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The Architecture of Consent: Cultural Hegemony and the Legitimation of Global Hierarchies

ABSTRACT

The persistence of global inequalities continues to raise questions regarding the mechanisms through which hierarchical relations are maintained within the contemporary international order. While material asymmetries and institutional structures have long been examined, increasing attention has been directed toward the cultural and ideological dimensions of power. This article explores the relationship between cultural hegemony and center-periphery dynamics as an analytical framework for understanding the reproduction of global hierarchies. Drawing on the theoretical contributions of Antonio Gramsci, Joseph Nye, and the broader center-periphery tradition in political and social theory, this study considers how influence can operate through cultural and civil institutions such as education, media, and knowledge production. These domains are approached as sites in which norms, values, and patterns of legitimacy are shaped. Rather than treating cultural processes as secondary to economic or political power, the article reflects on their role in structuring relations between dominant and subordinate actors in the international sphere. By situating cultural analysis within the center-periphery framework, the study contributes to ongoing discussions in political and legal theory concerning power, legitimacy, and the evolving configuration of global order.

Keywords: cultural hegemony ■ center-periphery model ■ global order ■ legitimacy
■ soft power ■ political theory

I. INTRODUCTION

Debates surrounding global inequality and asymmetrical power relations have long occupied a central place within political and social theory. While traditional analyses have emphasized economic dependency,

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geopolitical asymmetries, and institutional dominance, increasing attention has been directed toward the cultural and ideological processes that shape perceptions of power and contribute to the stability of unequal global arrangements.

In contemporary global society, relations between dominant and subordinate actors are increasingly mediated through channels that extend beyond direct coercion. Cultural narratives, educational systems, media environments, and other civil institutions play a significant role in shaping collective understandings of legitimacy, authority, and social order. Operating often subtly, these mechanisms influence norms and expectations that render existing hierarchies more durable and, at times, more readily accepted. Examining such dynamics requires an analytical framework capable of addressing both structural inequality and the cultural mechanisms through which it is reproduced.

The concept of cultural hegemony, most prominently associated with Antonio Gramsci, provides a valuable starting point for such an inquiry. Gramsci's analysis of power emphasized the importance of securing social acceptance through cultural and ideological leadership rather than relying solely on coercive force. Complementing this perspective, Joseph Nye's formulation of soft power highlights the capacity of actors to shape preferences and influence behavior through attraction and persuasion. Together, these theoretical approaches underscore the significance of cultural processes in shaping patterns of authority and influence within complex political environments.

At the structural level, the center-periphery model and related world-systems perspectives offer an enduring framework for understanding global inequality and dependency. These approaches illuminate how historical patterns of economic and political dominance continue to structure relations between regions and societies. While such models provide insight into material and institutional asymmetries, the cultural dimensions through which these hierarchies are normalized and maintained warrant further examination.

This article brings these strands together by examining how cultural and ideological processes interact with structural inequalities in shaping contemporary global hierarchies. It explores how influence, operating through civil institutions and transnational channels of communication, contributes to the formation of norms and patterns of legitimacy that sustain asymmetrical relations between dominant and subordinate actors. Rather than treating cultural processes as secondary to economic or political power, this article proposes a conceptual synthesis between Gramscian hegemony, Nye's soft power framework, and center-periphery analysis in order to explain how cultural and ideological mechanisms contribute to the legitimation of global hierarchies. In doing so, the article contributes to the literature by integrating cultural and structural approaches to global inequality, demonstrating how cultural hegemony and soft power function as mechanisms through which hierarchical relations are legitimized within the center-periphery framework.

The discussion proceeds in four parts. The first section outlines the theoretical foundations of cultural hegemony and soft power, focusing on their relevance

for understanding legitimacy and influence. The second section situates these concepts within the center-periphery framework, highlighting structural patterns of hierarchy and dependency. The third section examines selected institutional domains – including education, media, and knowledge production – as sites through which cultural influence is articulated and reproduced. The final section reflects on the implications of these dynamics for understanding the relationship between legitimacy, power, and the persistence of hierarchies.

II. CULTURAL HEGEMONY, CONSENT, AND SOFT POWER: THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

Hegemony – the process by which subordinate social groups adopt norms, values, practices, ideologies, and even economic and political arrangements that may run counter to their own interests – owes much of its conceptual development to Antonio Gramsci. An Italian Marxist philosopher, journalist, and political activist, Gramsci fundamentally reshaped twentieth-century understandings of the relationship between power, culture, and social order. His most influential reflections, compiled in the *Prison Notebooks (Quaderni del carcere)*^[2] during his imprisonment under Mussolini's regime, transformed prevailing interpretations of domination by emphasizing the cultural and ideological dimensions through which authority is maintained. Rather than relying solely on economic or coercive force, ruling groups secure and reproduce their position by shaping societal norms, values, forms of knowledge, and overall interpretive frameworks.^[3]

Although Gramsci did not offer a single, systematic definition of hegemony, his extensive writings provide a coherent framework for understanding it as a form of dominance exercised by a leading social group over subordinate groups through cultural and ideological leadership.^[4] Hegemony, in this sense, refers to the capacity of dominant groups to shape social norms, values, and interpretive frameworks in ways that secure the acceptance of arrangements that sustain their authority.^[5] While remaining broadly within the Marxist tradition,^[6] Gramsci expanded its analytical scope by arguing that the durability of power cannot be explained through economic relations alone. Instead, ideological and cultural processes play a central role in stabilizing social and political hierarchies.^[7] By foregrounding the role of institutions, intellectual leadership, and shared normative frameworks, his analysis highlights how hierarchical relations may be

[2] Gramsci, 1971.

