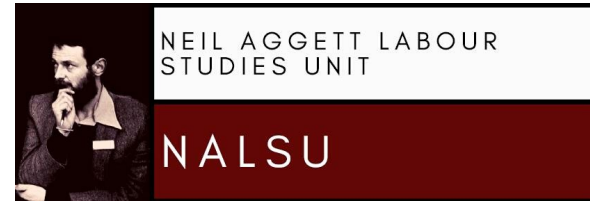


**RHODES UNIVERSITY**  
*Where leaders learn*



# Anarchism & Revolutionary syndicalism in Africa

Prof Lucien van der Walt



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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!





# Closing: anarchism and African culture/s?

What is anarchism?

Change and contradiction



# Some reading:

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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.
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- 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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