

Chapter 1

East African Pasts, Presents and Futures in *Transition* and its Network

Recalling his days as a student at Makerere University College in Kampala in the early 1960s, the Kenyan novelist Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o expressed his sense of bliss as a young man. For Ngũgĩ was alive in Kampala, beginning to make his way in the world. Makerere "was a place where we felt we could challenge the best at any university in the world – Cambridge, Oxford, Harvard, you name it – had to offer . . . It was a place where the impossible seemed possible. Makerere was a place of dreams."¹ There, Ngũgĩ achieved his first break within a new, vibrant community of cultural production in early 1960s Kampala, one operating within, but eager to interrogate, the late colonial structures through which literary production operated in East Africa. Encouraged by the British expatriate lecturer in English at Makerere, David Cook, Ngũgĩ entered a short story into a 1961 open writing competition bankrolled by the Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF). He won and his piece, *The Return*, was published in the third issue of *Transition*, a new literary magazine edited by the ambitious Ugandan Indian intellectual Rajat Neogy and, from 1962, also under the CCF financial umbrella.² A place within these networks secured Ngũgĩ a seat at the 1962 Makerere Conference for Anglophone African writers, an event also sponsored by the CCF, on which he reported for *Transition's* fifth edition. At the conference, Ngũgĩ was starstruck by attending African-American and Caribbean authors such as Langston Hughes and Arthur Drayton. He hit the nightclub with Neogy and networked with Chinua Achebe from Nigeria, who would help Ngũgĩ secure his first book contract for *Weep Not Child* with the Heinemann African Writers Series just two years after *The Return*.³ Things moved fast in East Africa's literary 1960s.

The importance to Ngũgĩ of the opportunities presented by *Transition* was far from unique. Indeed, by curating debates about the contours of new potential East Africas through its bold mix of literary, artistic and political output, the fire-brand *Transition* published almost all of East Africa's public intellectuals in the 1960s. Moreover, the journal was just one part of a network of flourishing Africanist cultural institutions that shared content, contacts and funders to push the

1 Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o *Birth of a Dream Weaver* (London: Harvill Secker, 2016), 222.

2 James Ngugi, "The Return," *Transition*, no. 3 (1962).

3 James Currey, *Africa Writes Back: The African Writers Series and the Launch of African Literature* (Athens OH: Ohio University Press, 2008).

boundaries of post-colonial African cultural production. Some such as the Chemchemi Cultural Centre (Nairobi), Transcription Centre (London) and *Black Orpheus* (Ibadan) became formally linked through the CCF. Others like the Nommo Art Gallery (Kampala) and Paa ya Paa Gallery (Nairobi) existed independently of such overseas funding but drew on the network to support their work. The writers and artists on these stages and in these places were, like Ngũgĩ at Makerere, tied into colonial-origin structures even as endeavours like the allied literary campus journals *Busara*, *Nexus* and *Penpoint* Africanised at pace. The network was also linked to new dynamos of public debate such as *East Africa Journal* (see Chapter two) and the East African Publishing House (see Chapter six), whose writers were reviewed in and wrote for *Transition*.

Transition therefore makes an ideal starting point for this book. It is, after all, the best-known (and today, thanks to JSTOR and ProjectMUSE, the most readily accessible) cultural artefact of East Africa's print cultures of the 1960s. It was an exemplar of East Africa's engagement with the external agencies and actors at work in the global 1960s.⁴ With roughly half its contributors and readership drawn from Europe and the USA, *Transition* deliberately set out to engage a global audience with its mix of acerbic commentary, prose, and poetry.⁵

For all its fame and critical reception abroad, *Transition* is more important for our purposes for three reasons. First, it was itself a critical node in the networks that connected the minds and pens of the region's intellectuals with external funders and consumers in order to bring East Africa into being. Through the pages of the journal we can start to describe the close-knit world of people and venues – a zone of affinity and connection – at the cutting edge of defining the shape of future intellectual East Africa. *Transition* was part of a historically rooted set of networks of East African and international persons and institutions that was a catalyst of change: a community of thinkers who rubbed shoulders, hustled and disagreed about what would and should make a new East Africa. More specifically, *Transition* brings into relief the pillars that supported this intellectual community. Its history demonstrates the ways in which the worlds of media, publishing, higher education, and both national and global politics coalesced in East Africa to incubate a distinctive, regional intellectual and print culture. On its pages, trade unionists sat alongside playwrights; politicians alongside academics; and artists alongside journalists. Indeed, within this ensemble its ac-

⁴ Monica Popescu, *At Penpoint: African Literatures, Postcolonial Studies, and the Cold War* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020).

⁵ Peter Benson, *Black Orpheus, Transition, and Modern Cultural Awakening in Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

tors often played multiple roles – cultural critics, students, creative writers, journalists, or political activists – simultaneously, as exemplified by Ngũgĩ in the opening of this chapter.

The second key claim to significance here for *Transition* lies in its provision of space for intellectuals to contest and forge the meaning of East Africa. Within its covers, East African writers and artists grappled with urgent questions about how to work within and break free from colonial-era institutions and worldviews. They reckoned with the challenges and exploited the opportunities to secure support in other parts of the African continent, Europe, North America and Afro-Asia. They argued about the relationship between “modernising” nations or region and “decolonising” public culture. Finally, they raged about how to hold new African statesmen to account in an era of growing authoritarianism and austerity into the later 1960s. Despite personal conviviality and even intimacy within this East African and wider pan-African community of affinity, there was certainly no consensus to be found. Indeed, this chapter is concerned with contestation – different visions – on these grand public questions. Such print cultural and other artistic fora provided platforms for *debate*. They allowed editors like Neogy, or artists like Elimo Njau, as will be seen below, to *curate* divergent ideas about how future East African life should be informed: by drawing on deep African pasts or, conversely, driven by cleaner breaks from pre-colonial heritage and colonial history. Through the pages of elite literary magazines, student journals, political quarterlies and pamphlets, East Africans sought to remake their nations, region and world as they remade themselves after empire. Nairobi, Dar es Salaam and Kampala in the 1960s became exciting hubs of intense cultural production on the pulse of local and global conversations about freedom and modernity.⁶

Last, *Transition* serves an important function in this chapter in setting the narrative arc of the book. Most obviously, as Ngũgĩ’s bliss gave way to Neogy’s personal despair, the chapter illustrates how mounting authoritarianism and its suspicion of any subversive cultural activity put *Transition*’s future in jeopardy. As *Transition*’s contributors jostled with one another in arguments about East Africa’s past and future, so they encroached into increasingly fraught political terrain occupied by insecure rulers. The fate of the journal and Neogy thus became intertwined with the rise of authoritarian statehood in the late 1960s. But, at the same time as the conflict between the journal and the Obote state was being fought in the public gaze, other, hitherto more obscure structural constraints on

⁶ This is a world evocatively captured by Carey Baraka, drawing on interviews with a number of key participants. Carey Baraka, “Remembering Kampala,” *The Republic* (6 April 2024), accessed 24 May 2024, <https://rpubc.com/april-may-2024/remembering-kampala-literary-history/>.

the creativity and impact of *Transition* were also at work. Structures of finance, market forces, and other material factors influenced who could be consumed and who could not in this period. For example, the continuing power of British commercial presses (see Chapter six) – with their own ideas of the palatable and saleable – exerted patriarchal influence over who was published long after formal colonial power withdrew.⁷ Competing Cold War institutions active in the decolonising world – with their own preconceptions about acceptable notions of dissidence shaped by anti-communism especially – could mould the artistic landscape to a significant degree.⁸ The agendas of external actors, the lingering influence of colonial institutions, and the febrile political atmosphere at large in East Africa combined by the late 1960s to close off many paths forward that seemed to have been open to cultural practitioners earlier in the decade.

Nevertheless, the challenges of capital and patronage notwithstanding, throughout the print culture and artistic worlds of East Africa's 1960s there was a dogged determination on the part of (often young) actors not to be boxed in by the legacies of colonialism, financial pressure or, soon, dictatorial post-colonial statesmen. As the brash *Transition* folded in the late 1960s under pressure from the Ugandan state, the 1970s witnessed the rapid diversification into more popular print culture forms. This chapter reassesses the work of an array of East African writers, editors and artists over the 1960s. In a period when the application of East African history to East African futures was vocally contested, these individuals offered a multitude of answers to the question of what East Africa should look like.