[3] Martin, 2023; Forgacs, 1992.

[4] Lears, 1985, 568.; Femia, 1975, 30-31.

[5] Gramsci, 1971, 12.

[6] Marx – Engels, 1976, 67.

[7] Lears, 1985, 568.; Adamson, 1980, 175-176.

reproduced through processes that render existing arrangements durable and widely perceived as legitimate.

A distinction that may help in comprehending Gramsci's emphasis on cultural mechanisms is that between a "war of maneuver" and a "war of position". Observing that the rapid and coercive revolutionary strategies associated with the Russian experience were ill-suited to the social and cultural conditions of Italy, he argued that durable political authority must be consolidated within civil society. The "war of position" thus denotes a gradual process through which influence is established across cultural and institutional domains.^[8]

By shaping norms, values, and shared interpretations of social order through institutions such as education, media, religion, and intellectual life, dominant groups are able to stabilize existing arrangements and secure the acceptance of subordinate groups over time. This perspective highlights how hierarchical relations may be reproduced through processes that normalize prevailing power structures and reinforce their perceived legitimacy. Gramsci's analysis, therefore, underscores the centrality of long-term cultural and ideological mechanisms in sustaining authority beyond the immediate exercise of coercive power.^[9]

Gramsci's reflections on power also engage with and transform earlier traditions of political thought, particularly those associated with Niccolò Machiavelli. While Machiavelli emphasized the necessity for rulers to employ both force and strategic calculation in maintaining authority,^[10] Gramsci extended this insight by arguing that durable power cannot rely on coercion alone but must also cultivate cultural and ideological consent. In the *Prison Notebooks*, he introduces the concept of the "Modern Prince" (*Il Nuovo Principe*)^[11] as a metaphor for political actors capable of shaping collective consciousness and securing the active or passive acceptance of social order.^[12]

Whereas Machiavelli's perspective is often associated with a pragmatic and sometimes amoral understanding of rule, Gramsci places greater emphasis on the production of cultural legitimacy, without neglecting the role of coercion when necessary. In this way, the exercise of power rests on a dual structure of

[8] Simon, 1999, 19-20.

[9] Gramsci, 1988, 364.

[10] Machiavelli, 1985, 65-68.

[11] Antonio Gramsci's writings, notably "The Modern Prince: And Other Writings", reflect a profound engagement with Niccolò Machiavelli's theories on statecraft. In this collection, Gramsci examines Machiavelli's "The Prince", reinterpreting its principles to address contemporary political dynamics (at his time). He introduces the concept of the "Modern Prince," envisaging it as a revolutionary entity – such as a political party – that embodies the collective will necessary for societal transformation. Gramsci emphasizes that this modern political force must adeptly balance coercion and consent, drawing from Machiavelli's insights to navigate the complexities of power and governance. This synthesis of ideas underscores Gramsci's belief in the necessity of a strategic, culturally aware approach to revolution, wherein the "Modern Prince" functions as a catalyst for establishing a new hegemony rooted in the aspirations and values of the subaltern classes. See Gramsci, 1957.

[12] Gramsci, 1971, 125-135.

supremacy: domination, achieved through coercive means, and hegemony, realized through the shaping of civil institutions and cultural life. Through this interaction between coercion and cultural leadership, dominant groups are able to stabilize hierarchical arrangements by encouraging subordinate groups to perceive prevailing structures as natural, legitimate, or historically inevitable.^[13]

In the maintenance of social stability, the role of consciousness becomes central. Gramsci's frequently cited definition^[14] of hegemony describes it as: the "'spontaneous' consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group; this consent is 'historically' caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production."^[15] In this context, "spontaneous" does not imply deliberate approval but rather an often 'unconscious' or 'passive' acceptance of prevailing social arrangements. Gramsci, therefore, distinguishes between different forms of consciousness (active and passive) through which such consent is sustained.^[16]

A key element of his analysis lies in the notion of this dual or contradictory consciousness. Individuals may participate actively in practical social and economic life while simultaneously internalizing inherited ideological frameworks that shape their perceptions of reality. This condition produces a tension between an implicit awareness rooted in lived experience and a more passive, uncritical consciousness shaped by dominant cultural narratives. As Gramsci observes, the "active man-in-the-mass" may engage in transformative activity without possessing a clear theoretical awareness of the structures that govern his position, resulting in a state of moral and political passivity that inhibits collective action.^[17] In this way, the persistence of hierarchical arrangements depends in part on the internalization of dominant ideologies that render existing relations appear natural or inevitable, limiting the development of critical awareness and contributing to the stabilization of prevailing social and political structures.^[18]

Gramsci attributed a central role to intellectuals in both the construction and contestation of hegemonic order. He distinguished between "traditional intellectuals", who typically operate within and reproduce the ideological frameworks of the dominant social order, and "organic intellectuals", who emerge from sub-

[13] See Femia, 1975, 30.

