BINDURA UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE EDUCATION

FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES

Implications of USA Tariffs on Sub -Saharan Africa:

Case Studies of Lesotho and South Africa

By

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Abstract

This study analysed the impact of the USA tariff regime for Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) under Executive Order 14257, using Lesotho and South Africa as comparative case studies. The research sought to understand how the withdrawal of preferential market access under AGOA increased vulnerability to external trade shocks in export-oriented industries. The study was guided by Constructivism and Dependency Theory. It adopted an interpretive qualitative research philosophy and a multiple case study design. Data were collected through semi-structured face-to-face and electronic interviews with a purposive sample of thirty participants comprising policy makers, trade economists, researchers, industrial managers, and continental officials. Document analysis was also conducted. Data were analysed using thematic analysis. The results indicate that the tariff instruments reduced competitiveness, disrupted production, lowered employment, decreased investor confidence, and increased sensitivity to external policy shocks in export industries, specifically the textile sector in Lesotho and the automotive sector in South Africa. The findings further show that the global tariff system is tightly integrated and that peripheral economies remain exposed to unilateral actions by major economies. The study concludes that the loss of AGOA preferences exposed structural weaknesses in SSA export economies and confirmed their dependence on external trade policy decisions. The study recommends strengthening regional value chains, accelerating the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), reforming global trade governance, and pursuing coordinated African trade diplomacy to reduce external dependence and build economic resilience. The findings are limited to Lesotho and South Africa and may not be broadly generalizable to other SSA countries. This study contributes to the field of International Political Economy by providing new insights into Africa's response to contemporary protectionist trends.

Keywords: Executive Order 14257, AGOA, AfCFTA, Constructivism Theory, Dependency Theory, Trade Protectionism.

Declaration form

I, Kudakwashe Moyo (B243762B) hereby declare that this dissertation is my own solemnly work and that it has not been copied or lifted from any other sources without acknowledgement.

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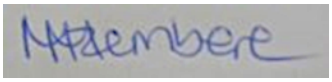
Signed: 

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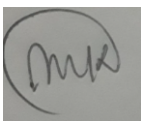
Signature: 

Dedication

This work is dedicated to the workers of Lesotho and South Africa whose livelihoods were disrupted by the USA tariff shocks of 2025. May your resilience inspire stronger regional solidarity and more just global trade. To my family, mentors, and colleagues, thank you for your unwavering support, patience, and belief in the importance of telling Africa's trade story from an African perspective.

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I am deeply grateful to God the Creator of the Universe for guidance throughout this journey. Special thanks go to my supervisor and for her invaluable time, commitment and tireless support. I also extend my heartfelt appreciation to my family for their constant motivation, as well as my colleagues in International, the Department of Peace and Governance, and the wider Bindura University of Science Education community for their contributions to this work.

List of abbreviations

AfCFTA: African Continental Free Trade Area

AGOA : African Growth and Opportunity Act

AU: African Union

BRICS : Group of eleven major emerging markets and developing nations of the world: Brazil, China, Egypt, Ethiopia, India, Indonesia, Iran, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa and United Arab Emirates.

ECOSOC: United Nations Economic and Social Council

EO: Executive Order

FDI: Foreign Direct Investment

GATT: General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade

GDP: Gross Domestic Product

GPN: Global Production Network

GVC: Global Value Chain

IR: International Relations

ITUC-Africa: African Regional Organisation of the International Trade Union Confederation

LDC: Least Developed Country

MFN: Most Favoured Nation

NAAMSA: National Association of Automobile Manufacturers of South Africa

OECD: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

RQ:	Research Question
SACU:	Southern African Customs Union
SADC:	Southern African Development Community
SARDC:	Southern Africa Research and Documentation Centre
SDT:	Special and Differential Treatment
TIPS:	Trade and Industrial Policy Strategies
US / USA:	United States of America
USTR:	Office of the United States Trade Representative
WTO:	World Trade Organisation
ZIMRA:	Zimbabwe Revenue Authority

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CHAPTER ONE

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background to the study

This chapter introduces the study by providing the background to the research, the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, the research objectives, and the research questions. It further presents the assumptions, significance, scope and limitations of the study, defines the key terms used in the research, and concludes with an outline of the organisation of the dissertation.

