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COUNTER CULTURES

Ashanti Alston Omowali

Jericho Movement

Hmmm...

I am thinking along the lines of:

1. One, two three, many CCs
2. Being within a CC
3. The importance of the study and practice of CCs

What if I reversed that order:

1. The importance of the study and practice of CCs
2. Being within a CC
3. One, two, three, many CCs as revolution

If I follow the later order I might be able to actually write this piece.

1. Lord knows that we living in some strange, extra-ordinary times. Particularly here in the entrails of the Babylonian monster called The United States of America. Hmmm... Babylonian Monster. Babylon, biblical. From the prophetic Black Panther Party. Papa Rage: Eldridge Cleaver. I am still in that mindset, that counter—cultural mindset of the 1960s revolution. Dig It? Smile with me. Seems like sooo long ago that we were studying events and processes that were going and growing counter to the American way. (how do I get this typewriter to stop capitalizing America? Even this laptop is trying to keep me within the Trumpian walls. Never, never... But seriously, this effort of us aspiring revolutionaries to study resistance, and revolution was our layperson desire to make profound local and world changes. We knew that desire had to be informed, and we knew that we had to reject this understood American way of thinking and doing and existential being.

What was our literature? Books like The Little Red Book of Mao tse-Tung's quotations, Das Kapital, the Communist Manifesto, the Cuban revolution and Che Guevara, the African, Asian and Latin American liberation struggles, the urban guerrilla struggles of Brazil, Germany and Ireland, the workers struggle to "seize the means of production" of Russia and China... etc., etc. We who had no previous desire to want to know about them before, now we are told how important they are to the struggles indigenous to us that we identify as Black revolution, Native sovereignty, Puerto Rican independence, the liberation of Atzlan, Women's Liberation, the Detroit auto workers, the Appalachian mountain folks coming into their own (can you dig it!). The Panthers' Revolutionary Constitutional Convention and intercommunal efforts. All represent what? What? What?

Counter-cultures. The Counter-cultural. Where is the resistance coming from? Why is it coming from there? Where is it going? And If you are the revolutionary-minded you wanna know how it can web together and over-whelm (not over-throw, I AM an anarchist dontcha know) the death-oriented forces of the American way, The Empire.

Study is what we did. Now some of us were just teenagers, like me and Jihad. We didn't even make it to high school graduation before "them pigs" were trying to frame us for a cop that was killed in our hometown. But many movement folks were college students. They were either dropping out of college to pursue full-time organizer and or underground work or figuring out how to make their college/university learnings relevant to the nascent revolutionary cultures developing. History, sociology, anthropology, black and brown studies, women's studies were gonna make their fields "serve the people." Chemistry and electronics students were gonna learn from the aforementioned and creatively use their fields and also "serve the people." Are you following me? Stay awake. Pour some more coffee...

The study and practice were happening at the same time. Not consciously or intentionally. It was just the intensity of the times. The 60s and early 70s. Being counter to u.s. bullshit meant being constantly aware that the Orwellian arms of the state would be after you the moment they found out that you, with your naïve self, had joined "The Opposition" (off-shoot Jordan Klepper, from the Daily Show 2018). No, seriously. We studied as the bullets of White supremacy snuffed out the lives and dreams of folks like Fred Hampton. We studied as redneck arms continued to noose Black necks. We studied as more and more caskets arrived home to the u.s. from the genocidal war on the Viet Nameese people. We studied the very theme of Counter-Culture that, for a minute, seemed like we were actually gonna make this revolution happen IN SPITE OF the american nightmare suffocating us.

As my own studies deepened and broadened in anti-authoritarian directions to make black resistance more resilient or recoverable, I learned how to be more observant of the local and international scene for... what? SIGNS. Because by this time, in the late 80s & 90s, the scene aint look like we were gonna win this thing. It seemed like all those spaces that were once hotbeds of freedom, liberation, revolution were done, exhausted, deeply wounded and not a rejuvenation, redemption song and fight-back arkestra in sight. I was depressed. But I kept reading and thinking.

