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Analyzing Lewis's "Eurocentrism Revisited"

Bernard Lewis's "Eurocentrism Revisited" raises interesting questions regarding Eurocentrism. Lewis argues in favor of a Eurocentric perspective as he credits Europe for civilizing and uniting the world. However, within a more 20th-century view, these nations face more guilt for their Eurocentric exploits than reverence. Lewis reflects on the multicultural perspective surrounding a 'new white man's burden,' where the western nations must bear the guilt of history's atrocities, even those non-European nations took part. Lewis's overall thesis supports a pro-Eurocentric world and rejects the lack of multicultural responsibility or placing the guilty burden on Europe. While it is unimaginable to determine where society would be without the success of Europe's advancements, nor are other nations' actions forgettable, Eurocentrism's adverse effects are unignorable. Even in its success, Europe must bear the guilt of the new and multicultural white man's burden, especially in the spread of horrific slave practices and Social Darwinism.

As Lewis suggests, many of the things the global, multicultural world blames on Europe were indirect, not only done by Europe or were resolved by Europe. However, because of European advancements and its ability to move swiftly, despite all the additional factors, are part of the burden Europe must bear. As "Eurocentrism Revisited" first refers to slavery, this is the

first exploration. Lewis states, “Although it was known in medieval Europe, slavery was of minor importance there, far less significant in the social and economic life of Europe than it was in pre-Columbian America or in Muslim and non-Muslim Africa” (Lewis et al.). Essentially, while Europe knew the concept of slavery, non-European nations utilized the institution more until the introduction of the Middle Passage and the triangular slave trade. Non-European regions participated in slavery. For example, in his lecture “Colonization Among Rivals,” Professor Reidy mentions that African kingdoms like the Kingdom of Kongo profited off the slave trade, as it was a slave hub before European interactions. It is important to note that it is also associated with the kingdoms of Spain, Portugal, and France when referring to Europe. Therefore, though the Kingdom of Kongo sold slaves to the Portuguese, Portugal’s greed for more slaves and ivory caused conflict morally and religiously as it seized the budding Christian Kongonese Kingdom. In this instance, the African slave trade escalated as it promoted from capturing rivalries to decimating and separating entire kingdoms as their people were brutalized and sent to various foreign lands.

An example of this escalation of African slavery was the British colony of Barbados. The “Colonization Among Rivals” lecture discusses English settlers who went to the Caribbean to cultivate sugar, requiring brutal work and demanding labor. Though the island was first uninhabited, Europeans imported thousands of slaves; whereby 1684, there were 45,000 slaves compared to 20,000 British colonists. However, despite their advantage in numbers, the Barbados slaves only had an average lifespan of 1 year. Thus, there was a constant flow of importation, work, and death for the African people forced to participate in this demanding and merciless labor. While life for an African enslaved by other African people could not have been

easy, European influence intensified an already cruel practice, globalizing it all for nationalistic territory expansion and resources, but at the cost of millions of lives.

However, there were early European attempts to stop slavery, specifically Native American slavery in New Spain, before Spanish explorers' influence and greed overtook the region, and other European nations began their explorations. For example, Carlos V's *The New Laws of the Indies* states, "[...] the Audiencias are to serve us is in taking very especial care of the good treatment of the Indians and preservation of them," as the document sought to free Native American slaves and incorporate them into the kingdom (Carlos V, *The New Laws of the Indies*, p. 1). While this mission was the intent of the Spanish crown, it ultimately failed, and slavery's brutal institution was allowed to flourish. Even members of Spain's Catholic clergy called for the end of Native American slavery. For example, Paul III wrote, "the said Indians and all other people who may later be discovered by Christians, are by no means to be deprived of their liberty or the possession of property [...]" (Paul III, *Sublimus Dei*, p. 1-2). However, he would also suggest replacing Native American slavery with African slavery despite this effort. Regardless, these early efforts to combat any form of slavery and foreign peoples failed, and European nations continued to abuse the practice for centuries, increasing its brutality and the loss of life and cementing its global legacy.

