

TRANSITION



EVERYBODY WAS having a lunchtime drink in a bar in Kampala, Uganda one hot afternoon in November 1961. Then a 22-year-old man with a big head and lots of hair entered, his arms saddled with copies of a new magazine he was trying to sell. As the hawkker wended his way to a table, an angry Englishman bolted from the din of the afternoon, dashed in his way, snatched one of the magazines from him and ripped it in shreds. He couldn't have stopped at that. 'That's what I think of your trash!' he spat at the young man. In the Lugogo

Retelling a Forgettable Tale

Akin
Adesokan

Black Orpheus & Transition revisited.

Sports Club, another venue in the city where the journal was being peddled to members of a jazz club, the manager threatened to eject the club for allowing what someone also called 'nasty left-wing literature'.

For a prospective newspaper vendor

taking his first shot at marketing, this reaction was enough intimidation. But Rajat Neogy, the young man, was not an apprentice hawkker, not even an accomplished one. The journal he was vending, *Transition* was his brainchild, an idea he had taken so seriously he staked his personal convenience for it. He had returned to Uganda a year before, just married, with a degree in political science, with the intention of introducing his wife, a Swede, to his parents,



take her round Kampala, then head for Greece, perhaps for honeymoon. But Uganda was giddy, like most of Africa, with the euphoria of imminent self-government. He had studied politics and practised journalism as a student and freelancer. He was spoken of as bohemian and given to the idealism of twenty-somethingness. Somehow, he saw himself as having a statement to make and Transition was his show of hand. 'Society as it is, for what it is, (is) totally unacceptable to me for obvious reasons. It cannot be changed, there is no satisfaction in Utopian intellect. I do not want to change it. I am an outsider. I accept my inaccessibility to others. I don't make a fetish of being 'outsider'. Sentimentalists of a finer order will call my 'condition' the painfulness of truth. But pain and joy do not come into this. Since I am surrounded by stupidity and I am not selfish (because not possessive or acquisitive materially or spiritually) I have a certain duty... I have to add my contribution, in iron and steel i.e. in permanence'.

A classic of Euromodernist pessimism? Wait for this, a publisher's announcement titled "Culture in Transition". 'This journal appears when East Africa is undergoing various and exciting changes. It is a time when idealism and action merge with various degrees of success. It is also a time for testing intellectual and other preconceptions and for thoughtful and creative contributions in all our spheres,' it said.

That journal, so vilified in its premiere appearance took Neogy and others three months to produce. The team included Valerie Hume who had canvassed for the advert spaces without any idea what was to be published and Signor Pessina, an Italian refugee from Zaire who spoke no English but who as printer set several million letters by hand and made as many errors. It came out the day in November when Neogy's first son was born.

What went for planning was anything but that. 'I gathered that he was planning to start a magazine,' wrote Hume in a reflection published in *Transition* six years later. 'An independent, intellectual magazine about culture and the African creative scene and all that'. What Neogy

wanted from her was straightforward, although to her it was not. 'You go and sell advertising and when you've sold enough, we can go to press', he told her.

'But what are we printing?' she asked.

'You don't worry about that, just sell the space.'

Wole Soyinka who visited Kampala shortly after the first edition was published and who succeeded Neogy as editor recalled in his first editorial 13 years later: 'I... remember well the editorial office situated in Rajat's home, its entire space taken up by a smooth slab of wood, supported on piles of bricks. All the labour originated from this desk'. Two thousand copies of the first edition were printed out of which 1,200 were sold, perhaps including the copies torn in the fury of offended sensibility.

Rajat Neogy died in December 1995.

Since handing over the editorship to Soyinka in 1974, he had returned to San Francisco in the US where he published a newspaper and did some writing. Very little of his life for the next 20 years was known. Peter Benson, the American scholar has written a book, *Black Orpheus, Transition and Modern Cultural Awakening in Africa*, (University of California Press, 1986) a thoroughly researched and well-written study about the history of *Transition* and its counterpart in West Africa, *Black Orpheus*, as they inspired the development of creative and intellectual groups in East and West Africa for the two decades that they existed. Neogy reportedly died of inflammation of the pancreas. He is survived by his mother Sumitra, the seven children (four sons three daughters) from his three marriages, and a grandchild. In a way, this is a tribute to him and others.