No matter how depressed, and no matter how much I denied it, it seems like the reading, the walks, the meeting reminiscing old comrades and mingling with new ones with bright eyes and buoyant naiveté allows you to hold on, so to speak. And the anarchist readings were telling me to look anew; that what you think is all you see may not be all there is. Look, look deeper. And widen your scope too, jack. Resistance is all around you right now. Resistance, hidden in front of your face. They were there. The radical sociologies, anthropologies, psychologies, and histories... they were giving me new ways of seeing, of thinking about things. And they were being acted out and written by students and professors in the mix! And then The Zapatistas hit! Talk about a counter-culture. Talk about the counter-cultural! Oh my god! Within Euro-Mexican society, seemingly out of nowhere comes this dynamic movement of the Mayan people in the mountains of Mexico. It captured the hearts of many a disillusioned revolutionary, like myself, and helped us to re-believe again. Soon, more studies were popping up

everywhere of similar kinds of “hidden” rays of hope. The Nigerian Struggle against Shell Oil; the Palestinian Intifadas; the First Nations Land struggles of Canada; the rebirth of anti-authoritarian movements right within the entrails of the Babylonian Monster; the Battle for Seattle against the WTO.

2. To Be Within a CC. This is what you mean to me, as one who belongs to an old counter cultural movement that sprang out of the bowels of slave ships 400-500 years past-present. I come from out of a movement that has been and can only be a constant thorn in the side of the Babylonian empire. This is that “being black” thing. This is that CC thing that even the seriously flawed but great movie Black Panther à-la-Wakanda still makes known: that Black folks within White supremacy anywhere and everywhere are cognizant of awfully deep needs for identity and freedom. My and comrades’ critical comments on that movie would take a whole lot more pages than this. But suffice it to say that it is critical to study these things as dynamics of any cultural resistance if you wish to aid that resistance towards its liberation. I needed to understand how, after 400 years of American lies and assured political deception, “my people” could vote for Barak Obama for president???? In my mind it’s yet another setback. We’ll never get out of this mess. More of our Political Prisoners gonna die, while more photos of President Obama and wife Michelle gonna go up alongside MLK and probably JFK and Bobby. Lawd have mercy! Yet it’s the contradictory nature of anyone’s oppression/liberation struggle. How do you look at it? What lens do we use? Better, what LENSES do we use to understand such craziness? What are folks who are putting a lot of thinking to this saying, writing, doing? If these things are kept in mind and one continues to hold out as well as onto loved ones and like-minded/hearted folks, hey, it won’t all look so bad, so hopeless. Possibilities present themselves.

As a youth I didn’t understand why the Civil Rights movement and the churches (the black church) didn’t take on a more radical stance against the Monster. So the Black Panther Party is where I went. While in prison as I read, I began to understand that the Civil Rights movement and the church had contradictory things going on. Messy things. I came to appreciate the more radical side of a Martin Luther King. I came to understand that there were also radical churches and not so radical churches that still held us as a people together and gave us hope and self and communal esteem. It’s never black and white. And rejection cannot be done so flippantly.

As a much older cat (then in my 50s) I didn’t understand this seemingly broad and entrenched apathy, disinterest and disillusionment. The crack epidemic was still ravaging my community: HIV/AIDS, gang culture... not looking good. But I was on the internet READING. Anarchist. Radical Hip Hop. Liberation theology. There are some interesting readings in Afro-futurism. They were telling me that even in the Black community there were signs of resistance inside this culture that could not stop finding ways to counter the imperial tentacles of this strangling monster. Folks wanted to breathe, uh-huhn. Folks wanted to dream the way the Elders and Ancestors had challenged us to do. And while we were doing all that for life’s sake, folks (organic street intellectuals and folks in universities) were watching, participating and writing about it. Sometimes those voices and writings got to us. Like bell