January 1995 presented a new year that saw the establishment of a new international trade body, namely the World Trade Organisation (WTO), a new international rule-bound body tasked with the formalisation of trade and tariffs, a fundamental shift from the diplomat-led flexible choice agreements that had characterised the post-war archaic informal General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) since 1947 (Hoekman & Kostecki, 2009, pp.42-45). The outdated GATT framework sustained trade and tariffs through ad hoc diplomatic deliberations and consensus acts among a mere twenty-three participant nations. This minority-exclusive grouping of trading parties excluded many nations of the world that sought a place and platform to trade equitably with one another (Hoekman & Kostecki, 2009, pp. 42–45).

The World Trade Organisation (WTO) brought inclusivity, with a vast majority of nations joining the new framework. Hoekman & Kostecki (2009) note that the WTO brought equity as it had a well-defined legal dispute settlement mechanism applicable to all member nations. Today, this system encompasses the vast majority of global commerce (World Trade Organisation, 2024, pp. 112-115). Fundamental to this legal structure are the Special and Differential Treatment (SDT) provisions, which formally recognise the equity principle, which

holds that applying identical trade parameters to sovereign states with highly unequal productive capacities deepens material inequalities rather than eradicates them.

Elaborating on this point, Krugman et al (2022, pp. 210-214) assert that symmetric rules applied to asymmetric economies inevitably favour the technologically advanced core. The SDT provisions provide for extended implementation periods and reduced levels of concession for developing countries, thus granting the exact measurement of the material vulnerabilities of the countries of the North. Similarly, Weinhardt and Schöfer (2022) state that these inherent adaptabilities would otherwise see the rapid de-industrialisation of developing economies by a flood of competition from core economies.

For African countries operating in the WTO framework, the convergence of global market integration and national economic vulnerability highlights a severe developmental dilemma. Open and inclusive international markets provide the required opportunities for export-led growth, but at the same time create extreme dependence of developing economies on changes in foreign legislations, which they are not able to control. An investigation by Amin (2019, pp. The core nations control the developing nations which in turn compels the peripheral nations to give away macroeconomic sovereignty in order to gain access to markets (88-91). This is systemic exposure and can be seen in the non-reciprocal preferential frameworks such as the US Congress enacted the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) in 2000 (USTR, 2024, pp. 12-14)

This attractively dressed US structured tool was presented as a means for sub-Saharan economic advancement; however, the Council on Foreign Relations (2025, para. According to 18), AGOA is based on an asymmetric trade preference policy that is conditional, leading to a dependency system that can be easily affected by policy changes. This investigation revealed that, if AGOA is to continue, its continued market access depends on annual compliance

reviews that are only carried out by the US, with a risk of unexpected withdrawal. This risky situation is affirmed by Rodrik (2018, pp. 156-159) puts the point that unilaterally bestowed, preferential, revocable access for exports is inherently weak in the long-term.

Additionally, this systemic exposure is intensified by the contemporary separation of production across Global Value Chains (GVC) and Global Production Networks (GPN), as modern export-oriented ecosystems, raw materials and semi-processed components traverse across multiple national borders numerous times before reaching their final assembly plants (Antràs, 2020, pp. 551-554). Insofar as GVC integration guarantees African states access to core states' knowledge and market requirements, it exposes them to regulatory tariff interruptions that can occur anywhere in the production network. An analysis by Gereffi (2018, pp. 23-26), an observation corroborated by Kowalski et al. (2015), draws attention to the crisis that ensues when a core economy introduces unilateral trade blockades, that have whiplash effects throughout the supply line and particularly hits peripheral economies that lack the capital and alternative market structures to absorb the abrupt product dislocation (Kowalski et al., 2015, pp. 34-37).

Beyond the legal architecture of the WTO, the period since 2020 has been defined by intensifying geopolitical competition between the US, China, and the EU, and the re-emergence of trade as an instrument of statecraft. This shift from a liberal multilateral order to a more fragmented, bloc-based system has direct implications for African states positioned at the periphery of Global Value Chains.