[14] As mentioned earlier, the concept defies a straightforward definition for several reasons. One key factor is that Gramsci composed his work under the constraints of imprisonment – forced to encode his ideas through letters and fragmented documents, which is why his collection is known as "The Prison Notebooks". Nevertheless, this passage is widely regarded as the most frequently cited articulation of hegemony, capturing its essence better than any other, see Lears, 1985.

[15] Gramsci, 1971, 12.

[16] Femia, 1975, 30-35.

[17] Gramsci, 1971, 333.

[18] Gramsci, 1988, 224.; Day, 2005, 63-64.; Patnaik, 1988, PE4.

ordinate social groups and articulate their experiences and perspectives.^[19] Through this distinction, Gramsci emphasized that intellectual activity is deeply embedded in social and political struggles over meaning and authority. While traditional intellectuals often contribute to the stabilization of prevailing ideological frameworks, organic intellectuals may formulate alternative interpretations of social reality that challenge dominant norms and contribute to the development of new forms of ‘common sense’ within society.^[20] In this way, the role of intellectuals becomes central to the maintenance or transformation of hegemonic arrangements, as the expansion of critical awareness and theoretical reflection can reshape how social and political structures are interpreted, accepted, or contested.

Antonio Gramsci’s concept of hegemony provides a foundational framework for understanding how power extends beyond direct economic and political coercion into the realms of culture, ideology, and social consent. By emphasizing the role of norms, interpretive frameworks, and intellectual and cultural institutions, his analysis demonstrates how dominant groups secure acceptance and stabilize hierarchical arrangements over time. Taken together, these insights underscore the importance of examining the cultural and ideological dimensions through which authority is maintained and perceived as legitimate. Gramsci’s work, therefore, offers a critical point of departure for exploring how influence operates within complex social environments, particularly where power is exercised through attraction, persuasion, and the shaping of shared meanings. This perspective provides a useful foundation for considering broader mechanisms through which consent and legitimacy are cultivated within contemporary global structures.

Building upon these insights into the cultural and ideological dimensions of power, it becomes necessary to consider how similar dynamics operate within the contemporary global environment. In this regard, Joseph Nye’s concept of soft power provides a useful complementary framework for understanding how influence may be exercised through attraction, persuasion, and the shaping of preferences rather than through direct coercion in the international sphere.^[21]

Nye defines soft power as “the ability to affect others and obtain preferred outcomes by attraction and persuasion rather than coercion or payment.”^[22] At its core, the concept emphasizes the capacity of actors to shape preferences and secure acceptance by projecting appealing cultural values, political norms, and institutional practices. This form of influence is often diffused through non-coercive channels such as media, education, cultural exchange, and public diplomacy, all of which contribute to the dissemination of ideas and normative frameworks across national and regional boundaries. As communication tech-

[19] Gramsci, 1971, 5-14.

[20] Simon, 1999, 104-113.; Femia, 1975, 35.

[21] Nye, 2017.

[22] Nye, 2017.

nologies and transnational networks have expanded, the reach and effectiveness of such forms of influence have grown considerably, enabling both state and non-state actors to extend their presence beyond traditional military or economic means.^[23]

Soft power derives much of its effectiveness from its capacity to operate through the routines of everyday social and cultural life. Civil society institutions – including educational systems, cultural organizations, and media networks – serve as key channels through which values, norms, and narratives are transmitted and reinforced.^[24] Through these processes, influential actors are able to shape interpretive frameworks and preferences in ways that encourage the internalization of particular understandings of social and political order. Such mechanisms contribute to forms of acceptance that stabilize existing arrangements and complement more direct economic or political forms of influence.

At the same time, the diffusion of soft power is neither static nor unidirectional. The expansion of global communication networks and transnational forms of interaction has diversified the sources and modalities of cultural influence, enabling a wider range of actors to participate in the production and circulation of ideas.^[25] These evolving dynamics do not necessarily displace established hierarchies but rather interact with them, reshaping the contexts within which legitimacy is negotiated and influence is exercised. In this sense, soft power operates within a fluid and continuously evolving environment in which authority is sustained through the ongoing construction and reinterpretation of shared meanings.

Nye, much like Gramsci, does not treat coercive and non-coercive forms of power as mutually exclusive but as interdependent elements within broader strategies of influence. While soft power – grounded in attraction, cultural appeal, and institutional credibility – plays a central role in shaping preferences and securing acceptance, it operates most effectively in conjunction with more traditional forms of economic and military capabilities. Nye describes this calibrated combination as “smart power”, emphasizing the strategic value of balancing persuasion with the potential for coercion when necessary.^[26]

From this perspective, soft power contributes to the formation of environments in which cooperation, alignment, and perceived legitimacy become more attainable, while hard power remains a latent or complementary resource within the exercise of statecraft. The interaction between these modalities highlights the extent to which authority in contemporary global affairs is sustained not solely through force but through a combination of attraction, institutional influence, and the capacity to enforce interests where required. Such an integrated

[23] Nye – Goldsmith, 2011, 46.

[24] Nye, 2021, 8-9.

[25] Hocking, 2005, 29-32.

[26] Nye, 2017, 2.

understanding of power provides an important conceptual bridge for examining how influence and legitimacy operate within broader structural configurations of the global order.

