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Western Hegemony in International Law: The Legacy of Colonialism and The Social Consequences of Legal Power

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Abstract

This paper critically examines how Western hegemony has shaped the development, enforcement, and social implications of international law from the colonial era to the present. It argues that the current international legal system perpetuates global inequalities by embedding Eurocentric principles within universal frameworks such as human rights and sovereignty. Drawing on postcolonial theory and critical legal studies, the paper traces the historical formation of international law from the Peace of Westphalia to contemporary institutions like the United Nations, IMF, and World Trade Organization. These institutions, though presented as neutral and universal, reflect Western political, economic, and cultural dominance. The paper also explores the sociological consequences of this imbalance, highlighting how it reinforces dependency and marginalization in the Global South. Through case studies such as humanitarian interventions and selective enforcement of international justice, the analysis reveals that legal power often mirrors geopolitical power. The study concludes by advocating for a pluralistic, inclusive approach to international law that values non-Western legal traditions and recognizes diverse understandings of justice and human rights. This research contributes to interdisciplinary debates on decolonization, global inequality, and the future of international governance.

Keywords: International Law, Colonial Legacy, Human Rights, Western Hegemony, Global Inequality, Postcolonial Theory, Critical Legal Studies, International Institutions, Global South, Decolonization