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NEIL AGGETT LABOUR STUDIES UNIT
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Anarchism & Revolutionary syndicalism in Africa

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Opening:

- What do we mean?
- Key developments, themes in anarchist/ syndicalist current in Africa.
- Importance of context.
- Two main phases: 1860s-1930s, and 1980s onwards.
- Focus: North Africa and southern Africa.
- Closing: anarchism and African culture/s?

What do we mean?

Anarchism?

- Libertarian socialist current
- Anti-state as well as anti-capitalist
- Against exploitation *and* domination

Aim

- Egalitarian, self-managed, classless society
- Common ownership/ control of means of key social resources

e.g. means of production

Method: international social revolution by popular classes.

Origin:

International Workingmen's' Association

i.e. "First International" (1864-1877).

Emblematic figures?

- Mikhail Bakunin
- Piotr Kropotkin

Syndicalism?

= revolutionary trade unionism, whereby radically democratic, decentralised, and inclusive unions:

- Organise resistance in current period.
- Educate / prepare workers to take over/ run, means of production.
- Overthrow the state / ruling class

=> revolutionary general strike.

Anarchism aims, in short, at:

- Building a popular **counter-power** to resist and replace the existing system;

- Development of widespread, **revolutionary "counter-culture"** (-hegemony) among the people

Syndicalism:

- An anarchist *strategy*
- Dates to First International

Phase one, 1860s-1930s

Context: the first modern globalization

- Rise, expansion of giant (western) monopoly capitalist corporations
- Relatively open, unprecedentedly integrated international economy

- Massive expansion of communications, transport:
- Rail, steamship, telegraph
- Suez Canal, 1870

Accelerating imperialism e.g., "Scramble for Africa" from around 1880.

- Deeper (but uneven) integration of Africa into world economy
- Building colonial (or establishing semi-colonial) states
- Substantial restructuring of African economies
- Rapid growth in working-class in Africa
  esp., farms, railways, docks, light industry, mines
- Large-scale movement of workers into, from, within Africa.

Emergence of anarchism and syndicalism: North Africa:

Algeria: 1880s

Egypt: 1870s, with first newspaper in 1877

Tunisia: 1880s

Initial base: (European) immigrants, exiles

Local roots? Yes:

- Involvement in unions, movements, nationalism
- Local press, local issues
- Some base amongst Arabs, Berber

Emergence of anarchism and syndicalism: Southern Africa

South Africa: 1880s

Mozambique, Angola: 1900s+

Initial base: (European) immigrants, exiles, political prisoners

Local roots? Yes:

- Involvement in unions, movements, nationalism
- Local press, local issues
- Some base amongst black, Coloured, *mestiço*, Goan, Indian

Other impacts:

1920s: syndicalism influences ICU mass union, active in:

- Lesotho, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland(Eswatini), Zambia, Zimbabwe

1910s-1920s: influences Ghadar Party

- active worldwide, including East Africa/ Kenya

1938: syndicalist workers federation in Nigeria

1930s-1970s

- Rise of Marxism-Leninism
- Nationalist movements
- Wars
- Repressive post-colonial, statist governments
- Larger process of “deglobalization”

Some anarchists / syndicalists shift to nationalists, communists

- Egypt and South Africa from 1920s
- Angola and Mozambique from 1950s

Also, some cooperation w. these groups by independent anarchists / syndicalists

- Algerian war of independence in 1950s

ICU lasts into 1940s (South Africa) and 1950s (Zimbabwe)

In summary, some ongoing developments in East, North and southern Africa

Phase two, 1980s-present

Context: the second modern globalization

- Economic crisis
- Failure of Marxist-Leninist, nationalist “development” models
- Fall of the Berlin Wall
- Growing adoption (and imposition) of neo-liberal reforms
- Widespread popular protests: “second liberation”
- The counter-globalisation movement, Social Forums

Re-emergence of anarchism and syndicalism

1981: Senegal

1990s: Nigeria, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Zambia

e.g., Zabalaza Anarchist Communist Front (ZACF)

2000s: Kenya, Swaziland, Zimbabwe**:** 2000s

2010s: Egypt, Tunisia

Big focus: syndicalism, unions, protests!

WHEN FREEDOM IS OUTLAW
ONLY OUTLAWS WILL BE FREE
SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

WORLDWIDE

Closing: anarchism and African culture/s?

What is anarchism?

Change and contradiction

DONT
VOTE
REMEMBER
MARIKANA
ORGANIZE

Some reading:

- Philippe Bouba, 2014, "L'Anarchisme en situation colonial: le cas de l'Algérie. Organisations, Militants et Presse (1887-1962)," PhD diss., Université Perpignan Via Domitia (France) / Université Oran ES-Sénia (Algérie).
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- David Johnson, Noor Nieftagodien and Lucien van der Walt (eds.), 2022, *Labour Struggles in Southern Africa 1919-1949: New Perspectives on the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union (ICU)*, Cape Town: HSRC Press.
- Leroy Maisiri, Phillip Nyalungu and Lucien van der Walt (2020), "Anarchist/ Syndicalist and Independent Marxist Intersections in Post-Apartheid Struggles, South Africa: The WSF/ ZACF Current in Gauteng, 1990s-2010s," *Globalizations*, volume 17, number 5, pp. 797-819.
- Ilham Khuri-Makdisi, 2003, "Levantine Trajectories: The Formulation and Dissemination of Radical Ideas in and between Beirut, Cairo and Alexandria, 1860-1914," PhD diss., Harvard.
- Zarina Patel and Lucien van der Walt, 2022, "The Beginnings of Left Ideology in Kenya," *AwaaZ* magazine, Nairobi, Kenya, volume 19, issue 3, pp. 70-74.
- Guillaume Rey, *Afriques Anarchistes: Introduction à l'Histoire des Anarchismes Africains*, Paris, L'Harmattan.
- Lucien van der Walt, 2007, "Anarchism and Syndicalism in South Africa, 1904–1921: Rethinking the History of Labour and the Left', PhD diss., University of the Witwatersrand.
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