III. A STRUCTURAL LENS: CENTER-PERIPHERY MODEL

The preceding discussion of cultural hegemony and soft power has highlighted the importance of ideological and cultural processes in shaping patterns of authority and consent. To situate these dynamics within a broader structural context, it becomes necessary to examine how global inequalities are organized and reproduced across the international system. One of the most enduring analytical frameworks for understanding such asymmetries is the center-periphery model.

The center-periphery framework is most prominently associated with the work of Raúl Prebisch, who, during his tenure as Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)^[27] in the 1950's, articulated an influential model for understanding global economic asymmetries. Initially grounded in the analysis of trade relations and development disparities, Prebisch conceptualized the international economy as structured around a core of industrialized "centers" or "cores" and a dependent "periphery" characterized by primary production and structural vulnerability.^[28]

Within this formulation, centers were understood as economically advanced and industrialized regions capable of shaping global markets, while peripheral regions remained dependent on the export of raw materials and subject to unfavorable terms of trade.^[29] Although Prebisch's analysis focused primarily on economic structures, his framework established a foundational distinction between dominant and subordinate regions that would later be expanded beyond purely material dimensions.

In its broader development, the center-periphery model has been adopted and refined across sociology, political science, and international political economy, among other relevant disciplines, as a framework for analyzing systemic global inequalities. Rather than referring solely to patterns of trade dependency, the model conceptualizes the international order as structured around asymmetrical relations between dominant centers – characterized by economic strength, institutional influence, and agenda-setting capacity – and peripheral regions, whose overall developmental trajectories remain shaped by structural constraints and external dependencies.^[30]

[27] ECLAC, Raúl Prebisch.

[28] Prebisch, 1950, 1-7.

[29] Wallerstein, 2004, 27-28.

[30] Klimczuk – Klimczuk-Kochańska, 2019, 1-2.

Within this expanded understanding, center-periphery relations extend beyond economic disparities to encompass political authority, legal framework, knowledge and norm production, and cultural influence. The model thus provides a structural lens through which enduring patterns of dominance and subordination can be examined, highlighting how inequalities are embedded within the organization of the global system itself rather than arising from isolated or accidental conditions.

Dependency theory played a crucial role in this expansion by challenging the assumption that peripheral underdevelopment merely reflected a delayed stage of modernization. Thinkers such as André Gunder Frank^[31] and Samir Amin^[32] argued instead that underdevelopment was actively produced through the historical incorporation of peripheral regions into a global system structured by asymmetrical relations of extraction, dependency, and external control. In this view, the condition of the periphery is not residual but relational: it is constituted through its subordinate position within an unequal international order.^[33]

This shift was important because it broadened the explanatory reach of the model. The center-periphery relation could no longer be understood solely in terms of trade imbalances or industrial disadvantage. It also involved political influence, institutional asymmetry, and the international organization of knowledge and authority. What emerged was a more comprehensive understanding of global hierarchy in which economic dependence was inseparable from broader structures of power.^[34]

Immanuel Wallerstein systematized this broader perspective through *World-Systems Analysis*.^[35] Rather than treating states as self-contained units developing along separate trajectories, Wallerstein approached the modern world as a single historical system organized through a hierarchical division of labor.^[36] Within this system, core (center), semi-peripheral, and peripheral zones occupy differentiated positions that are reproduced through long-term structural relations. Core regions concentrate capital, technological capacity, and institutional power, while peripheral regions remain constrained by patterns of extraction and subordinate incorporation. The semi-periphery occupies an intermediate position that both mediates and stabilizes the system as a whole.^[37]

Wallerstein's contribution was not simply to redescribe inequality on a larger scale, but to show that the reproduction of hierarchy is systemic. Economic

[31] Frank, 1966.

[32] Amin, 1974.

[33] Relevant contributions to the broader literature on dependency, imperialism, and global inequality include Said, 1978; Fanon, 2011; Fanon, 2008; Stiglitz, 2002; Dos Santos, 1970; Amin, 1976, among others.

[34] Ellner, 2024, 744-757.

[35] Wallerstein, 2004.

[36] Martinez-Vela, 2001, 4.; Wallerstein, 2004, X.

[37] Wallerstein, 2004, 27-30.

asymmetry, political power, and institutional ordering form part of the same historical structure. For this reason, the expansion of the center-periphery model beyond economics is not an external addition but a logical development of the claim that global inequality is produced through durable and interconnected relations of domination.

The analysis also introduced the concept of geoculture, referring to the ideological framework that underpins and stabilizes the modern world-system.^[38] Geoculture denotes the shared set of political and intellectual assumptions through which the system interprets itself and legitimizes its institutional arrangements.^[39]

According to Wallerstein, this geocultural order took shape in the aftermath of the French Revolution, which established the principle of popular sovereignty and normalized the idea that political change is an inherent feature of modern society. These developments generated a new ideological environment in which competing doctrines – most notably liberalism, conservatism, and radicalism – sought to define the legitimate organization of political and social life. Over time, however, centrist liberalism came to occupy a dominant position within the geoculture of the modern world-system, shaping prevailing conceptions of governance, development, and social progress.^[40]

Geoculture thus represents the ideological dimension of the world-system, providing the normative language through which structural inequalities become intelligible and legitimate within global political discourse. While the structural division of labor produces economic hierarchies between core and peripheral regions, geoculture provides the conceptual language through which these arrangements are interpreted and justified. Through the diffusion of universalistic ideas, the geocultural framework contributes to the system's relative stability by rendering its inequalities intelligible within a shared global discourse. Yet geoculture does not operate as an abstract set of ideas alone. Its influence is articulated and reproduced through concrete institutional settings within civil society. Educational systems, media structures, and institutions of knowledge production, among others, function as key arenas in which the normative assumptions of the world-system are disseminated, normalized, and internalized. Through these channels, broader ideological frameworks become embedded in everyday practices and modes of understanding, shaping how individuals and societies interpret authority, development, and their own position within the global hierarchy.