The Birth of *Transition* and its Network

Transition was an exciting and experimental novelty when it emerged in Kampala in 1961 under the ambitious young Neogy. Born in Kampala in 1938 to Bengali immigrant parents, Neogy studied at Old Kampala Secondary School in the city until 1955, and Regent's Street Polytechnic and SOAS in London until 1961 (with an 8-month break in 1958 to return to Kampala to work within Ugandan nationalist politics). His early life dictated comfort in both East African and British cultural milieux. As for so many of the individuals we will meet through the rest of this book, cosmopolitanism described Neogy's outlook, rather than being a theory through which we can analyse him. His new journal added to an existing

7 Caroline Ritter, *Imperial Encore: The Cultural Project of the Late British Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2021).

8 Bhakti Shringarpure, *Cold War Assemblages: Decolonization to Digital* (New York: Routledge, 2019), 136–8; 164–6.

literary scene in the city, particularly around publications like the *Uganda Journal*, founded in 1934 by the Uganda Society, and a plethora of publications coming out of Makerere by the 1950s.⁹

Dominated by British expatriate staff and dignitaries, the likes of the Uganda Society echoed the paternalistic, developmental endeavours of the British colonial state, with a concern for fundamental, depoliticised African education, a seeming anachronism in an era of nationalist mobilisation and mounting student discontent, as represented in the 1952 Makerere food strike, itself linked to regional anti-colonial politics.¹⁰ As Chapter three explains, universities – both as the sites in which actors forged ideas and networks, and as places in which the politics of intellectual life were practiced – were critical to the world we describe in this book. Makerere and its associated university colleges in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam – unified in 1963 under the University of East Africa (UEA) – continued to uphold colonial practices well into the 1950s against the tide of opinion in much of the student body. For example, in 1966, the mercurial writer Taban Lo Liyong lambasted the absurdity of his European style curriculum in a satirical faux autobiographical snippet:

It would have grieved me much to discover that criticism killed Keats. I wonder if some critics will be so unfair to me as the barbarous *Quarterly* was to Keats. I will write an article one of these days and send it to Rajat Neogy – I wonder whether that name has more iambs than trochees in it? It would be good to find out. That Professor of Literary Criticism who changes his two pairs of spectacles at every sentence should know. Last week he taught prosody, so I was told. I had to cut classes in order to study my French for an impending examination.¹¹

By 1972, resistance to these Eurocentric epistemologies reached a more radical zenith in Ngũgĩ's manifesto *On the Abolition of the English Department* at the University of Nairobi, a landmark postcolonial intervention. However, in the decade before, the constituent parts of the soon-to-be UEA created a less theoretically radical *regional* elite who transformed East Africa's capitals into hothouses of ar-

⁹ On the Makerere College University Society newsletter, produced by the long-serving drama lecturer and Makerere biographer Margaret Macpherson, see Margaret Macpherson, *They Built for the Future: A Chronicle of Makerere University College* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009). See also Anna Adima, "Anglophone Women's Writing and Public Culture in Kenya and Uganda, 1959–1976" (PhD thesis, University of York, 2022).

¹⁰ Milford, *African Activists*, 27–33; Frederick K. Byaruhanga, *Student Power in Africa's Higher Education: A Case of Makerere University* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 42–9; David Mills, "Life on the Hill: Students and the Social History of Makerere," *Africa: Journal of the International Africa Institute* 76, no. 2 (2006): 257.

¹¹ Taban Lo Liyong, "The Education of Taban Lo Liyong," *Transition* 24 (1966): 16.

gument and intellectual possibility. *Transition* was at the centre of this movement, the most read journal of East Africa's literary 1960s.

Mobility across the region and conviviality on campus across nationality and ethnicity were crucial to this sense of possibility on the pages of *Transition* and allied journals. Campuses constituted remarkable transnational spaces that alumni and faculty alike sought to replicate in print. The Ugandan Asian novelist Bahadur Tejani, a classmate and friend of Ngũgĩ at Makerere from 1959–64, recalled that “we saw each other almost every day . . . one felt that if a person who was a close friend could shatter the barriers of silence, we could do it as well.”¹² This energy was translated into action at speed on campus, in student publications such as *The Makererean* and *Penpoint*, both edited by the young Ngũgĩ. Moreover, as Tejani's comments suggest (and Ngũgĩ's subsequent career exemplified, with projects such as the Kamiriithu community theatre project), East Africa's emergent intellectuals had no fear of straying beyond the ivory tower. Instead, they embraced the challenge of engaging with society at large. Neogy's key aim was to empower the elite cultural community to which Tejani and Ngũgĩ belonged to shatter the “barriers of silence” imposed through colonialism. Intellectuals were, in other words, at the heart of the great political and social project of the day. In the introductory editorial, Neogy explained his experimental mission:

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 spheres. One of the questions this journal will address itself to is: ‘What is an East African culture?’¹³

The decolonization of knowledge was, in Neogy's mind, key to the political struggle for freedom and not a separate process to be picked up at a later point.

Over the next decade, Neogy would marshal the interconnected institutions of East African literary spheres and Cold War funding to attempt to answer this knotted question about the definitions of East African culture. He would, in the process, present the world with a curation of the best of East African cultural production. In 1966, around half of *Transition*'s 12,000 copies per issue were shipped overseas, especially to Europe and North America. For Neogy, the success of these cultural endeavours as exercises in nation and region-building depended on East Africa's willingness to open itself up to world currents and permissive influences.

¹² Anne K. Koshi, “An Interview with Bahadur Tejani,” *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies* 21, no. 3 (1993): 44.

¹³ Editorial, *Transition* 1, no. 1 (1961).

He argued that progressive cultural change relied on “how hospitable it is to ideas from outside, and how freely it delves into itself” as a result.¹⁴ *Transition* stood at the interface of local and global in East Africa as a creative centre – a sorting house – where different scales of belonging with new nation-states, East African regionalisms and pan-African networks were very publicly contested. It was a microcosm of broader debates occurring throughout East African educational and creative venues, but also an exemplar of a particular liberal, cosmopolitan vision of the region that its proponents believed would define East Africa in the post-colonial, Cold War world.

In the 1960s-70s, *Transition* ran for 50 issues, 37 published from Kampala between 1961 and 1968, and a further 13 from Accra, Ghana, from 1971–74. It formed a central node in an ecosystem of local cultural institutions in the environs of East Africa’s university towns. Ngũgĩ reminisced about the parties at Neogy’s house in Kololo and the “mysterious”, “beautiful” private secretary to the Kabaka, Barbara Kimenye, who would later become one of East Africa’s most famous journalists and writers through her *Moses* series of children’s books with Oxford University Press.¹⁵ *Transition* was also, however, a conduit for something bigger than beau monde Kampala. It stood for a globally extraverted, pan-African community of feeling (and its allyship) which looked abroad for inspiration and comradeship. Alongside Ugandan poet Okot p’Bitek or the Kenyan journalist Hilary Ng’weno in the pages of *Transition* was Martin Luther King Jr, Langston Hughes, James Baldwin, J. P. Clark, Wole Soyinka, and the cream of pan-African letters.

Yet, in another sense, early *Transition* was not a total departure from the past represented in the *Uganda Journal* and expatriate world of Makerere. In scrambling to sustain his journal in its first three years, a large proportion of the content solicited from overseas came through networks of white academics, writers and journalists in Britain and the USA.¹⁶ At a time in which European farmers, government officials and their families were otherwise leaving the region, many white intellectuals and administrators connected to the projects described in this book bucked the trend. As with some of the magazines and publishing houses discussed in later chapters, western authors often outnumbered African writers – by

¹⁴ Rajat Neogy, “Do Magazines Culture?” *Transition* 24 (1966).

¹⁵ Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, *Birth of a Dream Weaver*, 124; Anna Adima, “Mixed-ish: Race, Class and Gender in 1950s–60s Kampala Through a Life History of Barbara Kimenye,” *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 16, no. 3 (2023): 355–374.

¹⁶ Harry Ransom Center (Hereafter HRC), Transcription Centre (TC) Collection, Box 17.17, R. Neogy circular to potential advertisers, 5 August 1963.

three to one in the inaugural issue of *Transition*. On a lesser scale, the recruitment of Neogy's acquaintances in the Anglo-American world continued throughout *Transition's* existence, for example with Neogy's close friend and extra-mural lecturer in English at Makerere, Paul Theroux who, in 1967, wrote an angry response to anti-Asian racism he saw on the street and in the East African press.¹⁷ *Transition* and the other avowedly anti-colonial publications and organisations in this book ironically helped remake the notion of white expertise for a post-colonial East Africa.

