Rescuing the Enlightenment: A Critical Theory of Postcolonialism

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Given that postcolonial studies is considered anti-Enlightenment, it may seem paradoxical to propose a critical theory of postcolonialism. Postcolonial scholars have previously argued that lofty Enlightenment ideals are inflected by colonial violence and fascist terror, even as the Enlightenment served the interests of a certain privileged class, which enshrined norms with an implicit gender, racial and sexual bias. Despite these objections, Gayatri Spivak argues that given the imperial and counter-imperial nature of Enlightenment "one cannot not want it." Using the metaphor of "child of rape", Spivak warns that notwithstanding colonial and fascist violence that accompanied the emergence of these norms, the postcolonial world must learn to love the child of rape born from an act of enabling violence, namely, the contaminated legacies of European Enlightenment, such as "human rights" and "democracy". Accordingly, the aim of this project is to understand the contradictory consequences of the Enlightenment without taking up an anti-Enlightenment stance. The indispensability of the Enlightenment in pursuing critical projects is to be thought together with the Eurocentrism and Androcentrism plaguing its legacies, which are like pharmakon, both poison and medicine. To imagine postimperial futures, a critical theory of postcolonialism is proposed.

Projektbeteiligte

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