[38] Wallerstein, 2004, 93.

[39] Wallerstein, 2004, 75.

[40] See Wallerstein, 2004, 60-75.

IV. HEGEMONY IN ACTION: INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISMS OF THE ARCHITECTURE OF CONSENT

If structural hierarchies within the world-system are sustained partly through geocultural frameworks, the question becomes how these ideological structures are reproduced in practice. Gramsci's analysis of civil society offers an important insight in this regard. Hegemony is practiced through institutions that shape common sense, social expectations, and normative understandings of social order.

In the contemporary global environment, several civil institutions play a particularly significant role in mediating these processes. Educational systems shape intellectual frameworks and patterns of aspiration; media institutions influence public narratives and representations of global reality; and structures of knowledge production define what counts as legitimate knowledge and whose intellectual traditions are recognized within global discourse.

Examining these institutional arenas allows us to observe how the architecture of consent operates beyond formal political structures. Rather than relying primarily on coercion or direct economic control, global hierarchies are often reproduced through the gradual normalization of particular ideas about progress, development, modernity, and legitimate authority.

1. Education and Language

Education serves as a fundamental civil institution for transmitting and reinforcing hegemonic ideals and norms. By shaping the structures through which knowledge is produced and disseminated, educational systems influence the intellectual frameworks within which individuals interpret authority, social order, and development. In this sense, control over education enables dominant actors to cultivate patterns of thought and belief that align with prevailing political and cultural arrangements. As one reflection on colonial education famously observed, "the cannon compels the body; the school bewitches the soul."^[41]

One of the primary ways educational institutions sustain hegemonic influence is through the curriculum, which selectively frames history, economics, and culture in ways that reinforce dominant narratives while marginalizing alternative perspectives. Historical accounts, for instance, often emphasize national achievements while downplaying systemic inequalities, colonial legacies, and labor struggles. Such selective representation contributes to the naturalization of existing power structures and discourages critical engagement with counter-narratives.

[41] Kane, 1963, 49.

Beyond formal content, education also operates through what scholars describe as the hidden curriculum – the implicit transmission of values such as hierarchy, obedience, competition, and individualism through everyday institutional practices. These underlying messages shape expectations about authority and social order while reinforcing the norms that sustain prevailing political and economic arrangements. By privileging certain forms of knowledge and cultural expression over others, educational systems also contribute to patterns of social stratification, favoring individuals whose cultural capital already aligns with dominant institutional frameworks.^[42]

A significant dimension of hegemonic influence within educational systems lies in the imposition of a dominant language as the primary medium of instruction. When a hegemonic language replaces indigenous or local languages in education, it not only erodes linguistic diversity but also reinforces patterns of cultural dependency. Language carries history, identity, and particular ways of interpreting social reality;^[43] consequently, students educated primarily in a dominant or foreign language are more likely to internalize the intellectual frameworks and values associated with it. This process can gradually distance learners from their own cultural and epistemic traditions while aligning their aspirations and modes of thought with those of the dominant power. In this way, linguistic hierarchies function as an additional mechanism of hegemonic influence, shaping cognitive frameworks, limiting access to indigenous knowledge systems, and reinforcing the broader ideological order within which global hierarchies are interpreted and reproduced.^[44]

The British colonial education system in India provides a well-documented example of how education and language function as instruments of cultural hegemony. A pivotal moment in this process was Macaulay's Minute on Education (1835),^[45] which established English as the primary language of instruction and marginalized indigenous languages and knowledge systems. Macaulay explicitly advocated the creation of a class of English-educated Indians – "Indian in blood but English in taste and intellect."^[46] – who would serve as intermediaries between colonial authorities and the broader population, a role closely resembling what Gramsci later described as traditional intellectuals. This policy systematically devalued Sanskrit, Persian, and vernacular educational traditions, gradually aligning India's intellectual landscape with colonial priorities.^[47]

Through the restructuring of education, British authorities not only improved administrative control but also reinforced their ideological influence. The English-educated elite, shaped by Western literature and intellectual tra-

[42] Berman, 1984, 239-253.; Brown – Au, 2014, 358-389.

[43] Freire, 2000, 96-97.; Wa Thiong'o, 1986, 4.

[44] Lukianenko, 2024, 41-49.

[45] Macaulay, 1835, 107-117.

[46] Macaulay, 1835, 116.

