

CALL FOR PAPERS

ENLIGHTENMENT AS A ‚BATTLE TERM‘

Intellectual strategies and transcultural controversies

Interdisciplinary Conference (30 September – 2 October 2020, Saarland University, Germany)

Organisation:

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‘Enlightenment’ was not only a controversial term in the Age of Diderot, Hume, Kant, Leibniz, Lessing, Madame de Staël, Robertson, Voltaire, Wieland or Wolff, but has also been a guiding concept of Western societies. Not only due to the emergence of extremist positions (right wing radicalism, religious fundamentalism), is the sovereignty of interpretation over what Enlightenment is at its core and how it can be legitimised subject to fierce debate. The question to be asked is whether the ‘Enlightenment’ as an object of research must therefore, with regard to the diversity of concepts and practices, be thought of in the plural.

Starting from the Age of the European Enlightenment in the 18th century, the conference aims to examine and connect discourses and practices of the Enlightenment in different disciplines and fields of investigation up to the present day. We welcome contributions that examine literary texts, media strategies or historical events from the perspective of literary studies, theology, history, media theory, and/or cultural studies and with regard to the context of debates on concepts and practices of the Enlightenment.

The conference aims to discuss fundamental trans- and intercultural processes of exchange and debate, which have been neglected in national research traditions, especially with regard to colonial discourses in fictional, but also theological literature or encyclopaedic and scientific works. In this context, it is helpful to address alternative concepts of the Enlightenment as well as the relevance of religion in these processes, but also the ambivalences, resistances, and controversies connected with the reception of the European Enlightenment in new contexts: for example, impulses that arose from the confrontation with non-European cultures, as well as the problematic processes of appropriation and expropriation – especially in areas in which the project of the Enlightenment has been attributed to a specifically European identity. This is linked to the fundamental question of how discourses of reflection and exclusion have

contributed to the construction of a European identity through recourse to the Enlightenment. Accordingly, the 'dark sides' of the Enlightenment will also be examined by focusing on the categories of gender, race/ethnicity, and class: i.e., the repressed histories of the Enlightenment, which represent a contrapuntal modernity and exhibit processes of hybridization and mutual transculturation.

The conference deliberately focuses on the 'Enlightenment' as a battle term and thus draws attention to the question of how the idea of Enlightenment as well as the language and metaphors associated with it have been used to enforce or combat certain concepts, structures, and practices. In this way, the conference helps to build bridges to current debates, because the international and transcultural significance of the concept of Enlightenment becomes clear precisely at the moment in which it is transferred into a contemporary discourse that renegotiates human self-responsibility in the 21st century and once again raises the question of the "dialectic of Enlightenment" (following Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno).

Possible questions include:

- Which paradoxes, fields of tension or excluding mechanisms of the Enlightenment were already in place in the 18th century?
- In which cultural and media contexts does the concept of the Enlightenment become a 'battle term'?
- To what extent is the updated use of Enlightenment as a 'battle term' part of the history of a dialectically understood Enlightenment?
- How does European colonialism relate to the 'Enlightenment' project?
- What strategies are used to establish and implement a particular concept of the Enlightenment?
- What are the reasons for the fact that specific concepts of the Enlightenment were not successful in the 18th century as well as in the present?
- How do concepts of the Enlightenment change in cultural contact, in intercultural encounters, far from the centres of discourse in the geographical and discursive peripheries, in asymmetric power structures?
- Which were the preferred media of the Enlightenment and which are preferred today? Which media-specific challenges and problems hindered Enlightenment projects and continue to do so today?
- How do Enlightenment projects deal with the contrast between the ones who are 'enlightened' and the ones who are 'to be enlightened', and the narrative of the opposition between elites and those left behind, both ideas which are inherent in the concept of Enlightenment?
- How are faith in progress and rationalism renegotiated in the Information Era?

We hope to be able to cover expenses for travel and accommodation. The contributions to the conference will be published.

Please send an abstract (German, English or French) for a 25-minute presentation (max. 1 page) and a short scientific CV by 5 April 2020 to:

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