The multi-racial cosmopolitanism pronounced by Neogy and others throughout the following chapters allowed them to accommodate, on some level, the tensions between their rhetoric of decolonization and the disproportionate influence of white allies. Less easily reconciled were the cultural projects' avowed claims to sovereignty and the external sources of funding on which so much of what we write about here came to depend. In every chapter of this book, the East African organisers of cultural activity had to confront the blunt economic legacies of colonial rule. Salaries for African workers were too low – and there were too few workers employed in the formal, salaried sector – to make trade union subscriptions the basis of a viable, locally-funded labour movement. For the same reason, newspapers and magazines could not be sustained solely through sales. Nor could African-owned businesses, at first at least, make up the difference through advertising. Academic research and cultural production were of low priority in the economic planning of both colonial governments and their successors, even when considerable thought was given to their importance. And publishers lacked the capital necessary to invest in printing equipment. To address all these needs essential to the foundation of a vibrant intellectual life, East Africans had little option but to look outside the region for funding. This in turn forced them to engage with the protagonists in the cultural Cold War; with British efforts to continue to exert influence over former colonial territories; and with the cultural diplomacy of a host of other states and organisations looking to curry favour with decolonising states and societies.

Neogy was no different in this regard. He struggled to maintain enough advertising revenue – largely from local East African Asian businesses – to keep early *Transition* afloat, so looked beyond East Africa's borders to the wider Anglophone world in

¹⁷ Paul Theroux, "Hating the Asians," *Transition* 33 (1967). Theroux served as an Associate and Contributing Editor of the magazine in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Earlier members of the editorial team included the British social anthropologist Raymond Apthorpe, Dennis Williams of Guyana, George (later Kofi) Awoonor-Williams of Ghana, Chris Okigbo of Nigeria, and East Africans Ali Mazrui, Benjamin Mkapa, Francis Kasura and Ganesh Bangchi. Secretarial and advertising work from 1963-67 was carried out by four British and American women: Prudence-Rowe-Smith, Leigh Buchanan Bienen, Judy James and Valerie Hume.

which he was so comfortable. In 1962, on the recommendation of Seth Spaulding of the US Office of Education, who had served on a UNESCO mission in Kampala, Neogy asked the prominent American poet James Laughlin to finance *Transition* through Laughlin's experimental New Directions press in order to "find and encourage East African writing . . . [and] also to provide a link to international cultural streams, to widen perspectives and exchange ideas and not get stuck in an East African community alone".¹⁸ Neogy would eventually find a steady income, and the ability for *Transition* to become sustainable, having secured a grant from the CCF through its second Africa director, the exiled South African author, Ezekiel Mphahlele (known as Es'kia from 1977). Such grants were not generous. In January 1963, Neogy wrote to the CCF director in Paris, John Hunt, to complain that his £2000 annual grant barely covered half his expenses.¹⁹ But, persistent financial grumblings aside, the CCF link placed *Transition* more formally in a network of cultural projects that had the possibility of cooperating with one another.

The closest publication and initial inspiration for *Transition* was *Black Orpheus*, the publication of the Nigerian Mbari cultural clubs founded in Ibadan in 1957 and first CCF sponsored institutions in Africa. The CCF's African portfolio included the anti-apartheid *New African* and *The Classic*, exiled from Cape Town and Johannesburg to London.²⁰ Neogy, Ulli Beier, the German editor of *Black Orpheus*, and Neville Rubin, editor of the *New African*, corresponded copiously and met in person at the 1962 Makerere conference. John Hunt also encouraged the network to advertise the CCF's flagship magazine, London's *Encounter*, and other CCF publications with mixed success.²¹ British publishing houses, such as Heinemann, André Deutsch and Cambridge University Press, were quick to snap up and market contributors to these publications and provide advertising revenue.²² *Transition*'s network also benefited from close collaboration with a local CCF sponsored institution, Nairobi's Chemchemi Cultural Centre. Established in 1963 under Mphahlele, who had worked in West Africa with the exemplar Nigerian Mbari clubs from 1957–61, Chemchemi promoted four aspects of East African cultural life: visual arts, music, theatre and creative writing.

¹⁸ Wole Soyinka Papers, Harvard University, MS Am 2077 (1839), Africa Correspondence, folder 1, R. Neogy to J. Laughlin, 18 February 1962.

¹⁹ HRC, TC 17.17, R. Neogy to J. Hunt, 23 January 1963.

²⁰ Peter Benson, *Black Orpheus, Transition, and Modern Cultural Awakening in Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986); Randolphe Vigne and James Currey, *The New African: A History* (London: Merlin Press, 2015).

²¹ International Association for Cultural Freedom (IACF), Box 38, E. Mphahlele to R. Neogy, 5 August 1963; J Hunt to R. Neogy, 22 May 1963.

²² James Currey, "Literary Publishing After Nigerian Independence: Mbari as Celebration," *Research in African Literatures* 44, no. 2, (2013): 8–16.

Through workshops, use of its studios, theatre facilities and reference library, Chemchemi attempted to grow creative art in the region from the bottom up.²³ In October 1965, Mphahlele resigned as Chemchemi director claiming he was, as planned, stepping back to enable a Kenyan to take the reins.²⁴

A final allied CCF institution was the London Transcription Centre, “that dependable haven to passing African writers”, founded in 1962 by Dennis Duerden, a former BBC Hausa service producer and soon key node in the transnational Anglophone African writers and artists community.²⁵ Duerden placed Neogy on the Transcription Centre advisory committee within the year, alongside Professor W. E. Abraham from the University of Ghana, Edward Shils of Cambridge University and T. W. Chalmers, special assistant to the head of overseas and foreign relations at the BBC.²⁶ The London Transcription Centre specialised in radio broadcasts of interviews with prominent African and Caribbean writers and cultural figures in its “Africa Abroad” weekly strand, edited by the renowned South African author (and *Transition* contributor) Lewis Nkosi from March 1962, a programme broadcast on the continent in Zambia, Ghana, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone. Duerden also acted an agent, promoter, purveyor of loans and administrative trouble-shooter for a range of African cultural figures, such as the South African jazz musicians Dollar Brand and Chris McGregor who found themselves in financial straits in London. In collaboration with Mbari and *Transition*, from December 1964 Transcription produced a monthly information bulletin, *Cultural Events in Africa*, which brought news of new books, productions, exhibitions and shows to a world audience. Duerden’s activities were “insistently multivocal, placing Africans from different countries in dialogue”.²⁷ It was partially through this dialogue and place within the network that Neogy was able to populate the editions of his magazine and himself connect East African cultural figures with other cultural players within the pan-African world.

The window for such experimentation ultimately proved to be narrow. In 1967, the revelation of CIA backing for the CCF created consternation in the decolonising world. The CCF reduced and soon withdrew financial support from institutions like the Transcription Centre, which soon withered away. But, as for other similar ven-

23 Ezekiel Mphahlele, “Chemchemi Creative Centre, Nairobi,” *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 3, no. 1 (1965): 115–117.

24 “Chemchemi Director Resigns,” *Daily Nation*, 12 October 1965; Mphahlele, *Afrika, My Music*, Chapter 2.

25 Wole Soyinka, *You Must Set Forth at Dawn* (London: Methuen, 2008), 85; For a brief history of Transcription Centre activities see Gerald Moore, “The Transcription Centre in the Sixties: Navigating the Narrow Seas,” *Research in African Literatures* 33, no. 3 (2002).

26 HRC, TC 17.17, D. Duerden to R. Neogy, 22 January 1963.

27 Jordana Bailkin, “The Sounds of Independence? Lessons from Africa and Beyond at the Transcription Centre Archive,” *History Workshop Journal* no. 78 (2014): 233.

tures discussed below, the true costs of Neogy's dependence on CCF funding became apparent as the authoritarian political opponents of the proponents of the liberal, cosmopolitan brand of East African regionalism stepped up their attacks. Amidst the scandal over Neogy's indirect receipt of CIA funds, the Ugandan government of Milton Obote seized the opportunity to silence the criticism published in *Transition*, banning the magazine in 1968 and imprisoning Neogy. In 1971 – and with Neogy now in exile – the overthrow of Obote by Idi Amin augured a military authoritarianism that “scattered Makereans and Ugandans to the four corners of the world: no social sector was spared. To Amin and his soldiers, Makerere was the site of an educated elite to be humiliated and made to serve the soldiers”.²⁸ Yet for a decade before, the institutions that existed alongside and within *Transition*'s ecosystem were energetic in discussing how East African intellectual, political and creative futures should be built. It is to the ideas and debates in their pages and on their canvasses that the chapter now turns.