[47] Mondal, 2024, 3754-3758.; Cutts, 1953, 824-853.

ditions, became central to the functioning of colonial governance.^[48] Even after independence, the legacy of this system has persisted, with English continuing to dominate administration, higher education, and legal institutions.^[49] This enduring linguistic hierarchy illustrates how educational structures can sustain forms of cultural and epistemic dependency long after formal colonial rule has ended.

A similar dynamic can be observed in the French colonial experience in Africa, where language policy formed a central component of the doctrine of assimilation, which promoted the superiority of French culture and sought to reshape colonized societies in its image.^[50] The enforcement of French as the primary language of administration and education marginalized indigenous languages and cultural traditions while aligning institutional structures with French political and legal models. This linguistic hierarchy complicated the development of cohesive cultural identities and limited the capacity of local languages to function as vehicles of intellectual and cultural expression.^[51] Even after independence, many African states retained French as an official language due to its entrenched role in governance, education, and international communication. The persistence of this linguistic order has often been interpreted as a form of neocolonial continuity, reflecting the enduring cultural and economic ties linking former colonies to the structures established during colonial rule.^[52]

Taken together, these examples illustrate how educational institutions function as key sites in the reproduction of hegemonic order. Through curricular selection, linguistic hierarchy, and the shaping of intellectual aspiration, education does more than transmit knowledge: it organizes the normative frameworks through which authority, development, and legitimacy are understood. In this way, education operates as an important medium through which the geocultural assumptions of the world-system become embedded within social life, contributing to the broader architecture of consent that sustains global hierarchies.

2. Media

Media institutions occupy a central position in the diffusion and normalization of hegemonic ideas within contemporary societies. Often described as a “fourth estate” alongside the legislative, executive, and judicial branches, media function as powerful conduits through which dominant norms, values, and narratives are disseminated and reproduced. Through television, film, news outlets, music, and digital platforms, media do not merely reflect social realities; they ac-

[48] Macaulay, 1835, 107-117.

[49] Kattumuri, 2011, 171-172.

[50] Lewis, 1962, 129-153.

[51] Wa Thiong’o, 1986, 13.

[52] Chitondo – Chanda – Mpolomoka, 2023, 1020-1040.; Benneyworth, 2011.

tively shape the interpretive frameworks through which audiences understand political events, cultural identities, and global hierarchies. In the contemporary era, technological advancements in communication and telecommunications have amplified this influence dramatically, enabling dominant narratives to circulate with unprecedented speed and reach across national and cultural boundaries.^[53]

Media institutions shape societal perceptions by influencing how issues, events, and identities are interpreted within public discourse. By promoting certain values and perspectives as 'common sense,' media contribute to the normalization of prevailing social and political arrangements. This influence operates through several mechanisms, most notably agenda-setting and framing. Through agenda-setting, media determine which issues receive public attention and which remain marginal or invisible. Framing further shapes interpretation by structuring how those issues are presented, thereby influencing how audiences understand political events, conflicts, and social realities.^[54] In this way, media narratives play a significant role in reinforcing dominant perspectives while limiting critical engagement with the structural inequalities embedded within existing power relations.

Media representation and stereotyping constitute powerful mechanisms through which cultural hegemony is reproduced. By repeatedly portraying certain groups through narrow and often negative lenses, media narratives shape the construction and perception of social identities while reinforcing existing hierarchies. Such selective representation privileges dominant perspectives and marginalizes alternative voices, influencing how audiences interpret cultural and political realities. In doing so, media narratives help naturalize prevailing power relations and contribute to the reproduction of broader social and global inequalities.

Edward Said's concept of Orientalism^[55] provides a powerful framework for understanding how such representational hierarchies operate within global media discourse. Orientalism describes a long-standing intellectual and cultural tradition through which Western institutions have portrayed Eastern societies as exotic, backward, and uncivilized, thereby legitimizing Western dominance and intervention.^[56] Emerging initially within the colonial contexts of French and British imperial expansion and later reproduced through American cultural institutions after the Second World War, Orientalist narratives have been widely disseminated through global media channels.^[57] Hollywood, for instance, has frequently depicted Arabs and Muslims through stereotypical portrayals – often casting them as villains, extremists, or cultural outsiders – thereby re-

[53] Çoban, 2018, 103.

[54] Entman, 1993, 52.

[55] Said, 1978.

[56] Said, 1978, 8-39.

[57] Said, 1978, 4.

inforcing simplified and negative representations.^[58] As documented in works such as *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People*,^[59] these portrayals contribute to a broader process of othering, through which non-Western societies are constructed as fundamentally different and inferior. Such representational practices reinforce global cultural hierarchies by shaping public perception in ways that normalize existing power relations and legitimize unequal political and social arrangements.

Cultural imperialism represents a central dimension of cultural hegemony within the global order. Edward Said, in *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), demonstrates how cultural narratives have historically accompanied and legitimized imperial expansion by presenting Western norms, values, and institutions as universal standards of civilization.^[60] In this sense, cultural imperialism operates not merely through political or economic domination but through the diffusion of cultural frameworks that shape how societies understand progress, development, and modernity. This dynamic resonates closely with Immanuel Wallerstein's concept of geoculture, which describes the shared ideological environment of the modern world-system through which global hierarchies are interpreted and normalized. Cultural imperialism can therefore be understood as one of the mechanisms through which geocultural norms are disseminated and internalized across different societies.