To be sure, *Transition* was not just a restless youth's dream. According to Benson, one of the pieces published in the first issue was a retrospective tribute by Gerald Moore to *Black Orpheus*, which the German Ulli Beier had founded (with Jahnheinz Jahn and Moore) in Ibadan in 1957. Neogy had heard about this cultural

journal and been impressed by its success. He was determined to try something similar in East Africa. *Black Orpheus* was published until 1982 (though it ceased to be regular from the late 1960s) and even with changes in its editorial philosophies, as in its handlers, it fulfilled the role its founders designed for it. Like Neogy, Beier, a 35-year-old expatriate teaching extramural students at the University College, Ibadan, had before him the example of the Parisian review, *Presence Africaine* published by Alioune Diop. Attending the World Congress of Black-Writers in Paris in 1956, Beier had been struck by the literary movement that had grown around the review. 'One could envisage that this could kindle a similar development in the English speaking territories...' he said in a discussion which Andrew Salkey, the Caribbean writer moderated for him and Moore at Dennis Duerden's Transcription Centre in London in 1966, the year he left Nigeria for Papua New Guinea. (Beier alleges in a 1994 interview with Olu Obafemi in *TEMPO*, a Lagos weekly that Benson did not contact him while researching the book; but Benson claims he got a letter from Beier dated 21 August, 1981 in which he discussed how he came to Nigeria in 1950) Beier had hoped to stimulate literary activity in West Africa with a view to providing 'a vehicle for the new writers who would emerge'. An article by Jahn in the first edition reporting on the conference in Paris also struck a link between the congress's resolution and *Black Orpheus's* ideology.

Neogy too had intended a vehicle, 'on which the wagon of intellect may travel for certain distances', yet something besides a gallery for new culture. (It is instructive to note that whereas *Transition* has been revived in the US in the late 1980s - thus leaving a gap of 10 years save a three-year interregnum between 1968 and 1971 - Beier and Moore said in 1966 that the period for the kind of magazine they founded had passed. 'We need several different kinds of magazines now,' remarked Beier whom Benson christens 'border operator' for his role as exporter of African literature. Two kinds in fact; one would publish a new writing and circulate limitedly while the other, 'a really highly critical journal' would supply the

highest standards in evaluating the literature).

In 1957, a rich cultural mine was waiting to be exploited by Beier in West Africa, due in part to the sense of freedom and confidence that self-rule would bring. The University of Ibadan was one of the three centres of higher learning in the whole of West Africa. (Fourah Bay in Sierra Leone and the University of Ghana in Legon were others). Ghana had become independent in March and Nigeria was soon to be. Raised in one of the most culturally dynamic regions on earth, writers like Amos Tutuola had made history with the publication in 1952 of *The Palmwine Drinkard*, and Chinua Achebe was waiting to publish *Things Fall Apart* the 'first first-rate novel' in black Africa. Their thematic and stylistic preoccupations suited the

would now be a vehicle for their aspiration.

Beier had developed a keen interest in traditional Yoruba culture and was necessarily committed to a more than academic study of its potentials. Sangodare Akanji, one of the several pseudonyms under which he wrote reviews for *Black Orpheus* was described in the contributors' notes in a 1958 issue as a 'detribalised Yoruba' who having been born abroad and lived most of his life in Europe and the Near East, 'recently returned to Nigeria in order to "rediscover his lost Yoruba self"'. (Beier had been born in Gleiwitz (now in Poland) and had studied archaeology and lived in Palestine before being taken prisoner of war during the second World War).

His contacts among expatriates who

Jean-Paul Sartre to Leopold Sedar Senghor's edition of poems from French Africa, in which the French philosopher (who incidentally also wrote the introduction to Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, an important book on the origins of African radicalism) had evoked Orpheus's descent into hell to explain the black poet's search for identity. In the first editorial, Beier wrote: 'While it is the primary purpose of this journal to encourage and discuss contemporary African writing, we shall not forget the great traditions of oral literature of the African tribes. For it is on the heritage of the past... that the literature of the future must be based.'

For the next twenty years (and more) this journal defined the emergent African culture in a way not too surprising in the

light of its origins. It published writers and poets from Africa and the diaspora and so obsessive was its interest in the literatures of the black world that one of the poets *Black Orpheus* helped in exposing, Christopher Okigbo in an interview in 1963 criticised it for wanting to perpetuate the 'black mystique.' He wondered why Beier would publish black Americans but not white ones, since they really had a cultural affinity. Okigbo, one of Beier's important critics also expressed a view



