Introduction
This paper examines the phenomenon of imperialism and underdevelopment on the basis of the Nigerian experience. It argues that Nigeria has been a trading post connected to global capitalism on disadvantaged terms since about the sixteenth century when its human and material resources were first plundered and have continued to be pillaged by imperialist corporations and the Nigerian compradors.

For purposes of clarity and systematic discussion, we start by defining imperialism and underdevelopment. Though variously defined by both liberal and Marxist scholars, we shall adopt the definition of Sutcliff who has argued in his *Industry and Underdevelopment* that imperialism is the economic control and exploitation of foreign lands arising from the necessity for counteracting the impediments to the accumulation of capital engendered by the internal contradictions of domestic capitalist economy. It is in this sense that Claude Ake argues that the contradictions of capitalism not only transform it, but they also transplant it to a new environment with a bent on profit maximization¹. Michael Barrat Brown has thus associated the concept with an unequal economic relationship between states – not simply the inequality of the large and small, rich and poor trading partners, but the inequality of political and economic dependence of the latter on the former.

On its part, underdevelopment refers to a set of political, social and economic conditions that generate relative poverty and backwardness in any polity. According to Walter Rodney, underdevelopment expresses a particular relationship of exploitation. It is against this background that he has argued the developed capitalist countries exploit the states commonly referred to as ‘underdeveloped’ in the world. And the underdevelopment with which the world is now pre-occupied is a product of capitalist, imperialist and colonialist exploitation².

Though we cannot completely ignore the argument of the bourgeois school of thought, which sees underdevelopment as an aggregation of internal inhibiting factors, we hope to concern ourselves with the underdevelopment
paradigm, which argues that the deep and widespread poverty of Nigeria is concomitant with the Western selfish interest. Nigeria’s relations with the Western world are replete with the features of exploitation, domination and control whose gains accrue to the exploiter at the expense of the exploited. It can hardly be doubted that imperialism encourages and indeed entails the massive export of capital to developing and weak economies, including Nigeria, for the exploitation of their resources. Our position becomes clearer when we take into cognizance Ake’s position that in the era of imperialism, capitalism would only portray best what its inherent nature is: parasitism and exploitative system, par excellence.3

Suffice it to say here that imperialism evokes memories of ugly experiences of exploitation by the advanced and industrialized world and all the major writers in the study of imperialism agree that the impetus or catalyst for modern imperialism comes from economic interests. Imperialism was in effect the extension of the capitalist system, which embraced the whole world—one part being the exploiter and the other, the exploited, the predator and the prey, the hunter and the hunted, the poor and the rich, the oppressor and the oppressed, and recently, the globalizer and the globalized. This implies that the internationalization of the capitalist system has created a dialectical process, which causes development and underdevelopment at the same time.

In Nigeria as elsewhere, underdevelopment is directly linked to the extractive and exploitative effects of imperialism on the socio-political and economic life of Nigeria. It is no longer contested that the nearest fulfilling explanation for western imperialism had been and is the need for new markets and the search for areas of profitable investment. It becomes clear that Nigeria’s relationship with the West is that of parasitism rather than symbiosis when it is recognized that the nature of economic relations is dictated by the developed countries and by international institutions that are mainly under their control or influence.4

Underdevelopment in Nigeria is a historical rather than a spontaneous process. Thus, it is necessary that we go back to history in order to understand where we are coming from and where we are going. Allusions from the forefathers indicate that a configuration of factors some antedating the present world crisis, at least from Africa’s perspective, or otherwise the ‘New World Order’ have combined to bring about underdevelopment in Nigeria, nay the Africa predicament. Osita Eze captures the picture rather graphically when he argues that in the past four or five centuries, Africa which in its relative isolation, was through its internal dynamics, developing its own socio-economic systems and patterns of governance and evolving its own cultural values became brutalized
and subjugated first by the slave trade, then by the 'legitimate' but unequal trade that graduated to mercantilist capitalism and neo-colonialism. And now it is the 'new world order'.

In his *Industry and Development*, Sutcliff isolates three different phases in which imperialism brings about underdevelopment. These include:

1. The initial phase involved plunder (of wealth and slave) and export of capitalist manufactures to the peripheral countries.
2. The second stage involved the export of capital, competition for source of raw materials and the growth of monopoly.
3. The third phase involves a complex post colonial dependency of the periphery countries, in which foreign capital, profit repatriation, etc., all play a role in confirming, distorting or halting economic development and industrialization.

In essence, imperialism has manifested in Nigeria as the slave trade, colonialism, neo-colonialism (principally represented by globalisation in the 21st century). These patterns of domination and exploitation have been used to further the development of underdevelopment in Nigeria. We shall now turn attention to each of these instruments of marginalisation and exploitation that have impoverished Nigeria and Nigerians.

**Imperialism of the Slave Trade Era**

History teaches that a study of the modern world cannot be separated from the birth, growth and coming to maturity of the capitalist system which rose to its height on the basis of raw materials produced by the southern plantation system in the Americas. Colonies in the New World were more or less meant to serve as sources of raw materials and markets for manufactured goods. The tremendous natural resources in the Americas promised great fortunes and fabulous wealth to Europeans who had capital to invest in the region. Land was plentiful for the development of plantation agriculture. That capital was available is not in doubt since producers, investors and other owners of capital had begun the process of persuading their states to aid them in securing new markets and areas of profitable investment through the establishment of overseas protectorates, colonies and sphere of influence.

The only handicap that caused European imperialists sleepless nights was the supply of a labour force that would enhance the planting, tending, harvesting and processing of crops as well as the mining, cleaning, and transportation of minerals. The attempt to overcome this hurdle led to the enslavement of the indigenous Ameridians. Records show that sugarcane and cocoa were