Introduction: Provincialising 1956

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This is the second of two themed issues on 1956 as a 'global moment' of twentieth century communism. As the fuller introductory essay to the first made clear, we have imposed no hard and fast division of the papers between our organising themes, and as with the papers presented in the last issue, those that follow suggest in complementary ways what it might mean to both 'globalise' and 'provincialise' our perspectives on this hinge year. If the balance of the first set of papers perhaps tilted more toward assessing the impact of events that bookended the European communist 1956, principally the Khrushchev speech and the Soviet invasion of Hungary, that of the second takes the invasion of Egypt by Anglo-French-Israeli forces as a more explicit point of reference. For communists and others in countries fighting or emerging from colonial rule the crisis of Stalinism was potentially of less interest in itself than for the opportunities that the 'new winds' from Moscow might afford in the context of the differently accented internationalism epitomised by the Bandung conference in 1955. If, as Stuart Hall claimed, 1956 was a new conjuncture, we might then see its challenge, as one of our contributors Kevin Morgan puts it, as being 'to hold within one's field of vision and political action the violence symbolised by both Suez and Budapest and to register the connections between them.' We begin with two papers that illuminate these connections and whose communist protagonists move between the worlds of the imperial metropole and the colonised 'periphery'.

First, Kevin Morgan introduces us to the communist Aimé Césaire in Paris, writing his famous letter of resignation from the French Communist Party (PCF), and invites us to travel with him back to Martinique and his former comrades there. At first glance, in repu-

diating Stalinism and colonialism in the same breath and at the same moment, Césaire's case may seem to epitomise just the breadth of vision the conjuncture of 1956 required. Having for eleven years represented his homeland in the French national assembly as a communist, it was to the leader of the PCF, Maurice Thorez, that Césaire addressed his public resignation letter, written in Paris and of which his Martinican communist comrades had no more notice than Thorez. The letter's demand that Marxism and communism 'be harnessed into the service of coloured peoples, and not coloured people into the service of Marxism and communism' is justly famous as an indictment of the colonialism of communism even as it professed and to some extent practiced anti-imperialism.[1] Focusing on the reception of Césaire's letter 'from afar' in Martinique and reading it alongside the address he made on returning to Fort de France, Morgan's piece follows Césaire in decentring the European communist themes of 1956 while noting that, perhaps surprisingly, it was precisely those themes that Césaire chose to speak about in Martinique. How and when, for Césaire, who had published his famous *Discours on Colonialism* as a communist who would three years later attend Stalin's funeral, did the themes of destalinisation and decolonisation come to be articulated together? In addressing this, Morgan suggests that the 'singularity of his conjuncture of 1956' might be at least partly understood in terms of two different temporalities; one of a sudden, concentrated 'revelatory moment', the other a deeper and longer process 'for which the communist 1956 served not as motive but as opportunity'.

Resigning from the PCF, Césaire was expelled from the Martinican party federated with it. Having set out in his letter a kind of manifesto on behalf of, but without consulting Martinican communists, Césaire in turn was criticised for something that looked from their angle not unlike a cult of personality but which nevertheless secured his political dominance as he forged a new career. This dominance later helped deliver a yes vote in the referendum on de Gaulle's 1958 constitution, a result whose consequences Césaire would later regret and that would bring his new party closer to the position of the now independent Martinican CP. Thus it is not so much the oft-noted biographical contradiction between the radical writer and the moderate politician Césaire that stands out

when one foregrounds 1956 in Martinique, but rather the moment's uneven and discontinuous fallout at both global and local levels.