Motorpark in Kampala

prevalent taste for literature of discovery, and if, as he was later accused, Beier had approached the 'new culture' with a hint of condescension intending to promote its exoticism, there was the objective reality that little was known about what writing was going on in the sub-region. Young writers were scattered in the cities and universities in Nigeria, Ghana and even South Africa, and others like Soyinka, then studying for a degree in English at Leeds University in England would soon return home to initiate important intellectual and cultural movements; *Black Orpheus*

taught in schools ensured that Beier gathered material quite rapidly for the journal and with the experience of *Odu* (a scholarly journal of Yoruba studies which he co-edited) in store, all he needed was a printer. He found one in Times Press in Lagos. Moore and Jahn were co-editors who also wrote, and the layout, cover design and headings were done by Beier's wife, the artist Suzanne Wenger. Texts were illustrated with the drawings G.M. Hotop had made for the German edition of Tutuola's first novel. The name itself was taken from the introduction written by

concerning the editor's taste for the works of untutored artists but he, like Soyinka, Gabriel Okara, Ama Ata Aidoo, Alex La Guma, Kofi Awonoor, John Pepper Clark, Dennis Brutus, Eskia Mphahlele, Jean-Jose Rabearivebo, Tchicaya U Tamsi - artists like Demas Nwoko, Vincent Kofi, Taiwo Olaniyi (Twin Seven Seven), Ibrahim el-Salahi - featured (wrote and drew) and were written about on the pages of *Black Orpheus*.

The critics including Beier (and his several cognomens), Paul Theroux, an

American Peace Corper in Africa, Martin Esslin and Oscar Dathorne assessed the literature in a way that underscored the journal's ideology, convincing people like Clark (who with Abiola Irele succeeded Beier as editors) that European literary aesthetics were predominant in African literature and likely for the worse. This tendency became most obvious when Esslin, a drama critic at the British Broadcasting Corporation was commissioned to review the new plays of Soyinka and Clark. In 'Two African Playwrights', as the review was titled, Esslin confessed his lack of knowledge of the social conventions of the cultures which the playwrights were writing from. Theroux also wrote a critique of six poets including Clark, Brutus and Awonoor, and Dathorne the works of Achebe and Soyinka. Like Beier and Theroux, Esslin was white; in fact of all *Black Orpheus's* critics, only Dathorne was black, a Caribbean. Their artistic judgements were called to question in essays like 'The Legacy of Caliban' which Clark published in the first edition under his joint editorship with Irele in which they also announced a break with the old regime. Beier's preference of the negritudist sensibility as well as works of art owing their strength to accidental metaphors was criticised not only in this essay but in the general character of the series they edited. However, the pan-Africanist outlook of the journal was retained in their choice of essays.

The demands of the new thrust, coupled with the practical difficulties of the civil war and the editors' greater concern for editorial than managerial matters affected the journal's fortunes. While their resolve to reassess the presumed standards that informed Beier's editorship was exciting in view of the need to maintain a definite identity even in a continuum, their inability to muster Beier's entrepreneurial acumen betrayed a weakness characteristic of most intellectuals. But with their different brands of enterprise-Irele went on to found New Horn Press in Ibadan and Clark to whom it fell to edit the journal later became in the mid-1980s the proprietor of Pec Repertory Theatre in Lagos - these men have shown that they are not totally without the trading instinct. At all events, it is to Beier's credit that while not a creative writer or

painter, he manifested the original critical sensibility to judge any work of imagination with enthusiasm as well as the commercial skills to market what he produced. At one time, he was running *Black Orpheus* and *Odu*, the Mbari Club and Mbari Publications, Duro Ladipo's Theatre, and keeping his primary job as a teacher in six different places. Late in 1960, with a Rockefeller Foundation grant of \$5,500 he began trips to several African countries, meeting writers and artistes for involvement in *Black Orpheus*. 'Beier's success in educating anglophone Africa to the intellectual currents of francophone Africa and black America and in promoting the works of new anglophone writers both within and outside of Africa, is perhaps

Neogy reportedly died of inflammation of the pancreas. He is survived by his mother Sumitra, the seven children (four sons three daughters) from his three marriages, and a grandchild. In a way, this is a tribute to him and others.

the primary legacy of his editorship of *Black Orpheus*,' writes Benson. The essence was the 'black mystique'; the identification of borders. But how consistent is this crusading bent with Beier's assertion of being 'blissfully ignorant of borders' when he began publishing the journal, apropos of his encounter with the Brazilian worshippers of Yemoja who miss-understood a Catholic ritual of confrontation as identification with Yemoja? Would it be sufficient to merely state that knowledge has one root and several branches?