hooks and of course, Cornel West. But so did Angela Davis, Dylan Rodriguez, Michelle Wallace, Sonia Sanchez' poetry, and Tupac & Biggie Smalls, even with sometimes problematic words & performances. Contradictory, messy, right? That's the way it is. Dialectics. The internal struggles will bring forth the essence of a thing (we learned that as panther Marxists). UH-NO, un-capitalize that! Damn, laptop. Here we were, on the ground-level, organizing as we were learning new intellectual languages, new ways to see, and ways to do. New ways of be-inggggg... Praxis, that word. Praxis. Zines were in again. Folks were sharing their thinkings while doings. Within one tent of counter-cultures, now called a "convergence," were spaces made for Others. That word Other would take on a life of its own. We went to Shut Down the Republican Convention in Philadelphia. It was Anarchist Spring. When folks of color arrived and demanded space in the operations, it seemed like shit was gonna hit the fan. But the "spokes council" opened up and our entry (as entre, smile) created a new dynamic. Anarchism was no longer old school, intentional or well you know, "we didn't mean it."

Folks were reading Race Traitor, anti-heterosexism, ageism, abolitionism. Folks of color were reading them things too plus holding on to their "roots." We were reaching back for multidimensional modes of understandings and living and fighting back. In our languages you heard talk of Ancestors, Elders, forgotten sheroes and heroes. We were trying to recapture rituals that would help us to remember: reconnect with the Past and understand that the so-called Past is never disconnected from Now and Future. Also in this re-remembering we are connecting to acknowledging how the Monster has caused our dismembering as a body of people and as individuals. We want to bring healing through justice to our folks in this counter-nation. We want to reconnect the ancient with the present with the future. And it is for those of like hearts and minds and willing to put their studies to serve the people use to see how we within this matrix of resistance can mutual assist each other in bringing down the imperial monster. Dig it?

There is this political cartoon that I have somewhere that depicts a map of the united states, but there are no states. There are just thousands of liberated territories or spaces. The idea being that we have to see and think and feel differently in the process of envisioning what this land can be. We have to be able to do that. We have to work from certain no compromise positions or understandings that this land we be on is Turtle Island. Occupied Turtle Island like Occupied Palestine. The injustice begins there. The Original Sin begins there. Leonard Peltier as the longest held First Nations political prisoner under u.s. confinement, is symbolic of a 500 year Sin that will not just go away, from Wounded Knee to Standing ROCK. The technological empire that sits on the back of the Turtle cannot erase nor silence the continued resistance from FN folks. The kidnapping, Middle Passage and enslavement of folks of African descent is the next Original Sin of White supremacy. The theft of Mexican lands by American colonizers (Texas, "new" Mexico, California, etc.) and ridiculous "immigration" issues of the president Trump ad-strangulation. Add in Asia, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, Alaska, Guam, the Dominican Republic, the Virgin Islands (which still has political prisoners who fought against u.s. domination) and you have counter-cultural tinderboxes that could explode at any moment. Where will we be? How will we position ourselves to aid in the impossible changing of this imperial landscape?

My wife and I were watching the idiotic box and few weeks ago. Yeah, tis' contradictory I told you! Anyway, we like to watch the show "Catfish." There's Nev and whats-his-name. Whats-his-name has often worn T-shirts supporting Black Lives Matter and feminism. This particular episode he has a T-shirt that says, The Future Is Female, acknowledging his support of growing counter cultural resistances, like BLM, etc.

