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### Global Hierarchy from a Critical Perspective

Within international relations, a traditional theory is anything that aims to understand or explain the world. Critical theory, on the other hand, the focal point of this essay, takes form as a normative theory that looks at the world for what it should be as it focuses on critiquing and changing society. The critical theory views the world not as an anarchical system so much as one of hierarchy and aims to expose visible global hierarchical relations. This global hierarchy is a structure that privileges some groups but marginalizes others. Through the example of a racialized classed hierarchy, further analysis will clearly address this form of global hierarchy through a critical perspective including how it has been sustained, and how it can be broken down.

Global hierarchies implement ideals that lead to inequality, through the marginalization of some groups. In the 1500s when colonialism began, it was built off the justification that white people who were pardoned as elitists could enter other nations to “civilize” them in order to legitimate white domination. Aspects of this “civilization mission” include white colonizers controlling foreign policy and territory in colonized states regarding politics, economics, and oftentimes culture (Schroeder). The effects of this on the colonized are reflected through coerced slave labor, little to no self-governance, and a complete disregard for the colonized language, religion, norms, and culture. These actions of the colonizers undercut their justification of

colonialism, due to the clear hierarchical system that promotes inequality between the groups. Colonialism, an example of a racialized global hierarchy, helps to define global hierarchy as it is rooted in the inequality that whites are elitists at the top of the hierarchy and non-whites are anything but. Global hierarchy, as explained through the example of racialized colonialism directly reflects inequality within a hierarchical system.

If this global hierarchy is embracing inequality, why was it sustained over time? This is due to a narrative called hegemonic discourse. Hegemonic discourse is the idea that a dominant group's story of the truth is widely accepted to be true throughout the international system. Historically, black Africans have been viewed as biologically “lesser” or less “civilized,” whereas the dominant groups regarding colonialism were often white people who were regarded as “elitist”. Their truths remain widely accepted today, henceforth emphasizing the hierarchical system that critical theorists acknowledge. The implications of this view normalize disempowerment, justifying the unequal treatment of indigenous people such as the denial of self-governance and property rights, occurring during colonialism as presented by the hierarchical system (Schroeder).

In order to commence breaking down these hierarchies seen within the hierarchical organization of groups, there are a few options. Some of which are independence movements orchestrated by counter-hegemonic discourse, and the exploitation of depoliticized spaces. Decolonization led by independence movements is organized by a counter-hegemonic discourse which, “fundamentally derive[s] from the collective wills of desperate peoples,” (Peet) hence the colonized people who promote this discourse. This type of discourse addresses the issues within the hegemonic discourse narrative and aims to exploit it by highlighting its illegitimacy and

exposing hypocrisies. The ultimate goal of counter-hegemonic discourse is to provide an alternate narrative that empowers rather than enslaves people, and in regards to colonialism, promotes decolonization. Independence movements pertain to a variety of the core pillars of critical theory being, deconstruct, problematize the elitist view, inclusivity, and equality in law and practice. The final pillar, display of less obvious power dynamics, can be addressed through another form of breaking down global hierarchies, being the exploitation of depoliticized spaces. In these spaces, such as religious gatherings or prison, colonized people gather together and produce counter-hegemonic. In summary, these spaces, “have their own bases in power complexes, often situated in social movements or unions, different in that they employ more informal media of thought, discussion, and dissemination,” (Peet). The global hierarchies as represented through a racialized view regarding colonialism can be dismantled in a variety of ways that stem from the counter-hegemonic discourse.

Through the lens of a critical theorist, the global hierarchy can be defined by a racialized view as colonialism, as a structure that privileges some groups but marginalizes others. This definition was upheld by historically traditional views and hegemonic discourse that sustained the global hierarchy, and the ones that broke them down being independence movements, counter-hegemonic discourse, and the exploitation of depoliticized spaces.

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