As an editor, Beier was strongwilled enough to publish what his instincts adjudged worthy and as a critic intelligent enough to know that his duties included promotion of the new artists. Whatever was made of his views on Okigbo and Clark as 'gradually chiselling a large chunk of experience' (Okigbo) and 'writing

under a form of compulsion' (Clark), it is not in doubt that the assessment was made honestly and with consideration. It would be important nevertheless to know why Soyinka and Mphahlele left the fold so early in 1963 (the former even disassociated himself from the journal - certainly not, as was once rumoured, over the imperialist notion behind the name 'black orpheus?') and why Irele and Clark shouted 'Not Again!' when they learnt Beier was returning to Nigeria. Benson thinks this might have to do with, among other reasons, the remark Beier was said to have made in 1966 that 'all the talents had gone east' with the outbreak of the Biafran war. He also disbanded Mbari Club before leaving Nigeria, perhaps he could have handed it over like the journal; after all, he was only one person and the club once had Okigbo, Dennis Williams, Soyinka, Clark and Beier himself deliberating on the appropriateness of a publishing deal with Longmans whose representative in Nigeria, Julian Rea, was Soyinka's friend.

Clark and Irele were able to publish only seven editions in four years (*Black Orpheus* was meant to come out thrice in a year). A publishing deal with the University of Ife Press which Hans Zell was going to set up did not work out. And when the editing devolved to Clark and his wife, Egun, in 1974 when both were teaching at the University of Lagos, they issued three numbers, finally handing over in the 70s to the critic Theo Vincent of the same university. Vincent published two editions in 1982 by which time the standards had fallen way behind its predecessors'. This decline paralleled that of the intellectual industriousness in Nigeria. For by the turn of the decade the economic rot had set in: the Eighties began with austerity measures and ended with the Structural Adjustment Programme. Intellectuals began to flee to other places while intellectual work reacquired its original reputation as the lot of those blessed with the oath of poverty.

With Neogy the story was different. He had negligible editorial background compared with Beier's. Again, East Africa was not as culturally active as West. Makerere University in Kampala, though prestigious had not given rise to an artistic

movement around which a literary journal could flourish. The first writer of note from independent East Africa, Ngugi wa Thiongo (then James Ngugi) was not to emerge until 1964 when his *Weep Not, Child* was published. But Neogy's choice had simplified matters. According to Benson, 'Neogy seems to have been torn between providing a more thoughtful alternative to the political, social and economic reporting of the tabloid press and providing an outlet for young artists, poets and writers as *Black Orpheus* had done.'

The first issue of *Transition* testifies to this. From all accounts, what the region lacked in literature it had in politics. Ugandan politics became volatile as independence approached. Sir Edward Mutesa II, the *Kabaka* of Buganda had been deposed in 1953 by the British colonial government when he opposed the centralization of the country and in effect the subordination of his inherited kingdom. Echoes of the noise generated by the face-off could still be heard, and the issue of Buganda autonomy remained a central one in the country's politics. So much so that an article in the first issue, 'Is A Party System Possible in Africa?' contributed by Ivor Jennings foreshadowed the issues such as the rights of minority groups that led to *Transition's* trouble with the Obote government seven years later. Another controversial article on race relations in East Africa was published in that edition and like Jennings' dealt with an issue of no mean consequence in the *Transition*-Obote debacle.

It would seem that this decision to go beyond *Black Orpheus's* preoccupation with the arts had less to do with the fact of 'literary barrenness' (Taban Lo Liyong's phrase) in East Africa than with Neogy's own identity in Uganda. A Ugandan of Indian descent who had studied political science in England and been married to a Swede and living in a country where the tribe was vital to politics and the race question always on the boil - he would later be denied citizenship of Uganda - Neogy's description of himself as an outsider could not be more correct; only that this self-consciousness placed him in a position to see the issues with an intellectual's eye. His political values would



41, Ibokun Street, home of the Beiers in Osogbo, provides a view of the city's rusty corrugated iron roofs.

be universal and he would tend to favour the traditions from which liberal politics had developed. All these were obvious from the first edition, but it would be a disservice to that premier copy to suggest that it carried only politics.

Although, there were no new creative works, the edition made up for the inadequacy by publishing eight reviews. Later it published a number of poets and writers including Ngugi, Lo Liyong, John Nagenda, Okot 'Bitek, Ata Aidoo, David Rubadiri, Okigbo, Achebe, Awonoor, U Tamsi, Soyinka and Brutus. The East Africans were having their first exposures outside campus literary reviews, but others like Soyinka and Brutus had appeared in *Black Orpheus*. Even though U Tamsi first appeared in *Transition*, it was his appearance in the other journal that gave him more prominence, perhaps due to Beier's inclination for the surrealist aesthetics that remain the defining spirit of the Congolese poet's oeuvre. The

magazine would continue to feature contributions from these individuals either as essays, reviews, controversial exchanges, etc.