Last image: another favorite cartoon of mine out of an anarchist zine. It says something like, "We are not for the overthrowing of the system. We are for organizing and fighting to take back our lives away from the system until it just fades away into oblivion." Truth is, it said all that in about ten words but I can't remember it exactly. I'm 64 dammit. Smile and gimme some slack. So, the import of this cartoon's message for me is that we must recognize the insurgencies here. Hidden? Maybe; but resistance nonetheless. All around us. My bias is always towards the anti-authoritarian because I realize that folks are oppressed, tired and life moves within them to fight back in all kinds of ways. Anti-authoritarian means you honor that and respect its dignity and self-determination. Dig it. Again, the 60s studies give you a hint: Black power, flower power, anti-war, love-ins, poetry and off the grid communes. Get my point? Folks are studying today the growth of community gardens, Social ecology, the return of witch wisdom, and indigenous/holistic health practices-- in New York I know folks who are developing ways for others who may be bipolar to function in healthy ways. Some progressive churches have trained and implemented "Peace teams" not just for Guatemala but for the hoods they live in. What?! And because of the resurgence of police and gang-related killings in Black and Brown communities some folks are thinking about and developing ways to intervene to save their lives. Spike Lee's problematic movie, Chi-Raq, was an attempt in that vein, and Black Panther a la Wakanda will feed them thinkings in spite of itself. Included in that is the old idea of organizing gun clubs. Women led efforts to fight the high levels of rape has led to a myriad forms of safe spaces, empowerment spaces and mass political mobilizations of anti-heterosexist liberation. Black Lives Matter hopefully aint done yet. What is happening cannot be controlled from any centrally controlled vanguard organization. One, two, three, many counter-cultures as not only a recovery of revolution but also as revolutionary improvisation. Like jazz, taking these phenomena to places no man... (uh-uhn Star Trek), no humanity has ever gone before.

The historical writings unearthing new stories of resistance, and exposing how technics of silencing those stories were used for decades and generations; the sociological writings that bring in the intersectional connections of other insights, the psychological writings that incorporate the anti-colonial and postcolonial perspectives (especially 'cause they help me understand the sources of my own damn depression periods); the theological writings that speak to the spirit, the spiritual situation of individuals and peoples under all kinds of domination; the womanist/feminist and even the queer theoretical that can keep us from "slipping" back to the poison of the Monstrous Embrace. We need to continually understand and be continually open to understanding these times we live in. It is the only way to stay in the fight and to maintain some sort of optimism. Like, believing we can really win folks. It aint over!

Of the One-Two-Three-many counter-cultures I have high hopes for the one I know best – The Black Counter-culture. It is my hope that it stops getting bamboozled by the hypnotic Americanism of Uncle Sam à-la-Barack Obama. Somehow, we have to let Uncle Sam go. It's still a rapacious relationship; still totally colonial; still killing us. Black power offered us a way out back in the day (if I may use that expression). Revolution, socialism, liberation were words that carried a lot of transformative potential. But man, each one led by some righteous folks, got bought off or distorted back into The Embrace. We couldn't "get out" from this relationship with this abuser. Then I met abolitionist Viviane Saleh-Hanna for whom abolition sounded like revolution, anti-capitalism & imperialism, anti hetero-sexism and self-determination by focusing on the role of penal colonialism and white supremacy worldwide. And she was immersed in Black struggle here as a Palestinian-Egyptian Pan-Africanist critiquing western (particularly U.S.) criminology.

The abolitionism of Viviane Saleh-Hanna had a different way to look at the counter-culture of the Black experience within the bowels of the Monster. (In total transparency, what I am about to share with you is both personal and political. It involves two things: Black feminist hauntology & Professor Viviane Saleh-Hanna. And... So? Okay, Viviane is my wife. She is a pan-Africanist abolitionist. She is an activist abolitionist professor. She aint in academia for the prestige. She's in it for the liberation of the planet from all systems of oppression.) Her focus came a through penal colonialism and thus its abolition. I kinda watched her work on this paper on Black Feminist Hauntology at home. After studying penal colonialism in Africa, particularly in Nigeria while living and working there for 2 years, she eventually gets hired to teach in Massachusetts.

As a longtime member of ICOPA (International Conference On Penal Abolition), being here in the united states with her knowledge of criminal justice, abolitionist critiques/involvement and passion for justice, she brings a fresh perspective to abolitionism that can deepen some of the more liberal/progressive abolitionist versions currently popular in the u.s. What makes it unique and powerful for me? Besides taking penal colonialism for real, and European White supremacy for real, and heterosexism for real, she gave me a way to understand the challenge of "being Black" in Babylon as if it were wrapped in Harriet Tubman's rifle on yet another excursion through the swamps to freedom.