Antràs and Chor (2022, pp. 88-91) argue that great power rivalry has produced “weaponized interdependence,” whereby control over finance, technology standards, and market access is deployed to coerce alignment. For African states, this manifests as competing integration offers: the US-led AGOA and Prosper Africa initiatives premised on liberalization

and governance conditionalities; the EU's Economic Partnership Agreements and Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism that impose regulatory standards extraterritorially; and China's Belt and Road Initiative and FOCAC frameworks that emphasize infrastructure financing and non-interference but deepen debt exposure and commodity dependence.

This tripolar contest narrows the policy space available at the national level. As Farrell and Newman (2023, pp. 204-207) note, states in structurally weak positions are compelled to engage in "forum shopping" and "norm hedging," aligning with different cores on different issues to preserve autonomy. The decision by a government to deepen AGOA utilization, for example, is no longer a purely economic calculation. It is simultaneously a geopolitical signal regarding alignment with US industrial policy on critical minerals and de-risking from China. Conversely, increased engagement with China's digital infrastructure or the BRICS New Development Bank is read in Washington and Brussels as a strategic pivot, often triggering reviews of preferential access.

Executive Order 14257 of 2 April 2025 illustrates this dynamic at the operational level. The imposition of a 10% universal baseline tariff alongside targeted 30% and 50% tariffs on South Africa and Lesotho cannot be read solely as a trade remedy. Council on Foreign Relations (2025, para. 22) and CSIS (2025) analysis situate the order within a broader US strategy to reshore critical mineral processing and to penalize states perceived to be facilitating transshipment of Chinese goods or pursuing independent foreign policy positions in multilateral forums. For Lesotho, whose textile sector is 90% dependent on AGOA and GVC inputs from Asia, the tariff was an immediate fiscal and employment shock that forced the state to activate emergency budget support and seek alternative markets within the AfCFTA (Government of Lesotho, 2025). For South Africa, the tariff intersected with ongoing disputes over the African Growth and Opportunity Act eligibility criteria, land reform, and positions on

the Russia-Ukraine conflict, demonstrating how trade measures are now bundled with broader foreign policy compliance tests.

Thus, African decision-making is no longer confined to technical responses to WTO rules or SDT provisions. It occurs within a compressed geopolitical field where tariffs, aid, investment, and digital standards are linked. This forces states to make trade-offs between short-term market access and long-term strategic autonomy. The result is a reactive policy posture: the establishment of inter-ministerial task teams after tariff shocks, the hasty diversification of export destinations, and rhetorical commitments to AfCFTA as a buffer, but without the industrial capacity to operationalize it rapidly.

It is within this context of systemic exposure and constrained agency that this study examines the processes before and after the imposition of tariffs, and how structural dependence within core-periphery relations shapes domestic production networks and state responses.

The 2nd of April 2025 manifested these susceptibilities among the periphery states when the US issued Executive Order 14257, which imposed a 10% universal baseline tariff, together with highly disruptive, country-specific tariffs of 30% and 50% on South Africa and Lesotho, respectively. Therefore, this study considers the processes at play before and after the imposition of tariffs, as well as the structural dependence arising from the vulnerability of domestic production networks stemming from the relationship between core and periphery economies.

1. 2. Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to examine the multidimensional implications of the U.S. 2025 tariff policies on the economies of Lesotho and South Africa.

In addition, the study separates out the diplomatic and economic strategies used by these two southern African states as they navigate the trade realignment and drive regional integration initiatives, especially since the loss of conditional access to core markets. The argument used here is that these answers should not be understood as national improvisations or as inevitable effects but as an indication of the agency of the peripheral states in a set of structures that they did not select.

World Trade Organisation (2025) puts emphasis on South Africa and Lesotho, stating that the issues that the LDCs in the export sector in Africa encounter are characterized by decreased revenue of governments, decreased foreign investment and threats to macroeconomic stability, which requires a comprehensive longitudinal analysis as its consequences span years.

1.3. Statement of the problem

African states remain dangerously exposed to unilateral trade decisions taken by major powers, with limited tools to cushion the fallout or to steer their own industrial development. This exposure came into sharp focus on 2 April 2025. US President Donald Trump signed Executive Order 14257, introducing a 10% baseline tariff on all imports and additional duties of 30% on South Africa and 50% on Lesotho. The stated aim was to correct what the US described as “large and persistent annual US goods trade deficits” (White House, 2025, p. 1). In practice, the measures stripped away the tariff advantages African exporters had enjoyed under AGOA since 2000 and left both economies scrambling to respond (Fajgelbaum & Khandelwal, 2022, pp. 205–208).