Taking 'a view from Cyprus' George Odysseos' article, like Morgan's, exemplifies both globalising and provincialising effects. A Crown Colony and HQ of British forces in the Middle East, Cyprus had special significance as the Suez crisis unfolded, but was, at the same time, the theatre for another war: an armed campaign against British rule led not by the communist AKEL (Progressive party of Working People) but by the nationalist EOKA (National Organisation of Cypriot Fighters). The specifically communist crisis of 1956 is usually seen to have had little impact on AKEL, which retained significant support without distancing itself from the CPSU. Odysseos demonstrates however that it did not entirely bypass the party, focusing on the trajectories of two figures, Evdoros Joannides, based in London and affiliated with the CPGB, and George Cacogiannis. Both had been expelled from AKEL as a result of the party's own 1952 crisis over the strategic issue of Cypriot independence versus Enosis (union with Greece) and their attitude to the party leadership. In comparing and tracing their writings and activism Odysseos shows how the conjuncture of local and international concerns in the mid-1950s afforded Cypriot communists – both within and outside the party – a common framework to oppose British colonialism and NATO interests, illuminating also the dynamic relationship between imperial and communist centres and peripheries. Being on the periphery could benefit AKEL; unlike the Martinican communist party, AKEL was independent from both the CPGB and the Greek Communist Party (KKE), despite the latter's considerable influence, and appears to have avoided many of the confrontations discussed by Anastasia Koukouna in Issue 28. However, the party was 'not entirely shielded from the reverberations' of Stalinism's crisis, even as AKEL was in a sense a beneficiary of a 'recontextualisation' of the Soviet Union occasioned by Cypriot efforts to 'internationalise' their national issue and the emergence of the Afro-Asian countries.

A biographical focus proves in the Cypriot case, as in others here, a productive approach to the question of a 'long 1956'. We are perhaps accustomed to thinking of 1956 and some of its protagonists as a starting point for later radicalisms, particularly those of the 'long 1960s' and

multifarious 'new lefts'. This observation is certainly one that holds with the articles presented here. After 1968, Cacogiannis was associated with a new 'Third Worldist' Cypriot left with connections to Cuba, among others. The Cyprus case might also be seen as anticipating debates between peaceful coexistence and armed revolt that would acquire fresh significance in the 'global 1960s' as the peripatetic revolutionism of Che Guevara seized imaginations. Yet there were continuities as well as ruptures, influenced by the national and political contexts in which the impact of the 1956 'moment' was registered. And as ever, the shadow of older debates would persist; that AKEL could condemn EOKA armed strategy as 'Narodnik' is one example among many, and we will come back to consider the persistence of old divisions in our final article that deals with the significance of 1956 for international Trotskyism.

Next, however, we turn to Mexico, whose President Lázaro Cárdenas gave asylum to Trotsky and on his arrival in 1937, arranged for his transport to Mexico City by special train. Reporting on this event *Time* magazine quoted a spokesman for the USSR as 'amiably' conveying 'no objection' to the asylum arrangement.[2] Trotsky's assassination three years later would throw the Mexican Communist Party into turmoil, the character of which gives both start and end point of William Booth's article.

Ernst Bloch's observation that 'not all people exist in the same Now', quoted in the introduction to Issue 28, appears again here as Booth uses a reverse chronology to show how the 'endless 1930s' and the 'illusion of a popular front' shaped and delimited the perspectives of Mexico's Marxist left between the crisis over Trotsky's assassination and the collapse of the coalitional National Liberation Movement (MLN) in the 1960s. Within this context, the communist 1956 appears to have had a somewhat limited impact on the Mexican left and did not provoke the 'urgent crisis or break' so often discussed in the literature on western communist parties. Instead, Booth identifies 'a very Mexican set of causal factors and shifts' which had left the relatively small Mexican Communist Party significantly weakened, and which led to Revueltas' characterisation of 'a headless proletariat'. Yet far from remaining a merely 'provincial' affair, Booth's focus on Revueltas, perhaps 'alone among his peers on the Mexican left' in being deeply invested in the

events taking place in Budapest, demonstrates the international scope of his vision, even as his contemporaries contemplated the 'as-yet unfulfilled potential of the Mexican Revolution'. Crucially, this was an indication that 'not all of the Mexican left lived through the same "1956"'. Revueltas' trajectory illustrating the slow, 'fitful and partial' emergence of a Mexican 'new left' following the winding down of the National Liberation Movement (MLN), and the end of the hopes of a popular front, as well as the inspiration offered by the later Cuba Revolution to a 'new generation' of student activists.

