



## Hegemonic Tools of the West and Development Conundrum of the South: Interrogating with Dependency Theory BY

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### Abstract

The study observed the seemingly stampede in the development postures of the South and unraveled its nexus with the hegemonic stance of the West through the analytical lens of dependency theory. Ex-Post Facto research design was used and data were collected from secondary sources through Documentary method and the collected data were analyzed with the aids of tables through Content analysis. Dependency theory was adopted, which maintained that the hegemonic tools were used to subject the South to the West, and the study found that the hegemonic tools of the West have contributed to development challenges in the South. However, the study recommends that the south should delink and improvise environmental friendly ideological tools for development instead of sheepishly adopting the Western projected tools which were detrimental to the South.

**Keywords:** Dependency, Development, Economy, Hegemonic Tool and Production

### Introduction

Domination of the world has been the fundamental aspiration of the Western world. This fascinating ambition stemmed from the pre-capitalist era, through economic mercantilism, liberalism to the contemporary neo-liberal ideology. As a way of maintaining the leadership position in the global arena, European countries with the aid of state powers engaged in atavistic pursuit of territories through mercantilist principles. These unguided moves for territorial acquisition brought about incessant wars among the European countries. As this condition held sway, Spain and Portugal who enjoyed relative peace during the perilous period embarked on exploration of the world under the shadows of demystification of the controversial argument over the shape of the world (Obikeze & Obi, 2003). While in actual sense, they were searching for markets for two basic reasons: 1) source of raw materials for production of cheaper good and 2) for dumping of the toxic and finished goods (Rodney, 1972, Ake, 1981, & Okonkwo, 2024).

In order to counteract the impediments to the production and distribution of goods, liberalism was invented as the ideological tool. Essentially, Smith (1776) sees liberalism as

the most decisive strategy for the growth of wealth of the nation. Ricardo (1817) added his voice through the Comparative Cost Advantage (CCA). By extension, this change of tool for domination of the world by the West from mercantilist to liberalism necessitated the scramble for Africa which was finally resolved through the Berlin Conference of 1884/85. Furthermore, political awareness and enlightenment through education, brought about independence by the 60s. However, the West, with the instrumentalities of GATT and WTO initiated the 'International Trade Rounds' as a means of curbing any trace of protectionism (Balaam & Vesseth 2005). In another development, Washington Consensus of the early 90s emphasized more on outright divestment of the state from the economy, which is known as neo-liberalism (Balaam & Dillman, 2011).

Ordinarily, the essence of leadership is development but it appears to be paradoxical in this context because in spite of the dominance and the accompanying leadership of the West, the South was still experiencing a rigmarole in development challenges and the study observed that this perspective in the interrogation of development challenges in the South

generally and Africa in particular has not attracted enough scholarship. Hence this paper interrogates the nexus between the hegemonic tools of the Western world and the development challenges in the South with special emphasis in Nigeria.

### **Demystification of Hegemonic Tools**

Literally, hegemony denotes leadership of a nation over other nations. In other words, it implies domination of a state over other states. Therefore, tools are instruments used in getting works done in an easier manner. Hence, hegemonic tools in this context are the instruments used by the Western world to ensure leadership cum domination of the world. These tools range from ideology, social, political, economic and contextual practices.

To begin with, the West conquered the world through mercantilist ideological tool during pre-capitalist era, which accorded them the impetus to occupy African territory, though through a herculean task of deposing some traditional leaders. At the peak of the mercantilism, slave trading served the ultimate purpose of remaining at the helm of affairs, in other words; slave trade became another tool for the domination of the world by the West. When the mercantilism and the accompanying slave trade appear to be unpopular in the scheme of things, liberalism as an ideology became an available substitute. The liberal hegemonic tools was facilitated and maintained with the concept of International Trade Round, which monitored the effectiveness of free-trade to ensure zero tolerance of economic protectionism (Balaam & Dillman, 2011).