The damage played out differently in each country, but was severe in both. Lesotho’s economy is built around a single sector: textiles made for US shops. When orders were cancelled overnight, factories shut and thousands of jobs were lost. With few other formal jobs

available, the impact was felt almost immediately across households and communities (Agence France-Presse, 2025, para. 3; Janssen, 2025, para. 2).

South Africa faced a different kind of pressure. Its economy is larger and more diversified, with a long-standing automotive industry at its core. Yet the tariffs fed straight into rising input costs and disrupted supply chains. The National Association of Automobile Manufacturers (2025, para. 2) reported production delays and uncertainty that threatened investment plans built up over years.

As Reuters (2025, para. 6) put it, these events show how tightly African economies are still wired into the trade systems of core countries. A decision made in Washington can ripple through to government budgets, investor confidence, and regional stability in Southern Africa within weeks. The WTO (2025) has warned that this raises serious questions about whether current global trade rules are enough to protect structurally weak economies.

The Lesotho and South Africa cases therefore point to the same underlying issue. Relying on preferential, revocable access to a single large market leaves African countries vulnerable every time that market's politics change. This study contends that the only durable response is a managed move away from that dependence, toward deeper industrial cooperation within Africa itself.

1.4. Objectives of the study

- To identify the specific tariffs imposed on Lesotho and South Africa by the United States under Executive Order 14257.
- To evaluate the direct and indirect consequences of these tariff interventions on domestic production, industrial employment, and value-chain operations in Lesotho and South Africa.

- To examine the strategic, diplomatic and economic modifications deployed by Lesotho and South Africa to manage global trade realignment.
- To develop theoretical and practical frameworks for fairer international trade governance that supports balanced North-South and South-South economic cooperation.

1.5. Research questions

- What are the specific tariff mechanisms and structural frameworks imposed on Lesotho and South Africa under Executive Order 14257?
- How have the 2025 tariff policies impacted domestic production, industrial output, and sectoral employment within Lesotho and South Africa?
- What strategic diplomatic options and economic realignments have Lesotho and South Africa pursued to cope with these external shocks?
- What structural frameworks would be engineered to build fairer trade governance and balance North-South and South-South economic cooperation?

1.6. Assumptions of the study.

- AGOA preferential agreements provided to South Africa and Lesotho highlight deep structural instability between the core and periphery states, basing industrial growth on foreign policy decisions of the US, rather than local market strength.
- The non-reciprocal tariffs have strained relations between South Africa and the United States of America.
- Lesotho will diversify from basing its economy on the textile industry alone.

1.7. Significance of the Study

In presenting the significance of the African regional market to the nations therein, Hagos (2025, para. 3) asserts that the contemporary consolidation of regional markets is an essential

defensive necessity for developing states vulnerable to superpower regulatory shocks. In this vein, this study provides important perspectives for leaders and governments of African nations, regional policymakers, continental institutions, and international relations scholars.

For the regional grouping, the Southern African Development Community (SADC), this study provides a clear empirical map of how changes in external superpower trade policy traverse regional supply networks, while the presentation of selected data informs the design of more effective collective macroeconomic defence strategies against foreign-imposed economic disturbances.

The study is also useful to the African Union (AU) as it contributes to structuring negotiations within the WTO by demonstrating how current market exemptions can be manipulated unilaterally to weaken developing economies. Finally, this investigation offers a clear critique for nations working to implement the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), outlining how ratified expedited regional integration can function as an important shield for domestic industrial capacity against global instability.

1.8. Delimitation of the study

The World Bank (2024) classifies countries by structural income levels to understand how a country's systems would absorb macroeconomic destabilisation (p. 22–25). The context of this study is limited to two countries in the south: Lesotho, a least developed country (LDC) with an extreme concentration of textiles, and South Africa, an upper-middle income industrialized country, with diversified, yet vulnerable, textile production, which is well embedded in global value chains (World Bank 2024). This allows a comparative study and the isolation of structural parameters which absorb external shocks.

