



ANTHROPOLOGICAL IMAGINATION

Podcast Transcript

Diasporas III: An intermixture

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ZAINABU JALLO: We end with a different perspective how a diaspora can challenge and reshape structures around it. Dylan Duran invites you to consider the power of cultural mixing to disrupt the status quo.

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DYLAN DURAN: Before delving into the ways in which diasporas can be seen as counter hegemonic, it is essential to first delineate what I mean with hegemony. I will take the word hegemony to mean a broad societal naturalisation of a worldview, a correct way of being, and a correct way of doing things. A form of cultural dominance which is not necessarily created and reproduced by force, but is rather formed through the structural power relations, material conditions, habitus, and mass media.

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Hegemony is created by manufacturing consent by means of subtle cultural propaganda created and disseminated by the ruling class in any given society. The ruling class's firm grip on culturally relevant institutions is a precondition for the dissemination of that propaganda.

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Now I must delve into the notion of diaspora. In many cases, diasporas are the product of material coercion. Communities classically described as diaspora typically have a history of forced displacement through colonialism and slavery, and are therefore inherently linked to capitalism and capitalist wealth accumulation, which exploited those communities as sources of cheap labour.

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I will now explore why diasporic groups can be conceptualised as counter hegemonic. Diasporas, uphold and create alternative ways of being, and ways of doing that tend to refuse absorption into the dominant metaphysical framework. This becomes rather evident when looking at religions, kinship, rituals and community in the Afro-Atlantic. Afro-diasporic religious systems such as voodoo, Candomblé and Santería do much more than preserve cultural memory. They form counter hegemonic life worlds. They support and reproduce relational ontologies: concepts such as cyclical time, collective identity, and spiritual



authority that refuse the reified logic of Western modernity. Their persistence, especially in those contexts where they were historically criminalised and persecuted, signals their political and epistemic power not merely as identity markers, but as living critiques of a Western reified hegemony.

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I generally avoid speaking of a capitalist West, but rather speak of a reified West. As opposed to placing emphasis on the material conditions, I wish to focus on the ontological preconditions which allowed capitalism to arise. When I speak of the reified West, I'm speaking of a culture that is fundamentally defined by the instrumentalization of rationality and a glorification of individualism. As a result, the logic of the reified West has a strong tendency to break down social relationships, ecosystems, and cosmologies present in our world into seemingly objective truths by means of quantitative data. It is, in fact the destruction of holism, complexity, nuance, and organic networks.

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This cultural logic, rooted in enlightenment, rationality and the abstraction of life into data and function does not simply emerge from capitalism. I argue that capitalism is one of this logics' most fully realised expressions. Reification, as I will continue using the term, refers to the transformation of complex living processes into fixed, measurable and instrumentalised things from human relationships to knowledge to time itself.

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Afro-Atlantic religions, therefore, which see the self not as an autonomous bounded unit, but rather a node in a web of relations with ancestors, spirits, deities, kin and land can be understood as counter hegemonic: concepts of time in Afro-Atlantic traditions are often non-linear and frequently activate ancestral presence, thus compressing past, present, and future into a sacred continuum. This notion of time contrasts sharply with Western reification of time, which focuses on linear progression and deadlines.

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In short, the lived ontologies present and reproduced in a diaspora can in some cases represent counter hegemonic ontological and epistemic frameworks. It is, however, important to note that I am merely referring to the political potential of a diasporic counter hegemony, and do not wish to argue that all diasporic ontologies function as such. Rather, I argue that when they arise out of a history of exploitation, subordination, and persecution by the dominant hegemonic order, diasporic ontologies can, through their very existence, carry political potential. They can be conceptualised as ongoing acts of resistance against the totalising logic of Western modernity. If there is a radical insight to be drawn from the Afro-Atlantic diaspora, it is not simply that other ways of life are possible, but that the epistemic hegemony of the West is not inevitable. Diaspora, in this sense, is not merely a memory of displacement, but a living critique of the present.



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ZAINABU JALLO: You've just heard how a diaspora can unsettle and reimagine the world around it. What moments in Dylan's reflection made you think differently about power and change?