She says... Freedom, liberation from this madness, involves seeing yourselves as trapped in a 400 plus year relationship with a European rapacious monster that has built its empire and institutions (especially its systems of enforcement and punishment) on the back of First Nations Turtle Island. When you can see that it is your imperial rapist and that it has intergenerational power and privileges, aint but one goal that totally makes sense if ya wanna be free. "GET OUT!" Within our communities we have to move towards not accepting the harm inherent in americanism. We have to accept the fact that the criminal justice system and penal colonialism fortifies itself, perpetuates itself, justifies itself and then uses its hypnotic powers to convince us (its primary victims) that it is for our own good. That it is, in fact, a reflection of their god's thumbs up on the specialness of Americanism. NO! NO! Ya Basta! That could possibly be the potential of Black Feminism and Afro-futurism; that the "NO!" begins to include even the historically excluded voices and activisms within the Black community. Black feminism & Black Lives Matter gave a hint of that. Revolutionary hip-hop gave a hint of that. Liberation theology, black

liberation theology and womanist theology and spiritualities give us hints of potential new insurgencies that could help us break from this rapist embrace in explosive ways. These are things that I see as an Elder who aint too active no more in traditional ways but who still wants to win by any means necessary (love you Malcolm, Happy 93rd Birffday!) I still look for signs that the black counter-culture can finds ways to redemption, recovery (re-membling for a broken people). I still listen to conversations, watch CNN & MSNBC, Trevor Noah & Stephen Colbert. I get disappointed with BLM at times and hope they don't disappear into despair. I join my wife in raising these two chilluns who are sooo young and soooo deserving to be the generation to be totally free. My Mama's gonna be 97 and we just buried one of my nieces who was killed in a alley in my hometown. It's rough. But in spite of it all, this so-called community aint through yet. I have faith that we will find ways to pull it together, beyond mere survival. We have to finds ways to GET OUT! And in solidarity with others of like hearts-and-minds. Folks are studying, that I know. Folks are making analyses in intersectional ways. I read, and I ask questions. I drive my chilluns to school and watch other parents, even papas, show some genuine love to their little ones. That tells me it aint over. So, out of all my shit, my bouts of depression, my male shit, others male shit, there are the woman and queer folks, and the newer nationalists, both black and brown, whose Ya Basta! has a dual purpose. One, they want to deal with that rapist and mentality in a no-compromise and "breaking" manner, and two, they want to show love to the rest of us by challenging us to say "NO! No more!" to what harm we have been laying on them for generations. They are the ones truly saying that in unity there is strength. Come-unity. A new embracing is before us. And we can revisit the belief in victory being ours if we want it.

I have rambled enough. I hope that readers will not be too frustrated in following this. It is streams of thought of one who still wants to be in the mix of One-Two-Three-Many counter-cultures that brings an end to the rule of the international rapist. Panthers just wanted to be a part of that worldwide phenomenon of insurrectionary burstings of freedom. I am still that cat, that anarchist cat. Don't let us down. Free all political prisoners. They wanted us to GET OUT!

All power through the folks who care, who dare...

Ashanti Alston

National Jericho Movement

May 2018

Author Biography

Revolutionary, speaker, writer, organizer, motivator. Ashanti is one of the few former members of the Black Panther Party who identifies as an anarchist in the tradition of New Afrikan ancestor Kwesi Balagoon (BPP & BLA) within the Black Liberation Movement. As a result of his membership in both the BPP and Black Liberation Army (BLA), he served a total of 14 years as a political prisoner and prisoner-of-war. He is currently on the Steering Committee of the National Jericho Movement to free U.S. political prisoners. On top of all that, he is an Elder-co-parenting two youngins' (5 & 2!) and a grandfather of a small "maroon nation." Ashanti resides in Providence, Rhode Island.