However, the guilt of horrors like slavery is not the only burden modern Europe and western nations face as they also spread Social Darwinism and imperialism. Eurocentrism and Europe connecting the world globally also led to global fallout. The central ideology supporting imperialism was Social Darwinism, which racist and nationalistic idea that some societies evolve and progress further than others and that the stronger societies must help the weaker ones

towards progress. An example of this appears when Karl Pearson states, “Man will stagnate; [...] famine and pestilence, as we see them in the East, physical selection instead of the struggle of race against race, will do the work more relentlessly, and, to judge from India and China, far less efficiently than of old. . . There is a struggle of race against race and of nation against nation” (Karl Pearson *Imperialism Justified by Nature*, p. 1). These ideas served as the older ‘white man’s burden;’ however, this new white man’s burden refers to the guilt and blame other societies place on Europe and the West. According to Professor Reidy’s lecture, “The Age of Imperialism II: The Long Shadow,” the initial version of the white man’s burden led to Britain’s imperialism in China, India, and Africa. While Britain used the guise of saving or advancing these nations, its imperialism was based on greed and wanting to strengthen the country, leading to much destruction in the imperial holdings.

For example, imperialism in China introduced the region to violent wars and drugs. According to “The Age of Imperialism II: The Long Shadow,” Britain smuggled opium, a dangerous and highly addictive drug, into China because the nation refused to trade. When the Chinese government seized the opium, Britain launched the Opium Wars, resulting in China having to pay Britain for lost profit, open their ports to British trade, and the Taiping Rebellion, a civil war and devastating rebellion. In addition, the British continued to wage war to force China’s borders open and eventually divided the land between European powers. With trade and profits as the excuse presented, China fell victim to the Eurocentric perspective of imperialism and its violent consequences. Similar events occurred in India with the Sepoy Rebellion and Africa with the Belgian Congo genocide.

Africa paid a heavy price for Europe's imperial and Social Darwinism. The Berlin Conference divided the continent among several European powers. These actions were supposed to benefit the African people; however, they were successful European attempts at stealing power and resources. As Professor Reidy mentions, the imperialism of Africa embodied the concept of the white man's burden as the white European nations saw a need to civilize and help the Africans; however, this 'help' did not have good intentions. As time progressed, these European nations traded one burden for another as they faced the guilt for spreading imperialism and Social Darwinism, even as they tried to pull out and dismantle their imperial holdings.

First, not every nation wanted to give up its global empires after World War II. For example, according to the lecture, "The World After WWII: The Third World," the Dutch were reluctant to abandon their empire in Indonesia. To the extent that a civil war broke out after the area proclaimed independence. In addition to this hesitancy to ultimately end imperialism, many regions and nations were left with nothing when it ended. For example, Africa was virtually dependent on Europe during imperialism. Therefore, when Europe abandoned the continent, countries like Nigeria, Congo, Rwanda, and South Africa struggled with power, genocide, and racism as unfit leaders continued to rise and fall.

Of course, Europe was not the only nation to imperialize. As the lecture "On the Eve of the Great War" mentions, The United States imperialized Hawaii. After the Spanish-American War, it also established a protectorate over Cuba, Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines. Additionally, Japan imperialized Korea and China, committing great atrocities like the Nanking massacre, where "The killing of civilians was widespread," and large groups of military spectators "apparently greatly enjoyed the spectacle" (*The Nanking Massacre* p. 1). However,

despite this multicultural experience, one cannot overlook the initial guilt of Europe, which served as an example for other nations. As Okuma states, “In these respects we may be said to somewhat resemble the Anglo-Saxon race” (Okuma *Fifty Years of New Japan* p. 1). As discussed in “Liberalism & Unification: The Rise of the ‘Mortal God,’” when Europe and the West contacted Japan after its two-hundred-year peace, the nation had to revolutionize and become a world power. However, it adopted the Social Darwinism and racial positions flowing out of Europe in the process.

Though, despite horrors and advancements, one cannot measure where the world would be without European influence and Eurocentrism. As Lewis states, “Imperialism, sexism, and racism are words of Western coinage—not because the West invented these evils, which are, alas, universal, but because the West recognized and named and condemned them as evils [...]” (Lewis et al.). Because of these perspectives, blame, and even guilt, these nations can spread ideas again. There is a reflection in Eurocentrism that other countries cannot express. It is so powerful that even Europe and the West have trouble dealing with them. There are positives and negatives to Eurocentrism’s new white man’s burden. However, it is a guilt Europe and even the West must face to confront painful pasts.

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