At the zenith of the liberal hegemonic tool is the prevailing globalization and neoliberal mantra. The focus of the globalization and neoliberal tools is among others to make the whole world to be a global village, where there is no restriction to free flow of information, goods and services, the state should divest itself of the economy through the principles of deregulation, privatization and commercialization and remains an umpire in the economy. With the exposition of the hegemonic tools, the study is fashioned to unravel the link between the development challenges in the South and the hegemonic tools of the West. Before I delve into that, it is pertinent for me to explain what development conundrum means in the next segment of the study.

### **Conceptualization of Development Conundrum**

The broad and elaborate definition of development was provided by Rodney (2005), where he emphatically stressed that development is many-sided process, that at the level of an individual, it involves increased skills and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility and greater freedom. In the area of economy, which is known as economic development, he avers that a society develops economically when its members increase jointly their capacity for dealing with the environment, which is dependent on the extent they understand the law of nature through science, the extent they put the understanding into practice by devising tool which is technology and the manner in which the work is organized.

With the elaborate and succinct description of development, conundrum on the other hand connotes the difficulties in actualizing the mentioned features. By implication, development conundrum means the limitations, hitches and impediments to developments. Nevertheless, the history and the whole paraphernalia of African narrative at large and South in general cannot be complete without socio-political and economic meddlesomeness of the West. Therefore, the study is focused on dissecting the relationship between the hegemonic tools of the West and the impediments to development in the South.

### **Methodological Underpinning**

The study adopted Ex-Post-Facto research design. An Ex-Post Facto investigation seeks to reveal possible relationships between two variables by observing an existing condition or state of affairs and searching back in time for plausible contributing factors. It seeks to establish causal relationships between events and circumstances (Kerlinger, 1986). In other words, it finds out the cause of certain occurrences or non-occurrences. This is achieved by comparing the circumstance associated with the observed effects and by noting the factors present in the instances where a given effect occurs and where it does not occur.

The pre- and post-measurement symbols are demonstrated below:

**O1 O2 O3 O4 X O5 O6 O7 O8**

There are series of pre and post measurements, but the change between O4 and O5 is the principal focus for measuring the effect of the quasi-experimental treatment, which are required for establishing causal relationships or cause-effect relationship between variables under study. Here, we shall measure the level of development in Nigeria as a result of the Western hegemonic tools. This method of research design appears to be helpful in the study because the problematic has happened and it is ongoing thus, O1 O2 O3 O4 are the pre-measurement observations while O5 O6 O7 O8 are the post-measurement symbols.

In as much as we have series of pre-and post-measurements, the change between O4 and O5 is the principal focus to measure the effect of the quasi-experimental treatment, that is, the independent variable (x) Hegemonic tools of the West the dependent variable (y) which also represents the development conundrum of the South. The design, despite its lack of control group, to overcome a wide variety of threats to internal validity, the principal threat to the design is history. However, the series of pre-observations from O1 to O3 and post-observations from O6 to O8 will be used to control the interactive effects of history.

Documentary method of data collection is used to gather information from secondary sources such as books, book chapter, journal articles, and newspapers, periodical and internet sources to support or guide my views on the issue under investigation. Also, the generated data were analyzed using Content analysis. More so, we also used the Content analysis method in analyzing data generated from the secondary sources in order to make systematic and logical deductions from them. Content analysis, according to Holsti,

(1969, cited in Stemler, 2001), is a technique of making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages. This method therefore helped us read through the secondary sources of data and be able to extract important data and systematically reduce them into logical and meaningful information that will be useful to this research and others.

### **Theoretical Nexus**

The study is anchored on the theoretical compass of Dependency theory, which is a body of Social Science theories that emphasized on the idea that resources flow from the poor (periphery) states to the wealthy (core) states, where the latter enrich at the detriments of the former. The basic argument of the theory is that poor countries are impoverished because of the premature integration in the world economic system and the lopsided economic relations therein (Rodney, 1972). The theory was propounded by Raul Prebisch in the late 1960s as a reaction to modernization theories, which maintained linear stages of development (Rostow, 1960). The theory among others debunked the above view, stating that underdeveloped countries are not merely primitive versions of developed countries, rather, have unique characteristic of their own (Prebisch, 1970).