Soon, however, teething problems forced *Transition* off the streets (between January and June 1962) after the third issue. The project had been begun with the little money Hume raised from advertisement and Neogy's own money, and returns weren't too impressive. An international conference in Kampala in 1962, reminiscent of the one in Paris in 1956, where

Okigbo had made his hubristic statement about writing poetry only for poets did attract some attention to *Transition*. But increasingly, it became valid to fear that the magazine was condemned to either play second fiddle to *Black Orpheus* or find its place in the very heart of African intellectual and cultural politics.

There had always been some kind of tension between the intellectual and the political elites in Africa. Since political independence was secured by the latter who were themselves intellectuals (recall the attempts at defining the nationalist politics at independence in the writings of leaders like Kwame Nkrumah, Sekou Toure, Senghor, Julius Nyerere), the conviction was dominant that this set of leaders, coming at the time they did, had a messianic role, and the direct result of this thinking was the deification of most of the men and the despotism which marked their regimes. But the emergent intellectual elites had a more or less professional view

of their calling; they owed it a duty to the society to debunk the myth that was turning much of the continent into republics of fear and repression. *Transition* arrived early to referee in the 'tension-soaked' match.

Equally important was the need for the intellectuals to reassess (and in cases debunk or defend) the values that came out of the contact with the West as these had

to do with the direction African literature should take. In a manner more controversial only in duration than *Black Orpheus's* handling of the validity of Euromodernist aesthetics for the arts and literatures of recently deoralised societies, the pages of *Transition* became the battlefield for such questions as African socialism, pan-Africanism, the status of ethnic and racial minorities, political partisanship as against free speech and literary 'universalism', the use of indigenous languages versus Western languages and the role of Western critics and literary standards. It arrived early enough and after an initial period of blundering in the lurch of an overrated potential, *Transition* found itself at home.

Between 1963 and 1966, the magazine became more drawn to political and intellectual controversies of the most sophisticated order. This major shift coincided with the arrival of sponsorship from the Paris-based Congress for Cultural Freedom. (Mphahlele, the congress representative had in 1963 (?) introduced Neogy as he had earlier Beier). The congress was being funded by the Fairfield Foundation, in turn funded by the American Central Intelligence Agency. Both Neogy and Mphahlele and indeed Fairfield's executive director, John Thompson were to be embarrassed by this link when it later



From left, Ulli Beier, Jacob Lawrence (in glasses), Dennis Williams (in striped gown) and Duro Ladipo (striped cap) during a 1963 art workshop in Osogbo

emerged but the fact of CIA funding of a journal that apparently innocuously criticised the political and economic styles of Nkrumah and Nyerere ranked, beside the face-off between *Transition* and the government of Milton Obote, among the nemesis of Neogy's career and of course, *Transition's*.

But before the fall, writers, and poets trashed out the language question, following a contribution ('The Dead End of African Literature') by Obi Wali, then doing graduate studies at Northwestern University in the United States. He was in essence reacting to the proceedings of the Kampala writers conference and his submission was that if African writers wrote in languages other than indigenous ones (spoken by their audiences) they would be naturally doing harm to the new literature. 'Until these writers and their western midwives accept the fact that any true African literature must be written in African languages,' he argued, 'they would be merely pursuing a dead-end, which can only lead to sterility, uncreativity, and frustration.'

So touchy was this issue that it drew reactions from as many as 13 writers and critics including Soyinka, Achebe, Moore, Williams, Peter Nazareth and continued to rage on for two years. Although he sent

a response which amounted to 'recapitulation', Wali, writing again on related question of how western concepts of the isolated individual in fiction had dominated African letters, earned the praise of Irele who, reviewing the first 32 issues of *Transition* in the journal of African Studies in 1967 singled his piece out for drawing attention to the lopsidedness. Irele's position on this issue is

somewhat enthusiastic, for according to Bension, he had prevailed upon Clark for publish the similarly tempered article 'The Legacy of Caliban' in *Black Orpheus*. Part of the excitement of this period was the range of involvement of writers from several parts. Isn't it interesting to have Ama Ata Aidoo review Mokwugo Okoye's *African Responses* scathingly and with a deprecating laugh, to know that at a point *Transition* sold 17,000 copies and paid as much as \$150 per article, that Okigbo was supposed to be the West African editor in 1963?

