AFFIRMATIVE SABOTAGE OF THE MASTER’S TOOLS: THE PARADOX OF POSTCOLONIAL ENLIGHTENMENT

The intellectual and political legacies of the Enlightenment endure in our times, whether we aspire to orient ourselves by them or contest their claims. In the face of feudality, prejudice and subservience to authority, the Enlightenment intellectuals enunciate ideals of equality, rights, and rationality as a way out of domination towards freedom. However, as has been pointed out by scholars of the Frankfurt School as well as Postcolonial Studies, Enlightenment’s promise of attaining freedom through the exercise of reason has ironically resulted in domination by reason itself.

Instead of progress and emancipation, it has brought colonialism, slavery, genocide and crimes against humanity. Against this background, my talk engages with the contradictory consequences of European Enlightenment for the postcolonial world. Instead of a polemical dismissal of the Enlightenment, the effort is to conceptually rethink its legacies from a feminist postcolonial perspective.