avance des déserts), November 1977 (L'Afrique australe et le racisme), December 1977 (L'essor de la cité arabe il y a 1000 ans), August-September 1977 (L'empreinte de l'Afrique), August-September 1979 (L'Afrique et son histoire).

124 UNESCO, Conférence intergouvernementale sur les aspects institutionnels, administratifs, et financiers des politiques culturelles, Venise 1970, Final Report, Annex I, p. 31, quoted from: H.-P. Sagbohan, *L'Afrique noire francophone et l'Unesco de 1960 à nos jours*, doctoral thesis, Université Paris I, Institut d'histoire des relations internationales contemporaines, Paris 1979, pp. 244-252.

125 A. M. M'Bow was Senegal's Minister for Education and Culture in 1957 and 1958. He was involved in the struggle for Senegal's independence, was Minister for National Education in independent Senegal in 1966, then the country's Minister for Culture and Youth in 1968.

126 A. M. M'Bow, *Trafic illicite et restitution des biens culturels. Pour le retour, à ceux qui l'on créé, d'un patrimoine culturel irremplaçable*, 7 June 1978, URL:[http://portal.unesco.org/culture/fr/files/38701/12320176145discours\\_mbow\\_retour\\_fr.pdf/discours\\_mbow\\_retour\\_fr.pdf](http://portal.unesco.org/culture/fr/files/38701/12320176145discours_mbow_retour_fr.pdf/discours_mbow_retour_fr.pdf), access: 15-10-2013).



ing, yet its crucial role not only shed new light on African history, but also disproved the myth that there were no written African historical records.<sup>127</sup>

From the 1970s onwards, UNESCO engaged in African cultures through the International Fund for the Promotion of Culture. However, the implementation of the several projects it supported, such as the establishment of an Inter-African Cultural Fund or of the Université des Mutants, an intercultural university founded in Senegal in the early 1980s, proved arduous.<sup>128</sup>

Most importantly, UNESCO supervised, in collaboration with the Organization of African Unity, between 1965 and 1986 the editing of a *General History of Africa*, based on significant documentary and inventory research as well as a new systematization of knowledge on African history. Amongst the contributors to the eight-volume work were many African historians, among others Joseph Ki Zerbo and Cheikh Anta Diop, who constituted two-thirds of the members of the international scientific committee supervising the project. *General History* was the first attempt to give a unified historical account of Africa as a whole,<sup>129</sup> reflecting Pan-African aspirations. It was also thoroughly influenced by the “new African history”, which reassessed the previously neglected and underestimated precolonial past. Africa’s “new historians”, amongst whom Cheikh Anta Diop was a leading figure, made use of specifically African, especially archaeological sources. The project is a testimony of the desire of many Africans to produce knowledge themselves on their history and culture instead of being confronted with accounts and research by other countries.<sup>130</sup> As M’Bow’s foreword indicated, the purpose was to “remain faithful to the way in which African authors see their own culture” and “to see the things from the inside”.<sup>131</sup> This project was an important achievement in terms of inscribing African history in the general cultural world heritage.<sup>132</sup>

## Conclusion

Non-Western countries have played an increasing role in UNESCO since the 1940s, especially through collective action. First, representatives from Asian countries formed a lobby group, later an alliance of Latin Americans and of delegates from Arab countries emerged, and after 1960 representatives from the newly founded African states coordi-

127 J. M. Djian, Les manuscrits trouvés à Tombouctou, in: *Le Monde diplomatique*, August 2004.

128 Sénégal, création d’une bibliothèque interculturelle, Gorée 1984, in: UAP, document CLT/CIC/FIPC/12: OP 44.

129 A. M. M’Bow, Préface, *Histoire de l’Afrique*, Paris 1981, vol. 1, pp. 12, 14; idem, Préface, *Histoire de l’Afrique*, vol. 1, pp. 9-10, 15. For instance in the volume on the 20<sup>th</sup> century, section VII, “Independent Africa in World Affairs” discusses relations between African and other world powers. The section entails chapters on “Africa on Capitalist Countries”, “Africa and Socialist Countries”, “Africa and Developing Regions” and “Africa and the UN”.

130 Jean Copans has shown how the United States have expanded their influence in Africa, especially through scientific and cultural institutions, development assistance mechanisms, the establishment or financial support to intellectual networks, journals, research centres, and foundations. All these structures have influenced knowledge protection in Africa, see: J. Copans, *Anthropologie et impérialisme*, Paris 1975.

131 A. M. M’Bow, Préface, in: *Histoire de l’Afrique*, vol. 1, pp. 9f, 15 (129).

132 A. B. Ogot, Introduction, in: *Histoire de l’Afrique*, vol. 2, p. 18 (129).



nated their actions. All of them, and increasingly together, pressed in multifold ways that UNESCO would pursue their interests. I argue that non-Western member states have progressively taken ownership of UNESCO, helped to decentre internal structures, and globalized policies and programmes, thus triggering significant changes in the direction of diminished command by the large powers from Europe and the US – to an extent that in international public opinion UNESCO was considered to be a Third-Worldist organization. While the influence of non-Western actors within UNESCO was at its peak in the 1960s and 1970s, such leverage had its limits, as the organization has remained Western-centred.