Past and Present

In his scathing review of the 1962 Makerere Conference in issue four of *Transition*, the Nigerian writer Obi Wali concluded that “African literature as now defined and understood leads nowhere . . . African literature as now understood and practiced is only a minor appendage in the mainstream of European literature. Both creative writers and literary critics read and devour European literature and critical methods.” Pre-figuring Ngũgĩ of 1972, Wali argued that in failing to anchor writing in African languages and cultural traditions – over allegiance to “western midwives” – African literary production was doomed from its outset.²⁹ The question of how the African past should be reckoned with in the post-colonial present became a first order question in early *Transition* and the literary works it helped birth. Ngũgĩ's own first publication, the aforementioned 1962 short story “The Return”, narrated the life a newly released Mau Mau detainee in Kenya who lamented that the world had moved on without him.³⁰

Although hitting public consciousness through *Transition*, “The Return” had first been published in *Penpoint*, the student journal of the Makerere English Department student, which Makerere graduate Ali Mazrui later argued could claim to have honed “more creative writers in English than any other Department, at

²⁸ Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o *Birth of a Dream Weaver*, 222.

²⁹ Obiajunwa Wali “The Dead End of African Literature,” *Transition* 4, no. 10 (1963): 13–15.

³⁰ James Ngugi, “The Return,” *Transition* no. 3 (1962).

home and abroad”.³¹ The supervisor of *Penpoint*, and mentor to the young Tejani and Ngũgĩ, was the British literature lecture David Cook, who oversaw a group of young writers engaged in experimental prose, poetry and scripts that wrestled with themes of the priorities of Africanisation in the context of their Eurocentric learning.

In 1965, Cook edited *Origin East Africa*, an anthology of short stories, plays and poems by 25 Makerereans associated with *Penpoint* over its foundational years.³² For Simon Gikandi, like Wali, the alienation of African history under colonial knowledge production was abundant in *Origins*. Across in the History Department, Bethwell Ogot recalled that African history was not incorporated into the syllabus until 1959. However, Gikandi also noted how new Africanising creative spaces emerged to repurpose such western forms to new decolonial ends. On *Origin East Africa*, he wrote “that what strikes the reader most is not their imitation of European form, but the ways in which their mastery of the Great Tradition would enable them to introduce African topics into their poetry or prose . . . a vague and tentative attempt to recuperate a precolonial African tradition in literary discourse.”³³ A key conflict in Africa’s literary sphere emerged. Should East African writers centre African languages and traditions as the beating heart of cultural production, or should they offer up pragmatic solutions to overcoming colonial legacies that made best use of what was left after independence towards Africanising ends? Before 1972’s *Abolition of the English Department*, this was an open question.

The Ugandan Asian writer Peter Nazareth’s contribution to *Origin*, the play *Brave New Cosmos*, underlined the sense of dispute about the relationship between new and old ways amongst East Africa’s young intellectuals as three Ugandan students, Karanja, Kiwanuka and Kaggwa, sparred about the relationship between modernity and their lives as students:

KARANJA: Don’t be ridiculous! Sit under a *tree*? What is the library for? All the books one needs are in the library. And it has a wonderful atmosphere for studying. Only an idiot would think of studying in the open.

31 Ali Mazrui, *The Trial of Christopher Okigbo* (London: Heinemann, 1971), 41–42.

32 David Cook (ed.) *Origin East Africa. A Makerere Anthology* (London: Heinemann, 1965); Carol Sicherman, “Ngugi’s Colonial Education: ‘The Subversion of the African Mind,’” *African Studies Review* 38, no. 3 (1993): 11–42.

33 Simon Gikandi, “East African Literature in English,” in *The Cambridge History of African and Caribbean Literature*, ed. Simon Gikandi & F. Abiola Irele (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 428.

KIWANUKA: But at least *you* believe in reading in the open! Surely you must if you read Wordsworth!

KAGGWA: Why should one study in the open? Yes, I read Wordsworth, but that doesn't mean I should study like a caveman instead of a modern civilised human being!

[KIWANUKA *stares at KAGGWA, amazed. Then shrugs*]³⁴

In the pages of *Penpoint* and *Dhana* in Kampala and the University of Nairobi English department publication, *Busara*, young African writers appealed to the communal past to assert freedom from colonial institutions and create artistic practices more applicable to East African contexts over the 1960s.³⁵ For instance, Mary Kimori's 1969 article in *Busara* "What Future Drama?" noted the lack of "authentically East African" plays and, like Nazareth's Kiwanuka, proposed reanimating outdoor communal viewings – "popular village opera" – faithful to historical entertainment practices. "We need not wait until we have a magnificent stage with elaborate lighting effects and other aids [. . .] we are already in a position to use our bodies and voices – the most important tools for dramatic activity – for popular entertainment."³⁶ Several of these young students found their experimental essays and short stories published in *Transition*, which sponsored creative writing competitions locally, and thus opened up East Africa's creative scene to a global audience and scrutiny. In 1968, a member of the editorial board of *Penpoint* echoed Neogy to note the purpose of the magazine to help those "who feel restricted by traditional patterns of literary expression – who feel that what they have to say can be put differently and must be put so".³⁷

Faith in the necessity of looking back critically to, and further beyond, the colonial era to make sense of the present pervaded much literary output produced by EAPH or Heinemann, the outputs of which were carefully reviewed in *Transition* and the Transcription's "Africa Abroad" radio shows. Historical fiction – with the mission to explain the contemporary world as parts of larger historical processes – proved one of the most important genres of East Africa's elite literary production and review. This diachronic approach characterised Ngũgĩ's early novels from *Weep Not Child* (1964) to *Petals of Blood* (1977), which narrated in increasingly radical ways how the experience and legacies of the Mau Mau

³⁴ Cook (ed.), *Origin East Africa*, 177.

³⁵ For a recent study of *Busara* see Madhu Krishnan, "Citizenship, Responsibility and Literary Culture in the University Periodical in Eastern Africa: Spaces of Social Production in *Busara* and its Networks," in *The Edinburgh Companion to British colonial periodicals*, eds. David Finkelstein, David Johnson and Caroline Davis (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2024), 531–541.

³⁶ Mary Kimori, "What Future Drama," *Busara* 2, no. 3 (1969): 35–37.

³⁷ Editorial, *Penpoint*, no. 24 (1968): 1.

war related to the failed hopes of independence as the Kenyatta regime grew in power and repression over the late 1960s and 1970s. The Mau Mau novel provided a more widely used tool with which to debate nation-building and its relationship to Kenya's past. Such themes were prominent, for example, in Charity Waciuma's autobiographical novel *Daughter of Mumbi* (1969) which grappled with issues of allegiance to Kikuyu tradition against alternative forms of modernity. Similarly, Grace Ogot's *The Promised Land* (1966) concerned the alienation of migrant Kenyan Luo workers in colonial Tanganyika, narrated through ideas of Luo mysticism, and was "one of the first East African novelists in English to represent tradition as a bulwark against modern alienation".³⁸

Most famously, in Uganda, Okot p'Bitek – a frequent and outspoken *Transition* contributor – published the epic satirical poem *The Song of Lawino* (1966), a passionate historically attuned attempt to deploy Acholi language and cultural pride to reject colonial frames, becoming "highly critical of attempts to interpret African religions and philosophies in terms of European and Christian ideologies".³⁹ The protagonist Ocol, fascinated with European ways, was soon "captured" by ghosts to become a "walking corpse" such that his wife Lawino calls him "a dog of the white man":

*He cannot hear
The insults of foreigners
Who say
The songs of black men are rubbish!
When the master is eating
They [dogs] lie by the door
And keep guard
While waiting for left-overs.*⁴⁰

In 1980, p'Bitek recalled:

all my writings, whether they are anthropological monographs, studies of religion, essays, songs, poems or even traditional stories and proverbs such as I am collecting now, all of them are ammunition for one big battle: the battle to decide where we here in Africa are going and what kind of society we are building.⁴¹

³⁸ Simon Gikandi, "East African Literature in English," 428. Charity Waciuma, *Daughter of Mumbi* (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1969); Adima, "Anglophone Women's Writing," 95–8; Grace Ogot, *The Promised Land* (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1966).

³⁹ Tim Allen, "The Rage of Okot P'Bitek: Colonial Perspectives on a Failed Oxford Doctorate", accessed 28 February 2024. <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/africaatlse/2019/07/12/rage-okot-pbitek-colonial-perspectives/>.

⁴⁰ Okot p'Bitek, *The Song of Lawino* (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1966).

⁴¹ Bernth Lindfors, *Mazungumzo: Interviews with East African writers, publishers, editors and scholars* (Athens OH: Ohio University, 1980), 143.