However, the theory opposed the free-market economy and suggested delinks of the underdeveloped countries from their connections with the world capitalist economy so that they can carve a niche in keeping with their own needs and be free from pressures of external dictates (Frank, 1976). Furthermore, dependency theory interprets underdevelopment and development as a phenomenon with inverse variation tendencies because the increase in one in a particular society has a resultant effect on the other in another society. More so, it is the inevitable manifestations of the practical results of the global capitalism and the inherent exploitation and contradictory tendencies. The theory also categorized the world into the periphery and core and also insists that the extension of capitalism by the Western world to other parts of the World and its resultant colonialism cum neo-colonialism is responsible for the underdevelopment and dependency of the Third World countries. According to Ake (1981), dependency theory maintained that capitalism is driven by the quest for profit maximization. Specifically, therefore, the theory has the following propositions among others:

- Development is a condition fundamentally different from underdevelopment.
- The distinction between development and underdevelopment places the poorer countries of the world in a profoundly different historical context.
- That alternative uses of resources are preferable to the resource usage patterns imposed by dominant states.
- Belief that there exists a clear 'national' economic interest, which can and should be articulated for each country.
- The diversion of resources over time (and one must remember that dependent relationships have persisted since the European expansion beginning in the 15th century is maintained not only by the power of dominant states but also through the power of elites in the dependent states

(Wallerstein, 2008).

### **Application of the Theory**

The central motive of inventing those hegemonic tools by the West is to consistently make the South hopelessly dependent on them. Indeed, during the pre-capitalist epoch, mercantilism as economic tool was used to protect the Western economy as well as securing territories for the state. This gave the West the ample opportunities to subject the South to the whims and caprices of the West. Going further, the slave trading, which eventually paved way for the scramble for Africa and the corresponding balkanization of the political and administrative landscapes of the states in Africa culminated in colonialism. With the colonial mantra, and through the instrumentalities of direct and indirect rules, the South was subjected to the political and economic dictates of the West.

Liberalism, which metamorphosed to globalization and the attendant neo-liberalism, was essentially a tool for the dependent of the South on the West. The practical illustration is that the reason behind projection of liberalism is to enhance a free-flow of goods and services that innately encourage competition. Worthy to note in the competitive arena is that the technological knowhow determines the fate of the parties in the field of competition. Obviously, the South lacks the requisite capacity to compete favourably, hence they depended on the product of the West. Even the attempts of the South to gain economic grounds and independence through adoption of some elements of mercantilist principles were frustrated through instrumentalities of 'International Economic Rounds'. Through the machinations of the trade rounds, protectionism of any sort and Most Favored Nation (MFN) are frowned at thereby projection reciprocity as the best way to achieve a hitch-free global trade (Gilpin, 1987).

By implication, the development of the South has been hampered by the hegemonic tools of the West, which subjected the South to perpetual dependency on the West. By extension, the more the South delinks from the apron string of the West by looking inwardly to develop environmental friendly ideology for development (Okonkwo, 2025), the more they realise the appropriate means of development and the less development challenges in the South in general and Nigeria in particular.

### **Development Conundrum of the South: An Opportunity Cost of Western Development**

Unequivocally, there is no action without corresponding ripple effects. In the physical world therefore, the principles of give and take cannot be over-emphasized because for one to actually say that he gave, there must be an inevitability of another person that equally received. This is more reason that in economic sense, production is completed when the product gets to the hands of the consumer (Okonkwo, 2016). Correspondingly, this segment of the paper juxtaposed the nexus between the development status of the West and the stagnancy of the South with the position that the development conundrum of the latter is the opportunist cost of the former.

To begin with, the mercantilist moves of the West paved her the way of expansion of their territories, which also expands

the developmental tendencies of their economy. Essentially, as the West increases their chances of economic viability, the South loses the stronghold and expansion of her territorial integrity. For instance, the protection of the Western territory through ungaurded inversion into the territories of the South limits the developmental and social activities of South. More so, the usage of state might to guard the infant industries unleashed unfavorable signal to their Southern counterpart because the emerging and fledgling states in the South lack the strong will powers to protect the growing industries thereby remained under the mercies of the Western financiers and invaders (Gilpin, 1987). The message passed across here is that the development and underdevelopment are two sides of a coin. This is akin to robbing Peter to pay Paul which is in tandem with the principles of push and pull.