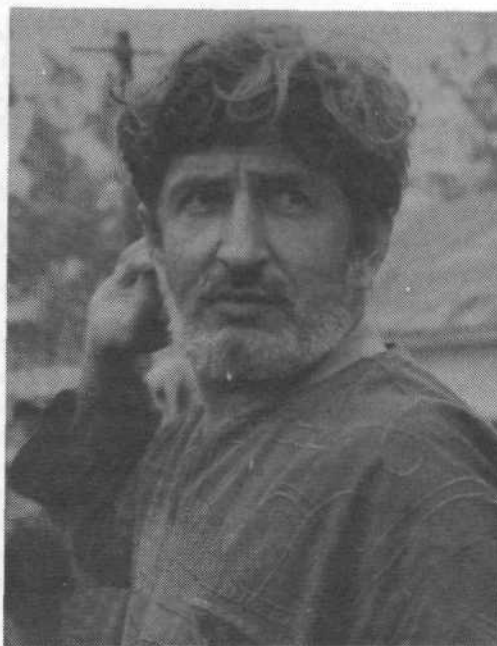
Political controversies became the rule with the arrival of Ali Mazrui and Theroux, both to feature later (or sooner) on the list of associate editors that also included Awonoor, John Godblat and Raymond Aphonpe. Mazrui's style of playing on the symbolically paradoxical suited the magazine's outlook very well. He seized on a book review to comment on hero-worship, wrote non-violence as commentary on violence. He became most controversial with the piece of Nkrumah politics ('Nkrumah The Leninist Czar') which came out just after the overthrow of the Osagyefo in 1966. Mazrui's argument was that Nkrumah had deliberately modelled himself on Lenin, copying every symbolic gesture of the Russian revolutionary leader. But he became a

czar in the opulence of his style, which to Mazrui was a case of double paradox. Not only Mazrui, but several other *Transition* contributors as well, took positions that were particularly critical of the socialist economies in Africa. Granted that there were rebuttals of most of those articles, but to step up a criticism of left-leaning regimes in that decade of intense western suspicion of communism was to make plausible and ironic the revelation of CIA sponsorship.

Actually the funding had been merely coincidental. Neogy needed money and Mphahlele's recommendation met no resistance from Thompson. The Fairfield Foundation, in funding the CCF thought that political stability and economic integrity would keep Africa non-communist. It assumed that art and literature were necessary foundation for cultural unity, and what *Transition* 'an excellent literary magazine' stood for perfectly suited the foundation's purposes. 'The decision to support Neogy's *Transition* was taken largely by Thompson himself on the recommendation of Mphahlele simply on the grounds that Neogy was a capable editor who stood for ideals that Thompson (but also Cord Meyer and others in the CIA hierarchy) wanted to see strengthened in Africa - that is multiparty democracy, freedom of speech; predominance of intellectual over bureaucratic, political, military and traditional tribal elites; and a continued cultural interchange with, and allegiance to, the West,' writes Benson.

Neogy confessed to a 'helpless resentment' on learning of the link, and Mphahlele shouldered the blame, though he insisted he was ignorant of the CIA connection. Soyinka who later took up the editorship described the agency as a 'subversive organisation whose principal rationale... appears to have been a policy of haphazard infiltration of everything and anything going, on the general principle that with such indiscriminate fishing, some terrapins may actually be hooked.' The issue was explained away, but it did lasting damage to the magazine's reputation.

The incarceration of Neogy and Abu Mayanja which followed was as



Ulli Beier

damaging. The issue of constitutional reforms in Uganda touched on the independence of the judiciary and Mayanja who had been education minister under the Kabaka until 1964 criticised one vital aspect of the proposed constitution: the absolute powers conferred on the presidency in the name of Emergency Detention laws. It was an exciting controversy that drew in a member of Obote's cabinet, Picho Ali, and later Davis Sebukima, a student of Makerere. Now Neogy had a distinct style of letting government officials (especially) know of contentious letters he would be publishing (if these had to do with the government) so there could be response to it. But Ali's defence of the regime's policies did no justice to Mayanja's aggressive piece.

Then on Friday, October 18, 1968, as the staff set down to parcelling copies of the freshly printed issue No. 37, some 'half-dozen men in immaculate black suits' entered the editorial office and arrested Neogy under the Emergency Powers Act. Mayanja had also been arrested, as had been Daniel Nelson, the British editor of *The People*, the government-controlled daily, whose arrest was an error. Neither Neogy nor Mayanja found this turn of events funny, and whereas Neogy's release was secured by March due to international media campaign pursued

by his wife Barbara and Mazrui, and the weakness and stupidity of the government's defence in court, Mayanja would not taste freedom until August 1970 when Idi Amin released him with other political detainees.