Such questions about past and future emerged forcefully too in the visual art scene in East Africa, at the university and in the three cooperative regional galleries: Kibo (Marangu), Nommo (Kampala) and Paa ya Paa (Nairobi). At the so-called Foundation course at the department of Art and Architecture at University College Nairobi during the mid-1960s, Selby Mvusi and Derek Morgan sought to generate a new “realization of time-consciousness” through radical pedagogy for students from across East Africa.⁴² Formal art and art historical training had been part of East Africa’s university landscape since the foundation of the Margaret Trowell School at Makerere in 1937. Debates about Trowell’s influence as a champion of indigenous African aesthetic practices against her attachment to colonial pedagogies continue.⁴³ But, in the 1950s, as Africanisation debates gathered momentum, disputes broke out between Trowell’s students the Ugandan sculptor Gregory Maloba and Tanganyikan painter Sam Ntiro over the value of “mythologising African pasts”.⁴⁴ Maloba was eager to push away from Trowell’s insistence on subordinating technique to local subject matter. “For me, there is no art without abstraction if during my moments of high artistic practice I said to myself ‘Now I am going to produce something African’ I would just come to a standstill”.⁴⁵ Here Maloba clashed with Ntiro whose work *Men Taking Banana Beer to Bride by Night* (1956) presented a simple, striking and idealised Chagga past set against the verdant slopes of southern Kilimanjaro to signal the direction of the future.⁴⁶ As Africanisation imperatives intensified into the 1960s, local artists in the region gravitated to Ntiro and Trowell over Maloba according to the art historian George Kyeyune.⁴⁷

Beyond the campus, the development of artistic capacity became a priority for parts of the CCF network, in particular Dennis Duerden’s Transcription Centre, which used its links with the Institute of Contemporary Art in London and the 1964 Commonwealth Festival in Cardiff to commission and sell works of Afri-

42 Daniel Magaziner, “The Foundation: Design, Time, and Possibility in 1960s Nairobi,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 60, no. 3 (2018): 599–628.

43 Emma Wolukau-Wanambwa, “Margaret Trowell’s School of Art or How to Keep the Children’s Work Really African,” *The Palgrave Handbook of Race and the Arts in Education*, ed. Amelia M. Kraehe et. al. (London: Palgrave, 2018), 85–101.

44 George Kyeyune, “Art in Uganda in the Twentieth Century” (PhD thesis, Makerere University, 2003).

45 “Gregory Maloba Talks About His Childhood and His Growth as a Sculptor,” *Transition* no. 11 (1963): 22.

46 Gabriella Nugent, “Memories of Chagga Country: Sam Ntiro,” *Post. Notes on Art in Global Context*, 23 March 2022, accessed 26 February 2025, <https://post.moma.org/memories-of-chagga-country-sam-ntiro>.

47 Kyeyune, “Art in Uganda”.

can visual artists. This provided a material lifeline to enable creators like Jimi Okolo of Nigeria to concentrate on their creative process over taking a lay job.⁴⁸ This was a fact acknowledged by East Africa's most famous artist, Elimo Njau, in his correspondence with Duerden.⁴⁹ Njau, like Maloba, had concerns about the dearth of technical skills in East Africa's art world. As such, Njau and Duerden arranged for the South African art and architecture professor, Julian Beinart, to travel to Nairobi in 1965 to provide the art summer school he had run at Mbari in Nigeria, Mozambique and South Africa to sixty students at Chemchemi. Beinart hoped to encourage his students there to "regard art less as an esoteric profession than as a popular and communal endeavour" that might plug into the longer-term projects of Chemchemi to grow local artistic production and consumption within communities.⁵⁰ While in Kenya, Beinart also did interviews for the Kenya Broadcasting Corporation and the East African Institute of Social and Cultural Affairs (EASICA) not least about his other passion – South African and American jazz – on which another Chemchemi seminar was held.

As with *Transition's* authorship and readership, and the fixing role of men like Duerden, East Africa's art scene of the 1960s involved the interaction of Black East Africans and sojourning white cultural organisers. The first director of Kampala's Nommo Art Gallery, founded in 1964 after the donation of a building by the Buganda government, was Barbara Brown, a former American model, curator, fundraiser and later second wife to Neogy.⁵¹ However, the ideas germinated in these new spaces aligned with Beinart's call for more "communal" attitudes to visual art and African culture. In *Transition* in November 1963, Njau introduced the new Kibo gallery in Marangu, Moshi, Tanganyika as:

like a mango tree; too slow in growth to compete with ephemeral fashions of the art world; but with roots too deep in the soil to be uprooted by any shallow wind of 'civilisation'. We dedicate it to the young generation who claim to be true sons of Africa in hope that they will face the challenge to live truly in the poor circumstances of their homes in the villages, deserts of countryside and uplift the old Africa to new spiritual heights and depths unknown to modern materialistic world!⁵²

Njau elaborated on East Africa's cultural wealth in an article for an earlier issue of *Transition*, where he argued that African artists must reject western cultures

⁴⁸ HRC, TC Collection: 12.11, Jimi Akolo.

⁴⁹ HRC, TC Collection: 12.10, E. Njau to D. Duerden, 15 September 1965.

⁵⁰ HRC, TC Collection: 12.10, J. Beinart "Report on Visit to East Africa and Europe – December 1964 – March 1965, Sponsored by the Farfield Foundation."

⁵¹ "Barbara Kimenye Talks to the Busiest Girl in Town," *Daily Nation* 3 November 1964.

⁵² Elimo Njau, "Kibo Art Gallery," *Transition* no. 11 (1963): 13.

and “pool all our resources to restore the soul of this vital man – the artist. If he has no soul, Africa has no soul, if he has a split personality the African personality also gets split.”⁵³ He called on East African governments to enact copyright legislation not only to protect contemporary art works but their seed: “traditional folklore”.⁵⁴ For many at the Chemchemi Centre, where Njau worked as visual director before Kibo, the mission was to “search for the broken threads of traditional idioms of culture”. But this was a search for the past in dialogue with the contemporary. “Chemchemi wants to remind itself that a tradition that stays put like a monument to a past and cannot be shifted and made to bear on the present-day problems remains mere history”, wrote Mphahele as director.⁵⁵ Images of Njau’s art, like those of many contemporaries peppered most editions of *Transition*. Debates about “authentic” African heritage and its relationship with the modern world, produced in environments indebted to Euro-American finance and time, remained a meta question which pervaded every issue throughout the 1960s.⁵⁶

Local and Global: Scales of Belonging

The exploration into the relationship between ethnically patriotic pasts and the post-colonial present in *Transition* and its allied institutions coalesced into contentious debate about African autochthony over the mid-1960s. The running questions of who could belong as an East African, and how, raged. Much of its controversy in these sources derived from the location of the labour and creativity underpinning *Transition* and its contributors: the multicultural city. As mentioned, the participants in Neogy’s editions were notable for their multiracial composition: from British lecturers to American poets, East African Asian political scientists and Black African novelists. Several early issues of the magazine addressed the nature of tense race relations in the East African city in rather dry academic fashions, analysing colonial taxonomy for example.⁵⁷ But few pieces truly grappled with the visceral populist, material African urban grievances that

53 Elimo Njau, “Copying Puts God to Sleep,” *Transition* 9 (1963): 17.

54 KNA MAC/EAU/25, Elimo Njau, “Some Talking Points for the Symposium on Art,” 16 September 1963 at “The Machinery of Planning” Public Policy Conference, University of East Africa, Kampala, 15–21 September 1963.

55 *Chemchemi African Creative Centre presents Paintings and Sculptures by Elimo Njau* (Nairobi: Chemchemi publishing, 1964), 2.

56 An even more integrated visual art component marked *Black Orpheus*. P. Benson, “‘Border Operators’: Black Orpheus and the Genesis of Modern African Art and Literature,” *Research in African Literatures* 14, no. 4 (1983): 431–473.

