CRITICAL THEORY, MODERNITY AND THE QUESTION OF POST-COLONIAL IDENTITY

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Dedicated to the memory of my mother
ABSTRACT
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This thesis seeks to understand the interrelation of knowledge, power and culture in the context of globalization. Crisis of Marxism has prompted intense reflection on the nature of modernity as a cultural-political phenomenon. This discourse highlights forms of domination and resistance which were neglected by Marxism and Liberalism. In contrast to postmodernism which accentuates certain Nietzschean and Structuralist themes abstractly, Adorno's appropriation of Nietzsche and Marx is quite illuminating, both theoretically and politically. It resists nostalgia and futuristic escapades to focus on the present.

Although intellectual developments in the West have global implications, they invariably acquire a halo of universality which makes it difficult for outsiders to recognise their limitations. The debate between modernists and postmodernists is a case in point. Following Edward Said, 'Post-colonial' theorists scrutinise the West's epistemological hegemony, highlighting modernity's connection with imperialism. Nevertheless, their appropriation of post-structuralism, thematic and methodological, raises questions about their own relationship to Western theory and whether their analyses neglect material aspects of globalization as well as problems specific to post-colonial societies. In short, post-colonial theory remains an ambivalent and contested formation.

The thesis contends that it is unnecessary to absolutise the 'culture vs. materialism' dichotomy. Both perspectives offer useful insights but also have their problematic aspects. As the world becomes more integrated without ceasing to be dominated by the West, the complexities and stresses of modernity are exacerbated. Thus, no single theory can prescribe answers to everyone or claim to be devoid of cultural effects, although there is the danger of 'culture' being invested with a subversive potential which cannot be redeemed in democratic ways. After all, authoritarian regimes find it convenient to legitimise themselves culturally. While it may be true that the cultural is 'always already' political, critical theory must insist on foregrounding a more activist notion of political agency in a conjuncture marked by global management of dissent, economic fundamentalism, media spectacles and cynical conflation of democracy with consumption.
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Declaration

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I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being available for loan and photocopying.
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