Suddenly, *Transition* had come full circle in Uganda, and by now it was clear it wasn't wanted. Obote's position regarding the magazine was quite categorical: During a five-hour audience with Mazrui following Neogy's arrest the then president plainly said, 'Transition is not Neogy and Neogy is not Transition', adding that it would be a more tolerable product in Mazrui's hands. True Barbara Neogy spoke of plans to 'bring out a new edition' of the journal, but this was not to

be, and it was just as well, for as Neogy later said 'to have continued to publish *Transition* in Uganda under these circumstances would have been a betrayal of the principles that it stands for.' After releasing Neogy, the government knowing *Transition* was a weapon, still went ahead to give it a really negative name: its editor was not Ugandan, the campaign contended, and the associate editors were not; the CIA funding meant foreign support and so there was no way it could project Uganda in a good light. Neogy's confidence in the political health of his country became so shaky, his own personal and intellectual life so disoriented by the experience of his incarceration that he promptly left the country, travelling to India, France, England and finally settling in New York.

Then followed a period of prevarication on the fate of the journal and three solid years lapsed before anything was seen of *Transition* again. And when it did come out, in September 1971, its new location was Accra, Ghana where Neogy had moved to. With subsidy from the International Association for Cultural Freedom, he set up a more expansive structure for the magazine. Kofi Busia's regime in Ghana, which to Neogy was 'the nearest to a government that is committed to freedom of expression'

was soon overthrown, and the Idi Amin regime in Uganda which Neogy had welcomed with enthusiasm became progressively repressive.

Although he was able to stir some controversy in Ghana and *Transition* still had enough fire to be described as counterrevolutionary and partisan on the part of the 'liberal bourgeois democracy' of the West, Neogy grew more and more demoralised and concluded plans to quit the editorship of the magazine. The choice was either Soyinka who like Neogy had just suffered incarceration in the hand of the military regime of Yakubu Gowon in Nigeria and now on voluntary exile, and Awonoor, at a time being considered by Neogy as editor of the Ghanaian edition. Soyinka got the job because according to Neogy 'it was thought in Paris that his was a more fundraising name.' It is important in the light of this change to note that Soyinka and Neogy had reacted differently to their imprisonment. While Soyinka saw his experience as confirmative of an historical pattern and was thus generally skeptical of conventional certitudes (as *Season of Anomy*, *A Shuttle in the Crypt*, *The Man Died* and *Madmen and Specialists*, all testify) Neogy was believing enough to convert to Islam, the religion of Idi Amin.

Soyinka has a nose for dictators, and his instincts were perfect about Amin. One of the radical steps he took on assuming duty, and the most politically antagonistic was his resolve to 'contribute *Transition*' toward the various efforts to terminate the nightmare of Amin's reign. He rejected a pro-Amin article by the Ugandan Erisa Kironde and for this was later accused by Mazrui of being a tyrant.

But there were more far-reaching changes. Soyinka made up his mind to deemphasise the political aspect of Neogy's *Transition*, saying its tone had become unduly flippant and fingering Mazrui for this. Rather he preferred another brand of politicalness: the need to identify with the mass

movements fighting for liberations in places like Guinea Bissau where Amílcar Cabral had just declared his country independent of Portugal. He even published a report on the revolution written by historian, Basil Davidson in what appears an aspect of the historian's book, *The Liberation of Guinea*.

This did not mean the magazine would lose its independence; indeed, the impulsive need to maintain editorial integrity in spite of or even because of, the lingering story of CIA funding made Soyinka relinquish the funding by IACF, and this ensured that the journal had fewer source of support. He did even more; after about five issues he changed the name from *Transition* to *Ch'indaba* (from Zulu and Swahili meaning, 'Let the 'great colloquium of the people begin'), the idea being to identify with and celebrate pan-African unity. Nor was the magazine without its own share of controversy and internal politics. There was no doubt that Soyinka and Mazrui didn't see eye to eye. It was claimed that Mazrui resigned as associate editor, but the politics of that resignation has become less mysterious following an exchange in the relaunched *Transition*.

Soyinka, accused by Mazrui of writing a review that perverted the message of the latter's television documentary, *The African: A Triple Heritage*, wrote, among other repudiations, that Mazrui 'persisted in attempts to prolong (his) influence over the journal even after (he) ceased being on the editorial board,' and confessed to 'brusque dismissal' anytime Mazrui wanted to raise any question over the running of the journal. Mazrui, who wrote first, contended that 'Wole's old *Transition* was once guilty of refusing to publish anything in favour of Idi Amin.'

It was during his editorship that Chinweizu and his friends Onwuchekwa Jemie and Ihechukwu Madubuike, published their famous polemic against the Euromodernist tendencies in much of African writings, especially those of Soyinka and Okigbo. Their manuscript had been accepted for publication by Nwanife Publishers, Enugu. But it never appeared; after two years only pirate copies were seen. When Soyinka replied them and they still intended to raise issues with him, he declined to print them any more. They finally found an outlet in *Okike*, established by Achebe, in which they published a three-part critique in numbers 12 to 14 of the journal. These included 'The Hopkins Disease', 'The Leeds-Ibadan Connection: The Scandal of Modern African Literature' and 'Soyinka's Neo-Tarzanism: A Reply.' These they later incorporated into the book *Toward the Decolonisation of African Literature*.