57 E.g. J.E. Goldthorpe, “Race Relations in East Africa,” *Transition* 1, no. 1 (1961).

had sparked conflagrations like the anti-Asian protests in Buganda in 1949, and continued to form a key strand of more muscular urban African nationalisms across the region in the 1950s.⁵⁸

Neogy's early life was rooted in this multicultural city. As a teenager, he was involved in advocacy for a non-racial public sphere and common roll through the Asian Uganda Action Group, an uneasy ally to the Uganda National Congress. In 1959, Neogy called for "an intellectual breakaway from the feudalism of Asian thinking in Uganda in the past" through new print cultures "not restricted on racial lines".⁵⁹ This represented a progressive strand of East African Asian thought, largely amongst second and third generation community members, that called for accommodative Afro-Asian change in the 1960s. In Kenya, the Ghai brothers "acknowledged that Asians will have to accept radical, at times painful, changes in their present positions, attitudes, and behaviour" at the same time as Africans should recognise the various forms of positive Asian economic contributionism as opposed to base populist accusations of Asian neocolonial vampirism.⁶⁰

The early editions of *Transition* dealt with this "general problem of modernisation, which implies not only economic development but also the adjustment of social institutions and attitudes to the exigencies of the modern world".⁶¹ Neogy himself took the lead. In his 1966 editorial "Do magazines culture?" he argued that interventions like *Transition* could drive forward an accommodative, dynamic East Africa to expunge the remnants of colonialism. He drew a dichotomy between "do cultures" and "don't cultures". The latter were "akin to frustrated spinsters in a family. They are censorious, opinionated, smug, complacent, and intent on preserving the 'tradition' . . . indicative of a dying out phase". He celebrated East Africa's new "do culture", which was "permissive, experimental, vigorous and challenging".⁶² At its foundation, he declared that "I do not like to think of it [*Transition*] as a magazine which has even to think in terms of or be conscious of the racial composition of its contributors."⁶³ His fellow Kampala resident, and former classmate of Ngũgĩ at Makerere, Bahadur Tejani took forward

58 Edgar Taylor, "Claiming Kabale: Racial Thought and Urban Governance in Uganda," *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 7, no. 1 (2013): 143–163; James R. Brennan, *Taifa: Making Race and Nation in Tanzania* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2012).

59 "Party seeks those who 'believe in Uganda'," *Uganda Argus*, 13 February 1959.

60 Dharam P. Ghai & Yash P. Ghai, "Asians in East Africa: Problems and Prospects," *Journal of Modern African Studies* 3, no. 1 (1965): 35–51.

61 Abiola Irele, Review of *Transition*, no. 1–3 in *Journal of Modern African Studies* 3, no. 3 (1967): 442–447.

62 Neogy, "Do magazines culture?"

63 Interview with R. Neogy for African Writers Club (BBC radio), c. 1962, available at <http://sounds.bl.uk/>.

such ideas into more dramatic literary ground. His novel, *The Day After Tomorrow*, written in 1967 and published by EAPH in 1971, presented a sexually charged vision of a new edenic East African civilisation, free of racial inhibition.⁶⁴ Through throwing off the shackles of social divisions by intimate cross-racial relationships (a culturally embellished version of the Ghai brothers' arguments) a more harmonious East Africa could be constructed.

A similar call to disentangle race from East African belonging was voiced by Peter Nazareth in the pages of *Transition* in 1965:

no African who writes about society in present-day Africa can avoid being committed and political, not in a sense of party-politics, but in the sense that every attempt to reorganise society in Africa is a move which affects everybody, the figures at the top and the bottom. I would think that the African writer who condemned colonialism . . . because it led to exploitation and the loss of human values, is hardly likely to be satisfied with the old systems are retained with the only difference that Africans have replaced Europeans.⁶⁵

An attempt to minimise ethnic divisions, which Neogy asserted had been exacerbated under colonialism, marked such attempts at politicised social engineering in the context of Afro-Asian tensions of old.

The literary critic Michael Echureo noted that figures such as Neogy tended to "ignore what he regarded as the petty issue of race and nationhood".⁶⁶ But despite the inclusion of many essays on African ethnic pasts in *Transition* – for example Okot p'Bitek's dissection of Acholi love in issue 17 – the editorial insistence on downplaying the salience of deeply rooted ethnicised pasts – the concerns of Okot p'Bitek – ran into vocal opposition. Despite being rooted in the cosmopolitan space of Kampala, for Echureo Neogy's "Africa was not really Africa at all. He was attached to Uganda, but it might just as well have been Kenya or Zambia. Neogy was equally at home in Kampala as he was in Paris or Ghana. For him and for Mazrui, nationalism and culture were valid as long as they were not tied to locality and ethnicity: to a people and to a history."⁶⁷ This sat uncomfortably with populist African nationalist movements in Uganda and across the region. Tejani's expulsion with the Uganda Asian community in 1972 by Idi Amin proved, as for Nazareth and many others, to be an emotively painful experience, one rooted in conflicting

⁶⁴ Dan Ojwang, "The Half-Caste and the Dream of Secularism and Freedom: Insights from East African Asian Writing," *Scrutiny2: Issues in English Studies in Southern Africa* 13, no. 2 (2008): 33–34. Stephanie Jones, "The First South Asian East African novel: Bahadur Tejani's *Day after Tomorrow*," *Contemporary South Asia* 17, no. 1 (2009): 33–46.

⁶⁵ Peter Nazareth, "The African Writer and Commitment," *Transition* 4, no. 19 (1965): 6.

⁶⁶ Michael J. Echureo, "From Transition to Transition," *Research in African Literatures* 22, no. 4 (1991): 138.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

perceptions of race and the right to belong within East African nation-building. Tejani left for the USA, declaring in *Transition* that “being a Ugandan was a birth-right. Not a privilege. To be handed certificates of citizenship was allowing us to kick a mother: the soil on which one grew up, the school walls on which we wrote our first four-letter words, the clamour of first stolen kisses, the fear of sex, parents, race, the dead under the ground.”⁶⁸ Not everyone agreed on this birthright.

Another route to overcome the artificial divisions of the colonial past was the framing of a distinctly East African community, a method abundantly apparent in *Transition* and its network. A variety of opinions were contained in the issues on East Africa’s regional moment. In 1961, Makerere economics lecturer Semei Nyanzi surveyed the prospects of the East African Common Market, sceptical about the inequalities between Kenya, Tanganyika and Uganda and calling for, at best, a limited and “loose agreement” to let each nation chart its own course into independence.⁶⁹ This was taken up more sternly in Grace Ibingira’s “obituary” of East African unity in 1965, a lament at power politicking in the respective ruling parties whose leaders would not pool sovereignty to sufficient degrees to make a federation work.⁷⁰

Beyond the individual articles on political and economic affairs, however, a profound sense of regional connection bound *Transition* together. Neogy himself framed his categorisations of the intellectuals in his network as “East African” and rarely by nationality. “Persuasion, not confrontation, has always been the East African intellectual’s mode of operation”.⁷¹ He made a conscious effort to represent all three East African territories in his issues. What might not work in the corridors of political power could in East Africa’s regional cultural community. During Neogy’s interview on Transcription’s “Africa Abroad” in 1963, producer and presenter Lewis Nkosi introduced Neogy as “an Indian, though I doubt if he would take kindly to such classification. He certainly regards himself merely as a citizen of East Africa. No more no less”.⁷² This regionalist sensibility pervaded the making of literary anthologies throughout the period. In 1971, the EAPH collection *Poems from East Africa*, edited by David Cook and David Rubadiri, consciously included 50 contributors – most of whom had written for *Transition* – relatively equally from across Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda, including Taban Lo Liyong (Uganda)

⁶⁸ Bahadur Tejani “Farewell Uganda,” *Transition* no. 45 (1974). John Scheckter, “Peter Nazareth and the Ugandan Expulsion: Pain, Distance, Narration,” *Research in African Literatures* 27, no. 2 (1996): 83–93.

⁶⁹ Semei Nyanzi, “The East African Market: For Better or Worse,” *Transition* no. 2 (1961): 20.

⁷⁰ Grace Ibingira, “Political Movements and their Role in Promoting Unity in East Africa,” *Transition* no. 20 (1965): 37–42.

⁷¹ Rajat Neogy, “On Being an African Intellectual,” *Transition* no. 123 (2017): 49–50.