In the contemporary global environment, mass media play a decisive role in this process. The widespread circulation of media content originating from dominant cultural centers, particularly the West, facilitates the global diffusion of specific cultural narratives, values, and lifestyles. Through film, television, and digital media, audiences across diverse societies encounter representations that frequently prioritize Western ideals of individualism, consumerism, and economic progress.^[61] This diffusion contributes to a gradual process of cultural homogenization in which local traditions and knowledge systems may be marginalized or reinterpreted through the lens of dominant global norms.

Hollywood provides a particularly visible illustration of this phenomenon. As the epicenter of the American film and television industry, Hollywood has exercised an extraordinary influence on global media markets for over a century. Through its global distribution networks, Hollywood productions have become one of the primary channels through which international audiences encounter American cultural narratives, fashions, and social values.^[62] This phenomenon – often described as “Hollywoodization” – reflects the capacity of media industries located within the core of the world-system to project their cultural frameworks globally. In doing so, Hollywood contributes to the broader process some-

[58] Said, 1978, 1-4.

[59] Shaheen, 2006; Shaheen, 2003, 171-193.

[60] Said, 1993, 6-14.

[61] Sever, 2018, 300-307.; Maisuwong, 2012, 1-7.

[62] Kitamura, 2004, 235-248.

times referred to as the “Americanization” of global culture, reinforcing cultural hierarchies in which Western narratives and aesthetic forms occupy a privileged position within global cultural circulation.^[63]

Taken together, these dynamics illustrate how media institutions function as crucial arenas in the reproduction of hegemonic order within the contemporary world-system. Through mechanisms such as agenda-setting, framing, and representational hierarchies, media do more than disseminate information: they structure the interpretive frameworks through which political events, cultural identities, and global inequalities are understood. By circulating narratives that privilege certain perspectives while marginalizing others, media contribute to the normalization of broader geocultural assumptions about development, modernity, and legitimacy. In this way, the global diffusion of dominant cultural narratives – often amplified through powerful media industries such as Hollywood – plays an important role in embedding these norms within everyday consciousness, reinforcing the architecture of consent that sustains hierarchical relations within the international system.

3. Scientific Innovation and Knowledge Production

To be hegemonic is to be in the lead: what prevails is not only your language, religion, values, norms, and culture, but also your epistemology and scientific innovation. Hegemony, therefore, entails the ability to shape the intellectual frameworks through which knowledge is produced and understood. Within the modern world-system, dominant centers have consistently sought to maintain authority in science and knowledge production, as such epistemic leadership reinforces broader narratives of cultural and civilizational superiority. Viewed from a longer historical perspective, this dominance has developed gradually through processes of knowledge transmission, institutional consolidation, and the marginalization or appropriation of alternative intellectual traditions. Achieving this position has required substantial investment in research institutions, education systems, and scientific innovation, but it has also involved the appropriation of knowledge and the erasure or downplaying of competing scientific contributions.^[64]

The Cold War offers a striking illustration of how scientific innovation can function as a mechanism of hegemonic competition. During the ideological conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union, technological and scientific achievements became important instruments for projecting political legitimacy and cultural superiority. This rivalry was most visibly expressed in the “Space Race”, where scientific advancement served not only as a marker of technologi-

[63] Chen – Shen, 2021, 209.

[64] Akena, 2012, 600.

cal capability but also as a demonstration of ideological strength.^[65] The Soviet Union initially gained prestige through milestones such as the launch of Sputnik 1 in 1957 and the flight of Yuri Gagarin in 1961, achievements that were presented as evidence of the superiority of its socialist system.^[66] The United States responded by intensifying its own space program, culminating in the Apollo 11 mission in 1969, when Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin became the first humans to walk on the Moon. Beyond their technological significance, these events functioned as powerful symbolic demonstrations of national achievement, illustrating how scientific innovation could serve as a means of shaping global perception and reinforcing competing claims to ideological and cultural leadership.^[67]

Regarding epistemic marginalization, a particularly revealing illustration can be found in the historical treatment of scientific contributions from the Islamic world. Islamic scholars working across the Muslim world made significant advances in fields such as mathematics, astronomy, medicine, optics, and philosophy. Figures including Al-Khwarizmi, Ibn Sina, Ibn Al-Haytham, Al-Zahrawi, and Ibn Rushd not only preserved classical Greek knowledge but also expanded and transformed it through original research and innovation. Their works played a crucial role in the development of algebra, optics, medicine, and empirical scientific inquiry, contributing substantially to the foundations of modern science.^[68]

Despite these achievements, the subsequent rise of European intellectual and political dominance led to the gradual marginalization of many of these contributions within mainstream historical narratives.^[69] During the European Renaissance, numerous scientific works were translated from Arabic into Latin, through scholars such as Gerard of Cremona, yet the intellectual origins of these works were frequently obscured or reinterpreted.^[70] In many cases, the transmission of knowledge was framed as a direct rediscovery of ancient Greek learning, bypassing the intermediary role of Islamic scholars who had preserved, developed, and transmitted these ideas.^[71]

This process of intellectual rebranding was further reinforced through the Latinization of scholars' names – such as Al-Khwarizmi becoming Algorithmi, Ibn Sina becoming Avicenna, and Ibn Rushd becoming Averroes – which gradually detached their work from its original intellectual and cultural context. Over time, such historiographical practices contributed to a broader narrative that positioned scientific progress primarily as a European achievement while

[65] McDougall, 1985, 20.