That 'hinge dates' like 1956 can act as markers of a generational shift is a point also highlighted in Pablo Gil Valero's article. Gil Valero focuses on a figure who joined the communist movement after Khrushchev's revelations and the invasion of Hungary, at a time when others were abandoning official communist parties. Jordi Solé Tura joined the illegal Unified Socialist Party of Catalonia (PSUC) in November 1956 as labour and student unrest rocked Francoist Spain. His case reminds us of the different ways even European communist movements could be embattled, as Solé Tura and his comrades faced a regime whose ideological underpinnings were explicitly and violently anti-communist.

Although a scion of Spain's social elite, the political ferment at his university, and the establishment of a PSUC cell on its campus, orientated Solé Tura to the communist movement, even as the first demonstration he attended was against the Soviet intervention in Hungary. As a member of the party's 'interior', Solé Tura faced the threat of arrest, forcing him to escape Spain via Paris to Bucharest, where the party's 'exterior' leadership was situated. Rising through the ranks, he was soon expelled from the party following a leadership struggle. Valero demonstrates the importance of the 'culture of national reconciliation' that Tura operated within, which sought to bring about a new generation of anti-Francoists composed of the 'sons of the victors and the vanquished'. Indeed, it might be said that Solé Tura personified this generation; rejoining the PSUC and elected to the Spanish Congress as a communist in the first free elections after Franco's death, he would become one of seven authors of the 1978 democratic constitution, before breaking with communism once more to serve in three PSOE administrations including a stint as Minister of Culture in the early

1990s. Ultimately, the life history of Solé Tura illustrates the symbiotic and dynamic relationship between the 'global' and the 'provincial' 1956 in creating a 'Generation of 1956' willing to explore new tactics and strategies.

Across our two issues a common thread has been to examine 1956 as a centrifugal moment from less familiar vantage points – from students in Mao's China to clandestine communists of the 'interior' under Franco, to take just two examples. Our final paper shifts the perspective in a different but complementary way. E.P. Thompson once called Trotskyism the opportunist side of the Stalinist moon, and British readers of this journal will likely be familiar with the limited successes of 'The Club' in recruiting disaffected members of the CPGB in the wake of the mass defections of 1956. Marcio Lauria Monteiro's paper evaluates the similarly limited successes of the international Trotskyist movement in turning the 1956 events into an opportunity to expand its influence and activities into the 'workers states' established after the Second World War, and thus to end the insolation experienced since the purges of the 1930s. These states were not limited to the 'satellites' of the Soviet Union in eastern Europe, but also included those communist states not fully aligned to Moscow – such as Yugoslavia and China. The postwar world thus offered opportunities for Trotskyist expansion, and terrain to test out their theories regarding 'political revolution' in the Third World, as Trotskyist groups and parties tried to make sense of the movements and insurgencies ranging from the war in Algeria to the 'bourgeois democratic' regime of Nasser. Through a careful assessment of the positions of various international Trotskyist bodies, Monteiro shows that the long-standing debates that had led to the splits within the Fourth International – particularly around the question of whether official CPs and bureaucracies could be reformed, or whether there was a need for the overthrow of regimes and the establishment of new parties – acquired 'a more practical character regarding which analysis and political program to follow' after the 1956 events.

We hope that the work presented across these two issues has deepened the case for understanding 1956 as a 'global moment' approachable and intelligible from multiple locations and perspectives. Ranging widely geographically (though not as widely as we had hoped), we

have attempted to move beyond a focus on ruling parties and on the European communist 'before and after' to examine how the cross-currents of 1956 as a conjunctural marker played out over space and time, with ideology, generation and life history affording alternative organising themes. These of course are not the only themes possible, let alone the only interesting cases, thus we end as we began, with curiosity and a call for further research and conversation.

Notes

1 Robin D.G. Kelley, 'A poetics of anticolonialism' in Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000 edn, p25.
2 https://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,770539-2,00.html.