⁷² Bailkin, “The Sounds of Independence?”: 234.

and John Mbiti (Kenya), alongside numerous East African South Asian-origin writers Jagjit Singh (Kenya), Yusuf Kassam (Tanzania) and Tejani (Uganda).⁷³

As arguments about the role of history, region and nation-building rumbled on within East Africa, so too did debates about bigger scales of sovereignty within decolonising pan-African contexts. Duerden had long hooked up continental African writers with their diasporan comrades at the Transcription Centre, while Neogy regularly invited Caribbean and African-American figures into his journal both as contributors and, above all, readers. Mbari remained the centerpiece of the network for Duerden and the CCF, but an institution fraternally linked to *Transition*. Ghanaian poet George (later Kofi) Awoonor-Williams sat on Neogy's editorial team from 1963-64 and again from 1966-68. Nigerian poet Christopher Okigbo, an attendee of Makerere 1962 and the West Africa contact for Oxford University Press, became *Transition's* West Africa correspondent.⁷⁴

But, true to the feel of contestation apparent within *Transition* and its network, there was no simple story of reinforcing comfortable pan-African cosmopolitanisms. The famous clash between Kwame Nkrumah and Julius Nyerere on the sequencing and magnitude of pan-African organisation – a conflict on the extent to which national sovereignty should be pooled on a continental scale over the 1960s – was the tip of the iceberg in thinking (and disagreeing) about pan-Africanism in East Africa's 1960s.⁷⁵ Fissures quickly formed within the network between East Africa and West African views on race and liberty. Mphahlele was outspoken against *négritude* in argument with his predecessor as CCF Africa Director, the African-American scholar, Senghor expert and later US diplomat in Francophone West Africa, Mercer Cook.⁷⁶ By 1963, Mphahlele responded angrily to what he perceived to be repetitive attacks on him at the "Conference on African literature and the university curriculum" in Dakar, Senegal, by "fire-eater", "proselytizing" activists association with *Présence Africaine*, "paralysing a sense of African solidarity".⁷⁷ The South African, Lewis Nkosi

73 David Cook and David Rubadiri, *Poems from East Africa* (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1971).

74 Obi Nwakanma, *Christopher Okigbo, 193–67* (Oxford: James Currey, 2010).

75 Issa Shivji, "Nationalism and Pan-Africanism: Decisive Moments in Nyerere's Intellectual and Political Thought," *Review of African Political Economy*, 39, no. 131 (2012): 103–116; Chambi Chachage, "African unity – Feeling with Nkrumah, Thinking with Nyerere," *Pambazuka News*, 9 April 2009.

76 M. Cook and E. Mphahlele "The African Personality – Two Views," *The New Leader* (New York), 24 October 1960; G. Massé, "Cold War and Black transnationalism: Aimé Césaire and Mercer Cook at the first International Congress of Black Writers and Artists," *Palimpsest: A Journal on Women, Gender, and the Black International* 4, no. 2 (2015): 115–34.

77 Ezekiel Mphahlele, "Confidential Report on the Conferences on African Literature in French and English and the University Curriculum," 26 March to 8 April 1963.

(Duerden's second in command at Transcription and *Transition* contributor) saw the spat as "the result of emotional entanglements rather than "genuine disagreement", a product of Mphahlele's experiences of the racial oppressions in apartheid South Africa and a certain reductive interpretation of the restrictions on Black writers writing against colonial structures.⁷⁸ Neogy agreed with Mphahlele: "Negritude as a concept I'm afraid cuts absolutely no ice in East Africa".⁷⁹ Despite his commitments to pan-African networking through his magazine and beyond, true to his views on East African autochthony, racially exclusive ideas had no place for Neogy.

The Political Turn in the Late 1960s

Transition's content and the texts reviewed within became bolder, brasher and more locally politicised into the latter 1960s. *Transition* had always included overtly political content in its early years both to fill column inches in the absence of enough literary criticism, academic commentary and creative writing, but also to air the topical issues of the moment. Top ranking East African politicians used the magazine, and its significant readership at home and overseas, as a soapbox. Kenneth Kaunda theorised about democracy in Africa as he became president of Zambia; Julius Nyerere extolled the virtues of one-party government; Tom Mboya published an essay in 1963 on "African socialism", a piece bursting with his confidence in the ability to control economic and developmental liaisons with now post-colonial western partners.⁸⁰

This provoked questions within the network about what exactly *Transition* was for. In 1965, a discussion on "Africa Abroad" between John Nagenda, Bethwell Ogot, Erisa Kironde, and Ali Mazrui on the purpose of *Transition* asked whether it should remain a literary and creative journal above all (like *Black Orpheus*), and leave political commentary to the press or *East Africa Journal* (see Chapter two), or remain a mix of both. The latter emerged as the pragmatic consensus.⁸¹ *Transition's* political analysis went from strength to strength. In his 1965 review of the

⁷⁸ Lewis Nkosi, *Tasks and Masks: Themes and Styles in African Literature* (Harlow: Longman, 1979), 16–19.

⁷⁹ Interview with R. Neogy for "Africa Abroad" (BBC radio), c. 1962, available at <http://sounds.bl.uk/>.

⁸⁰ Kenneth Kaunda, "The Future of Democracy in Africa," *Transition*, no. 15 (1964): 37–39; Julius Nyerere, "One Party Government," *Transition* no. 2 (1961): 9–11; Tom Mboya, "African Socialism," *Transition* no. 8 (1963): 17–19.

⁸¹ HRC, TC Collection, 24.4 "Appendix A – Discussion of Transition with John Nagenda, Bethwell Ogot, Kironde and Ali Mazrui."

first 32 issues, F. Abiola Irele announced that “what is really gratifying is the amount of discussion in its columns provoked by theories about Africa. They are analysed, queries commented upon, queried, turned inside out as it were – and sometimes more closely scrutinised in the correspondence section than in the main columns”⁸² Again, *Transition* curated a public discussion about the nature of democracy and statehood in Africa for the local intelligentsia and the hundreds of academic, governmental and private subscribers around the world.

This mission to platform debate, as at Transcription’s “Africa Abroad” roundtables, made way for something more direct in *Transition* into 1966 and 1967. As Peter Kalliney argues, Neogy and many others in his network such as Okigbo had in their poetry long “repurposed modernist versions of aesthetic autonomy to declare their freedom from colonial bondage, from systems of racial discrimination, and even from the new postcolonial state.”⁸³ Upset by the direction of authoritarian creep, Neogy commissioned a series of articles that did not pull their punches on Kalliney’s last point. Ali Mazrui was the most provocative responder, writing several articles in 1967 critiquing the “Tanzaphilia” of the international left in praising Nyerere’s one-party state and, particularly provocatively, lampooning Nkrumah as a “Leninist Czar” after his deposition. “Both essays were incendiary, reinforcing *Transition*’s prestige as a magazine that set no store by orthodoxies.”⁸⁴ In 1968, the *New York Times* applauded that “a questing irreverence breathes out of the pages of every issue.”⁸⁵

This thinking chimed with other work published within the network community. Ngũgĩ’s 1967 novel *Grain of Wheat* lamented that the fruits of Uhuru were not enjoyed by those who had fought colonial oppression, rather avaricious new elites:

But now, whom do we see riding in long cars and changing them daily as if motor cars were clothes? It is those who did not take part in the movement, the same who ran to the shelter of schools and universities and administration. At political meetings you hear them shout: Uhuru, Uhuru we fought for. Fought where? They were uncircumcised boys. They knew suffering as a word.⁸⁶

⁸² F. Abiola Irele, Review of *Transition*, no. 1–23 in *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 3, no. 3 (1967): 442–447.

⁸³ Peter Kalliney, “Modernism, African Literature and the Cold War,” *Modern Language Quarterly* 76 no. 3 (2015).

⁸⁴ Mahmood Mamdani, “The African University,” *London Review of Books*, 10, 14 (2018); Ali Mazrui, “A Reply to Critics,” *Transition* 32 (1967): 48–52.

⁸⁵ Alfred Friendly, “Slick African Magazine Gains a Wide Following,” *The New York Times*, 11 August 1968, 3.

⁸⁶ Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, *A Grain of Wheat* (London: Heinemann, 1967), 60–61.

Inequality and the unequal distribution of the fruits of freedom emerged as a key theme of Oginga Odinga's 1967 autobiography *Not Yet Uhuru*, as the Kenyatta government, like others in the region, clamped down on political opposition.⁸⁷

As we will see throughout this book, the restrictions on liberty imposed independently (and at different times) by the governments of Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania had significant repercussions for the intellectual, cultural and print cultures of the region as a whole. The region's new political leaders were well versed in the power of the press; after all, many had been writers or editors as part of their practice of a broad repertoire of anti-colonial politics prior to independence. Okot p'Bitek wrote in *Transition* in 1967 that "The most striking and frightening characteristic of all African governments is this, that without an exception, all of them are dictatorships [. . .] by the educated for the educated".⁸⁸ As Tom Mboya, a notably frequent contributor to the local and international press both before and after independence, put in a speech reprinted in *Transition*, "The Press needs to recognise that it has a duty in our society as well as its normal and popular functions and service." This duty was clear to Mboya and his fellow leaders: to "join us in the task of nation-building," by which he meant support for the governments of independent states. "These things it must do, or face the charge of traitor."⁸⁹

Neogy's demise in this context was swift. In 1967, a global exposé revealed covert CIA support for the CCF much to the consternation of Neogy, who denied knowledge of the link.⁹⁰ The revelation dictated that the CCF began to reduce and soon terminate funding of the Transcription Centre too, which had all but atrophied by the time Neogy came to trial the following year for sedition. Neogy was jailed for publishing two articles by the opposition MP, Abu Mayanja, which lambasted the repressive turn of Uganda's government. At a sensational trial, covered by the global press thanks to CCF lobbying and Neogy's global celebrity as an Amnesty International Prisoner of Conscience for 1968, prosecutors stressed the neocolonial threat underpinning *Transition*. Obote decreed Neogy a foreign agent after the discovery of a Swiss bank account in the name of Neogy's wife Barbara.⁹¹ At the trial, it also emerged that Neogy had not officially renounced his UK citizenship, acquired by his Indian descent under the 1948 British Nationality Act,

⁸⁷ Angelo, *Power and the Presidency in Kenya*, Chapter five.