The need for an alternative source of funding for *Ch'indaba* became urgent, IACF's support having been declined. What Soyinka did was to transfer the journal's management to *Africa Magazine* since he would soon return to Nigeria and didn't think it helpful to transplant the magazine again after barely six years. But while Soyinka went to pick a job at Ife in 1977, *Africa Magazine* began to arrange for his succession by a Ugandan. But this was not to be; plans had not been completed when in 1979 Amin's overthrow by Tanzanian forces led the successor-designate to return to



Rajat Neogy (died December 1995)

Kampala. Thereafter, there was no will on the part of *Africa Magazine* to revive the plans. 'For an intellectual magazine, *Transition* was actually rather long-lived,' observes Benson. 'However much one feels its absence, the tragedy is not that it died, but that it left no progeny.'

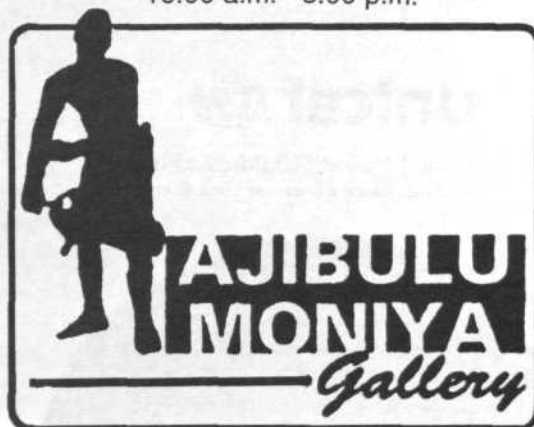
Yes, a valid judgement in 1984/85, when Benson was writing. By the close of that decade, however, Soyinka had relaunched *Transition* (not Ch'indaba) in the US. With him as chairman of board and scholars Henry Louis Gates Jr and Kwame Anthony Appiah as editors the new *Transition* proclaims itself as 'where the outspoken speak out', harking back to Neogy's pioneering work. The announcement carried in every edition is a capsule of the journal's old history. 'In 1961, some of Africa's most provocative thinkers started speaking out in a new magazine called *Transition*. It pulled no punches. *The New York Times* called it "Africa's slickest, sprightliest and occasionally sexiest magazine." Editor Rajat Neogy refused to listen when told by government officials that *Transition* was speaking a little too loudly. He was subsequently sent to jail. After 50 uncensored, unguarded, uninhibited issues, *Transition* ceased publication because of political and economic pressure.'

The new *Transition*, having such people as Carlos Fuentes, Aime Cesaire, Nadine Gordimer, Derek Walcott, Toni Morrison, Abiola Irele as editorial board members, promises to carry on with the tradition of 'tough-minded, far-reaching criticism.' It is published quarterly as an official publication of W.E.B. Du Bois Institute in the United States. There has been in the new *Transition* a certain controversiality that is stimulating. The three-part exchange between Soyinka and Mazrui is one instance; another on the politics of power initiated by the scholar Emery Roe received at least a dozen replies.

The major difference between the new *Transition* and its predecessors is its emphasis is 'on African and African-American concerns'. But the old debate about the primacy of audience ought to have returned. The language, themes as well as the general intellectual inclination of most contributors to *Transition*, while reflecting the trends in academic circles across the world, appear to be coming from the glands when applied to the Africa of here and now. The journal does not pretend to be a gallery of new writing. It is basically an academic and cultural journal and nothing is essentially wrong with its pre-occupations. Rather, its seeming distance from the African reality is a reflection of a general state of things that is deplorable and utterly meaningless. The people have failed to climb up to Gogol, as Anton Chekhov once lamented, but the life that obtains in Africa today is most perfect as a photograph of the people pulling Gogol down to their abysmal level and seeking to adapt him to their grinding poverty. Is this a failure of politics or of imagination?

On reflection, one might say this is not 1957; midlife crisis begins at 40. One might go ahead and still ask why *Transition* and not *Black Orpheus* needed reviving, whether the state of creative and intellectual productivity in Africa today should not provoke a publication 'where a young poet can see his work published in three weeks' as Beier dreamt 30 years ago. Are the days gone already, or not coming, again, when just as the Mexican critic Ilan Stavans could write in the new *Transition* about the phenomenon of Gabriel Garcia Marquez, a Colombian, a certain writer from 'the region between Chad and the Limpopo river' could assume a stature compelling enough to put an Indian critic to task? **GR**

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