Similarly, slave trading implied buying of human beings from a source (South) and selling same to another source (West) obviously, for a bag to be filled, there is inevitability of a bag being emptied. This simple logic applies to buying of a slave from the South and selling them to the West. Regrettably, as people were evacuated from the South to the West in the name of slave trading, the West was filled with people. Naturally, development is human oriented in the sense that it is human being that facilitates it and in the interest of human persons. Impliedly, it is human beings that bring about development in any socio-economic setting. Therefore, when those able bodied men and women were bought over by the West as slaves, it created developmental vacuum in the South while creating and increasing developmental tendencies in the West. The developmental pursuit was seriously enhanced by the subjection of the slaves to inhuman treatments. This was a situation where they were denied relative luxury and rest with the sole aim of bountiful production for the economic boom.

The roles of colonialism in the lopsided development of the South and West cannot be overestimated. Following the conquer and occupation of the South as the Western colony self-centered administration ensued. Indeed, the essence of administration is to enhance development of the economy. Inversely, the Western administration under the cloak of colonialism was a glaring opposite. This is observable when the communication and transportation networks are focused on shipping the products of the South to colonial metropolis. The railways and other transportation routes were configured to achieve the sole objective of developing the West to the detriment of the South. Those goods shipped to the West for production of finished goods that would be retuned back to be sold at exorbitant prices in the South would have been an avenue for development in the South. In political parlance therefore, the South was controlled to the extent that all the decisions were externally made, as you can see that 'he who pays the piper dictates the tone', the decision makers made it to serve their interests. By extension, the more the Western economy grows, the more the Southern economy shrinks which is the simple logic and reciprocity of push and pull.

Liberal ideology on the other hand created room for unequal economic relationship between the South and the North where

the latter with the technological advantage dominates the former. The technological muscles of the West gave the relative edge over the products of the South, by implications; the South remained at the receiving end of the international economic relations. This can easily be explained with the concept of 'Qui Bono' as developed by Susan Strange while trying to understand the inherent logic behind trade relations in the international system. According to her, the concept of qui bono defines who benefits in the complex web of international trade (Strange, 2007). Clarifying further, she delineated the structures of international economic system as follows: 1) production and trade, money and finance, security, knowledge and technology (Balaam & Dillman, 2011) in all the segments of the structures of international trade, the West benefits most to the detriments of the South. Analytically, the productions in the international arena is dominated by the West where the South promotes the domination by patronizing the finished goods, security gadgets and information emanates from them while patronage that is the sole function of the South. Western currency is the strongest and the most reliable currency one can save his money without fear of unnecessary fluctuation. In all, the status of the Western economic development under the aegis of liberalism was facilitated by the deficiency of the South.

Projection of liberalism by the West to replace mercantilism was construed by the South as a ploy to remove a ladder which one used to climb a tree, sequel to the interpretation of liberalism as a limiting factor to development in the South; the South started adopting some elements of mercantilism to protect the infant industries. The international trade round was initiated to frustrate any attempt for protection of the economy by the state. Using the round as a means of checking any form of restriction and impediments to free flow of goods and services favored West because they have the technological wherewithal to compete and dominate the global economic space. This free flow of goods and services with corresponding leverage for Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) gave the West the impetus to invest in the Southern Economy. Multinational and transnational corporations are also the added vista for development of the West because they used the medium to invest and exploit those host economies.

This scenario is transcended to the globalization cum neo-liberal mantra. This among others made the world to appear as a village where everybody can converge and discuss issues of their concern. In this arrangement, unfettered freedom abound which culminated in the neo-imperialism, where the understanding is more or less that once it is West, it is the best. Based on the above inferiority complex on the part of the South, all the products of the West were patronised without any trace of restriction. Without mincing words, the patronage of the Western goods invariably brought about negligence or better still abandonment of the local products. As the Western products are patronized, they stand the chance of enhancing the balance of trade and payment surpluses while the South, through the negligence and abandonment incessantly recorded deficits in the balance of payment and trade calculus. However, the ripple effect of patronising the Western product



is the abandonment of the Southern goods.

