Impact on defining progress and development due to colonization

“Why do you allow it? Are you savages that you permit something like that? Look at you: you've had some education; you should know better. How will your country ever progress if you carry on doing these things. You've been to Europe; you've seen how advanced they are. Now tell me: have you ever seen them burning their dead? ... They're not ignorant people. They're advanced, they're educated, they have science, they have guns and tanks and bombs”

— In An Antique Land by Amitav Ghosh (235)

This quotation marks an important discourse in early modern globalization since it engages in issues about the definition of progress and the influence on language that the West’s colonization had. Ghosh’s response to Imam’s primitive and stereotypical view of India reflected his anger and frustration. The buildup and response to this discourse is worth exploring since it allows us to understand the definitions of progress from the perspective of each culture. The definition and impact on progress that colonization has is important to globalization since it directly relates to the way that most countries and their citizens evaluated their sense of progress and development.

Ghosh responds to these claims by stating “[we] have them too ... we have guns and tanks and bombs ... they're better than anything you've got in Egypt - we're a long way ahead of you” (Ghosh, 235). Imam replies “ours are second only to the West’s” (Ghosh, 236). Through this discourse we can make the claim that both Ghosh and Imam and measuring their success and advancements of their countries relative to the West. The measurements they are using are also militaristic and are biased towards the strengths of the West. Ghosh writes “Imam and I: delegates from two superseded civilizations, vying with each other to establish a prior claim to the technology of modern violence” (Ghosh, 236). Through this argument it becomes more apparent that the language and similarities between these two nations stand from being colonized by a third country, which engaged in modern violence against them. Therefore, they are bound to use the language and description of progress to measure their position in the global sphere.

In addition, the emotion by which each of these characters presents their arguments also reinforces that their sense of progress for their respected countries is engraved and is a key part of their nationalistic pride. It has become a part of their view of globalization and how their country fits into the global world. Ghosh puts it as “[we] were both travelling, he and I: we were travelling in the West” (Ghosh, 236). Metaphorically, they are both following the mentality that was instilled into their culture by the West, and that they had “demonstrated the irreversible triumph of the language that has usurped all the others in which people once discussed their differences” (Ghosh, 236).

Both Imam and Ghosh compare the technology infrastructures or militaristic infrastructures they have in their country rather than the cultural differences that exist between them. However, Imam paints the continent of India as being backwards because they burnt their people rather than burying them. Imam questions this culture of burning people in India since Ghosh has “had some education”, and implies the Indian people to be “ignorant people”. This quotation is powerful as it shows the neocolonial evolution of progress in the way that the global culture has evolved.

This view of progress is similar to the depictions of the Native Indians in the Americas when they were discovered. The painting “Discovery of America” depicts this well. The painting initially depicts the fully clothed European man and him encountering the naked American Indian female, who is greeting him with her empty hand welcoming him to her land. This is juxtaposed by the European man whose hands are completely full. In one of his hands he has a crucifix and in the other he has a staff. The crucifix symbolizes religion, tradition, and faith, and the staff usually symbolizes knowledge, wealth, and wisdom. He can be said to be bringing both of these to the new land, and the American Indian is welcoming him with open arms, perhaps, in seeking to learn his ways. His armor also symbolizes progress. This painting uses the definition and language that the West uses to measure the progress of the Native Indians. Religion, wealth, and knowledge is more valued to the West than survival instincts, spirituality, and honor.

Similarly, in the movie También la Lluvia the state government measured progress or advancements in their nation by measuring the foreign money coming into the country. This definition of progress is based on the American definition of progress, which is built on a capitalistic economy. They follow the neocolonial view of progress. In the movie, the President of Bolivia says “[we] have objective reports from Harvard professors, the IMF ... it’s the cult of the victim vs. modernity”. The victims being the Indians. The language that is used by the Bolivian president in this particular instance through the use of ‘objectivity’ and ‘Harvard professors’ is one that follows the definition of what is progressive to the West. Modern globalization seems to be defined and iterated on by the West, and government organizations that were once a part of the west through colonization following and adapting to their view of progress and development.

In conclusion, the impact on how different countries and their citizens view their progress and development changed a lot due to globalization. The discourse on what progress is in modern globalization has been impacted by Euro-American neocolonialism. Even in the postmodern era the West is still central figure in progress and development, and the narrative of progress is central to the cultural and political differences that exist between non-West nations.

Bibliography

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También la Lluvia (Even the Rain)