⁸⁸ Okot p'Bitek, "Indigenous Ills," *Transition* 32 (1967): 47.

⁸⁹ Tom Mboya, "Relations Between the Press and Governments in Africa," *Transition* no. 4 (June 1962): 11–14, quote from 14.

⁹⁰ "Rajat Neogy on the CIA," *Sunday Nation* (Nairobi), 11 June 1967.

⁹¹ International Association of Culture Freedom (IACF) Archive, University of Chicago, box 384b, B. Neogy to S. Stone, 27 October 1968.

due to an oversight. British officials noted Obote's emotional "morbid preoccupation" with the case when he publicly castigated *Transition* as "manned by non-Ugandan interests and citizens" and during a gruelling seven-hour private meeting with Barbara Neogy about Rajat's future.⁹² *Transition* was the victim of state repression, an argument made by Neogy's lawyer, Sir Dingle Foot, in *The Guardian*.⁹³ By February 1969, the chief magistrate rejected the prosecution's assertion that Mayanja's intervention had "a subversive effect on the mass of the Ugandan population", and Obote eventually released a brutalised Neogy from Luzira prison.⁹⁴ CCF relationships proved critical to Neogy's defence, notably through family friend and CCF officer David Goldstein, who liaised with Amnesty International to secure a legal team.⁹⁵

Such conceptions of Neogy's youthful "do culture" were not shared by Uganda's leadership. This is not to suggest that Obote's castigation of *Transition's* foreignness sprang from the shunning of internationalism. As *Transition* was proscribed, Obote welcomed Tiny Rowland's Lohnro conglomerate, which bought the Standard Group newspapers in 1967 and gave favourable coverage of the government for profit.⁹⁶ Obote's condemnations of *Transition* served as proxies for differing visions of Ugandan state and society – for example on the role of capital or ethnicity within nation building. They also revealed the multiplicity of competing internationalisms at play, with certain forms of cultural connection and literary output increasingly throttled by authoritarian states. In the 1970s, repression under Idi Amin's regime compelled poet Taban Lo Liyong – who studied at Howard University, was the first African graduate of the (CCF funded) Iowa Writers' Workshop, and wrote provocatively in *Transition* in the mid-1960s – to find haven at the University of Nairobi over Makerere. Neogy bitterly criticised the state of Ugandan intelligentsia after the trial as he left Uganda for good to settle briefly in Ghana and then the USA in the mid-1970s. "One of the banalities of the authoritarian situation is the way in which otherwise intelligent people become inordinately suffused with humility when a morsel of recognition is shown them from above".⁹⁷

92 "President's open letter," *Uganda Argus*, 23 Jan. 1969; UKNA FCO 31/491, W. Wenban-Smith, British High Commission, Kampala to East African Department, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 13 March 1969; E. Le Tocq, East African Department, Foreign and Commonwealth Office confidential memorandum, 25 March 1969.

93 "Uganda Takes "Lesson" From Colonialists," *Guardian*, 1 January 1969, 2.

94 "Acquittals in Uganda," *The Times* (London), 2 February 1969.

95 IACF box 50, D. Goldstein to B. Neogy, 12 December 1968.

96 Spencer Mawby, *The End of Empire in Uganda: Decolonization and Institutional Conflict, 1945–79* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020), 120.

97 Neogy, "On Being an African Intellectual," 44–61.

For the writers, publishers and academics that remained in East Africa into the decades of authoritarianism, state contraction, social service collapse and less robust debate on the questions of history, regionalism and political critique which had characterised the 1960s, the changed political and economic circumstances demanded different cultural responses. A new range of magazines addressed the preoccupations of East Africa's urban citizens. For example, *Joe*, active between 1973 and 1979, acted as a public mouthpiece for an African middle class in Nairobi with a humorous combination of text and illustration. The titular character, Joe, often lost in conversation in the bar, acted to express the concerns of Kenya's urban citizens on gender relations, employment, leisure, housing and socialisation to city life. In December 1973, on the 10-year anniversary of independence, in the article "Uhuru and the Common Man", Joe listed the boons of independence: "bottled beer, land redistribution, African owners in River Road."⁹⁸ In novels published by Heinemann, EAPH and beyond, authors often dealt in the dark tones of urban decay, disillusionment and suffering represented in works like Meja Mwangi's *Going Down River Road* (1976).

Conclusion

For obvious reasons, efforts to explain *Transition*'s impact on East Africa's intellectual life and its rapid demise typically centre on Neogy and his own tragic fate. The magazine's breadth and ambition seemed best understood as the expression of the personality of its founding editor. In the words of his wife Barbara, Neogy

lived, effortlessly, on a grand scale and he insisted that those around him rise to a higher measure of their own – perhaps as yet unrecognized – nobility. He insisted that we are all better – far better – that we imagine ourselves to be. In his presence one always felt more alert, more alive. Life was robust, vital. Courage was easy. Those days in his beloved Uganda were happy days.⁹⁹

For Paul Theroux, *Transition* was the outward expression of its editor's personality: "Transition was more than a magazine; it was a movement, a vehicle for change."¹⁰⁰ It is certainly true that the magazine bore its editor's imprint. Ques-

⁹⁸ Bodil Folke Frederiksen, "Joe, the sweetest Reading in Africa" in *Readings in African Popular Fiction*, ed. Stephanie Newell (Oxford: James Currey, 2002), 94. The River Road point alluded to the Africanisation of one of central Nairobi's major commercial streets which hosted mainly East African Asians' shops during the colonial period.

⁹⁹ Barbara Lapcek, "Rajat Neogy Remembered," *Transition* 106 (2011): 87.

¹⁰⁰ Paul Theroux, "More than a magazine," *Transition* 106 (2011): 12.

tions of the tenacity of history in the formation of the post-colonial future, what could be discarded and what must be kept, the importance of thinking across nation and state without losing an intrinsic “East Africanness” – these topics all animated Neogy and others to engineer their new worlds after empire.

But as Neogy would have been the first to admit, *Transition* was home to multiple visions of East Africa’s past, present, and future, not just his own. This is to say nothing of the visions exhibited on the stages, galleries, and pages of parallel cultural initiatives that were part of the wider cultural network to which *Transition* belonged. *Transition* is unique in the scale of its global network of readers and contributors, and the longevity of its fame and influence. Otherwise, it was a magazine that was very much of its place and time. While its literary, political and aesthetic innovations are relatively well known, this chapter has emphasised the extent to which *Transition* was embedded in the broader political and social worlds we examine in this book. The magazine was one part of a community of East African and international persons and institutions that constituted a vehicle of change, a community of thinkers who rubbed shoulders, hustled and disagreed about what would and should make a new East Africa. The members of this community were not just to be found on the pages of *Transition*, but also in publishing houses, broadcasters, newspapers, trade unions, and on university campuses, as the following chapters illustrate.

Equally, some of the dynamics that worked against the survival of *Transition* in Kampala, under Neogy’s editorship, will reappear elsewhere in this book: the dependence on external Cold War-generated funding, and on the so-called “expertise” of white intellectuals and organisers; the challenges of breaking out of an elite, urban, university-centric network of contributors; the political executive’s reduced tolerance for criticism and dissent in the late 1960s. Yet, as Neogy’s personal trajectory suggests, there was no pre-defined fate for the intellectual project of East Africa: these dynamics will play out differently, and with different timetables, in the chapters that follow. And, as *Transition*’s own trajectory in Ghana and the United States up to the present-day attests, endings were not final. To better understand the structural constraints that East Africans worked under, it is necessary to step further back in time, before the birth of *Transition*, to examine the foundations laid by late colonial print and broadcasting. As the next chapter argues, these foundations had a decisive impact on the possibilities of regional circuits of news and ideas.