[66] Almeida, 2024, 30-32.

[67] McDougall, 1985, 20-25.

[68] Rubenstein – Schwartz, 1999, 16-18.; Mehri, 2017, 71-74.; Rehman et al., 2021, 9046-9067.; Falagas – Zarkadoulia – Samonis, 2006, 1581-1586.; Saliba, 2007.

[69] Bala, 2006; Saliba, 2007, 3-21.; Hajar, 2013, 43-46.

[70] König, 2019, 88-93.

[71] König, 2019, 89.

marginalizing the diverse and interconnected intellectual traditions that had shaped its development.

A related mechanism involved the construction of a narrative of intellectual decline in the Islamic world, often contrasted with the emergence of the European Enlightenment. Within Western historiography, this framing portrayed Muslim-majority societies as intellectually stagnant after the medieval period, despite continued scholarly activity in regions such as Persia, the Ottoman Empire, and Mughal India.^[72] Such narratives not only simplified the complex history of scientific exchange but also helped legitimize broader colonial assumptions about cultural and intellectual superiority.

In the contemporary global academic landscape, the hierarchical structure of knowledge production continues to reflect broader patterns of hegemonic influence. Major universities, research institutions, and academic publishing networks located in the core regions of the world-system exercise significant authority in determining what forms of knowledge are recognized as legitimate. As a result, scientific discoveries and intellectual traditions originating outside these institutional centers are frequently undervalued or gain broader recognition only after validation by Western academic institutions.^[73] The organization of global research funding, scholarly publishing, and university curricula, therefore, plays a crucial role in shaping dominant narratives about scientific progress, often reinforcing the perception that modern scientific advancement is primarily a Western achievement. In this way, epistemic authority remains closely intertwined with broader cultural and institutional hierarchies within the contemporary international system.

Taken together, these dynamics demonstrate that knowledge production constitutes a critical arena of hegemonic power within the modern world-system. Through the institutional authority of universities, research networks, and scholarly publishing, dominant centers acquire the capacity not merely to generate knowledge but to define the very standards through which knowledge is evaluated and legitimized. In doing so, these institutions shape the intellectual narratives through which scientific progress, cultural achievement, and historical development are interpreted. Such epistemic authority forms an integral component of the geocultural framework of the world-system, reinforcing the perception that existing hierarchies of power reflect natural or inevitable patterns of advancement, operating as a key pillar within the broader architecture of consent that sustains contemporary international hierarchies.

[72] Saliba, 2007, 3-21.

[73] Selvaratnam, 1988, 41-68.

V. CONCLUSION

The persistence of global hierarchies continues to raise important questions about the mechanisms through which asymmetrical relations of power are reproduced within the contemporary international order. While economic disparities and geopolitical asymmetries remain central features of global inequality, the preceding analysis has emphasized that these structures cannot be fully understood without considering the cultural and ideological processes through which they acquire legitimacy. Hierarchical arrangements endure not only because they are materially entrenched, but also because they are embedded within shared frameworks of meaning that render them intelligible and, at times, broadly accepted.

From this perspective, hierarchy within the international system is inseparable from the production of legitimacy. Gramsci's reflections on cultural hegemony remind us that durable forms of authority depend not only on coercion but also on the internalization of norms that render prevailing arrangements acceptable. When situated within the broader framework of the world-system, this insight reveals how cultural influence, ideological narratives, and institutional practices contribute to stabilizing global inequalities by shaping the interpretive horizons through which they are perceived.

The institutions examined in this study – education, media, and structures of knowledge production – illustrate how these processes unfold within civil society. Through such domains, broader geocultural assumptions become embedded in everyday intellectual and cultural life, shaping the ways in which individuals understand authority, legitimacy, and their own position within the global hierarchy. These mechanisms operate through the gradual normalization of particular narratives of progress, development, and civilization that render existing asymmetries appear natural or historically inevitable.

These dynamics also carry important implications for the understanding of international law. Legal norms and institutions do not emerge in a social vacuum but develop within the broader political and cultural environment of the international system. When global hierarchies are stabilized through widely accepted narratives of development, modernity, and legitimacy, legal frameworks may reflect and reinforce these asymmetries rather than challenge them. The uneven application of international legal norms, the differential recognition of political claims, and the selective enforcement of legal principles often mirror the broader structural relations of power within the world-system. In this sense, the legitimacy of international law itself cannot be fully understood without considering the cultural and ideological processes through which global hierarchies are shaped, normalized, and accepted.

Understanding the endurance of global hierarchies, therefore, requires attention not only to material structures but also to the cultural frameworks through which those structures are interpreted and justified. The concept of an architecture of consent offers a way of capturing this relationship: a constellation of in-

stitutions, narratives, and epistemic practices through which dominant arrangements acquire legitimacy within the broader geoculture of the world-system. Within such a configuration, power operates not merely through control over resources or institutions but through influence over the meanings that structure collective political understanding. Global hierarchy persists not only because power is unevenly distributed, but because it is continuously rendered meaningful, acceptable, and legitimate through the cultural and ideological structures that influence how it is perceived and understood.

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