Modernity / Coloniality

‘Modernity/coloniality’ is a concept first used by Aníbal Quijano and later developed by Walter Mignolo. It refers to the way in which the concepts (modernity and coloniality) are inseparable —two sides of the same coin. Like many postcolonialists, decolonialists seek to draw attention to the relation between colonialism and the narrative of modernity, through which much of the world’s history has come to be understood. Modernity, then, is viewed as an epistemological frame that is inseparably bound to the European colonial project.

Decolonialists seek to move beyond what they see as the over-geographical determinism present in various critiques of Eurocentrism, towards an epistemic conception of coloniality. Thus, epistemic hegemony is not limited to particular places, and decolonial thinkers suggest that there is a history of epistemic violence in every geographical location, including the West. If the rhetoric of modernity maintains a logic of coloniality, even critical work emerging from within the geographical and epistemological heartlands of the old empires cannot escape the logic.

Essential reading


Further Reading


Questions

What is the difference between thinking of modernity as a series of events or processes, and thinking of modernity as an ‘epistemic frame’?

How is coloniality linked to colonialism?

If modernity cannot be understood without thinking about coloniality, how does this change the way we understand the social and political world?

Can the epistemic hegemony of coloniality/modernity be transcended?

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