Table 2: Hegemonic Tools: Opportunity Cost to West and Forgone Alternative to the South

S/N	Tools	Opportunity Cost to West	Forgone Alternative to the South
1	Mercantilism	Territorial expansions and exploitation of invaded colony	Territorial loss and economic exploitation of the economy
2	Slave Trading	Buying of slaves as manpower for production of goods and services	Loss of able bodied men and women who are potential producers in the economy
3	Colonialism	Socio-economic political control in the interest of the metropolis	Loss of economic and political grip of the economy to the colonial masters
4	Liberalism	Total control of the international economy with the aid of advanced technology	Subjection to the periphery in the global production and distribution context
5	International Trade Rounds	Imposition and control of the international economic system through trade surveillance	Receipt of a foreign development ideology that is at variance with environmental dictate.
6	Globalisation (Neo-Lberalism)	Unlimited access to the economy of the whole world with the ability to control them	Limited stronghold of internal economy as a result of technological weakness

Source: improvised by the Author from Gilpin (1987)

The table 2 above demonstrated the opposite dispositions of the hegemonic tools to the West and the South. Understandable from the table is that the positive needs and outcome of the tools to the West is always manifested negatively to the South. As mercantilism brought expansion of

territory to the West, it bred loss of same to the South. The same negative scenario is seen in the other tools such as slave trade, colonialism, liberalism, international trade rounds and globalisation. However, the result of the relationship of the West and the South is demonstrated on the table below showing the poverty rate and number of poor in the regions of the world.

Table 3: The poverty Rate and the Number of poor in the Regions of the World

S/N	Regions	Survey coverage (%) Jan 2025	Poverty Rate (%)		Number of poor (million)	
			Sep. 2024	Jan 2025	Sep. 2024	Jan 2025
1	East Asia and Pacific	94.4	1.0	2.5	20.3	54.0
2	Europe and Central Asia	93.4	0.5	1.1	2.4	5.3
3	Latin America and Caribbean	90.0	3.5	5.2	22.6	33.6
4	Middle East and North Africa	66.7	6.1	8.5	26.1	37.1
5	Other High Income Countries	90.8	0.6	0.7	7.1	7.8
6	South Asia	84.1	9.7	7.3	186.2	141.5
7	Sub-Saharan Africa	48.8	37.0	45.5	448.0	558.8
8	East and Southern Africa	54.0	43.6	53.4	314.0	390.9
9	Western and Central Africa	41.1	27.3	33.8	134.0	167.9

10	World Total	82.5	9.0	10.5	712.8	838.0
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Source: Poverty and Inequality Platform (2025)

Observable from the table 3 above is that the Western world has lower rate of poverty unlike the South, which recorded a high rate of poverty. For instance, Sub-Saharan Africa has poverty rate of 448.0 in September 2024 and 558.8 in January 2025 whereas Europe and Central Asia recorded 2.4 and 5.3 within the period of time. These noticeable differences occur as a result of the hegemonic tools adopted by the Western world.

Conclusion and Recommendation

This paper identified the discrepancies in the developmental status of the two divides of the world (the West and the South) and interrogated the reason behind the imbalance in the development index. Conjecturally, the paper advanced that it was made possible by the hegemonic tools devised by the

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West to maintain her domineering disposition in the international arena. However, the study found among others that the hegemonic tools by the West, such as mercantilism, slave trade, colonialism, liberalism, international trade rounds and globalisation contributed in different capacity to keep the South in perpetual dependency on the West, which culminated in development conundrum. To shove off the structural imbalance the paper recommended as follows:

1. The South should as a matter of necessity, delink from the prevailing hegemonic tools such as liberalism and the attendant international trade rounds and globalization which still made the South to be dependent on the West.
2. The south should devise an environmental friendly development ideology to enhance all round development. This will have much to do with adoption of some elements of mercantilism to ensure socio-political and economic freedom.

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