This study is a time bound study covering April-December 2025 for immediate impacts and initial responses, with the understanding that medium and long term impacts are

continuing. The study focuses on two industries that are most directly affected in targeted exports: textiles in Lesotho and automotive and minerals in South Africa.

The research theory is conceptually guided by a confluence of Constructivism and Dependency Theories, and explicitly excludes purely quantitative econometric modelling, instead examining interaction between power asymmetries, historical dependency and policy narratives.

1.9. Limitations of the study

The challenge of geography in fieldwork in Lesotho and South Africa was eliminated by audio and video calls, enabling face-to-face interviews and facilitating participants in the study to send impact videos to the researcher. An opportunity arose that required the researcher to travel to Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, the diplomatic city, to conduct fieldwork and conduct face-to-face interviews with officials from the African Union and other agencies. In Zimbabwe, participant engagements were conducted in person, while a video conference call was used to engage with foreign-based respondents.

Data availability and quality posed constant challenges, particularly in Lesotho, where government statistical capacity is limited. Risk reduction strategies included triangulating across multiple sources to establish convergent evidence while admitting uncertainty.

The researcher’s position as an external observer inevitably shaped data collection and interpretation. Participants may have tailored responses based on the researcher's perceptions. Reflexive practices, including journaling, peer debriefing, and participant member checking, partially address concerns, though this cannot eliminate positional effects entirely.

1.10. Definition of key terms

- **Constructivism**

An international relations theory that states' interests and identities are not predetermined, simply based on material capacities, but are negotiated, discursively produced, and socially continuously generated. Constructivism is an approach to trade policy analysis that looks at how political actors create meaning about economic phenomena, such as calling a trade deficit a “security threat” and mobilizing politically in defense of that view. Constructed meanings are a key determinant of policy decisions, as Wendt (1999, pp.) makes clear. 92–97).

- **Dependency Theory**

One of the central concepts of the development economics approach from Latin America is that all the components of the international economic system might systematically be working against the interests of the economy of the periphery if it is tied to the core, characterized by a more technologically advanced economy. The theory explicitly calls into question the orthodox neoclassical arguments that there are automatic forces towards convergence in free trade. To the contrary, it shows how specialization patterns, technological differentials and location in value chains can sustain high inequality, as Prebisch (1950, p. 8–10) and Frank (1967, pp. 3–7).

- **African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA)**

The U.S. government has set unilateral rules of origin and governance compliance requirements for the countries and products eligible for duty-free access under the trade framework, which was enacted in the U.S. in 2000 (Brookings Institution, 2024, para. 12). This research aims to demonstrate preferential frameworks as cases in which the conditional and retractable nature of preferential frameworks results in systemic dependencies, which are susceptible to sudden withdrawal.

- **African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)**

An agreement aimed at achieving a single market in Africa (African Union) that was ratified by all the members of the African Union, (World Bank, 2020, pp. 44–47). It seeks to lower the barriers to trade, shorten supply lines from other parts of the region and shift away from traditional extra-continental markets. It is above all a technical customs arrangement and a constructivist project that manifests the pan-African identity and collective economic dignity (Hagos, 2025, para. 3).

- **Core-Periphery Relations**

Analytical concept from dependency theory, which identifies systemic relationships that allow the economically developed "core" economies to exploit the underdeveloped "peripheral" economies through, and as a result of, unequal exchange, technological monopolies and strong control over the coordination of global value chains (Frank, 1967, pp. 3–4).

- **Global Value Chains (GVCs)**

Current production systems with manufacturing processes split and fragmented across different countries. This renders international trade as a perpetual series of "intermediate inputs" that are bought and sold involving firms at different points of leverage from "autonomous" "lead" firms that set the rules, to "captured" firms that lack independent market access at "assembly" sites (Gereffi, 2018, pp. 23–46).

1.11. Dissertation outline

Chapter One: Establishes the research foundation, spelling out the background, statement of the problem, operational objectives, core research questions, delimitations, and limitations of the study.

Chapter Two: This chapter provides the major literature and validates the topic. It also contains the principal theories on which the research will be based. The major theories are Constructivism and Dependency Theory.

Chapter Three: This chapter covers the research philosophy and paradigm that guided the research, research design and approach, population, sampling procedures, data collection methods and instruments, data analysis procedures, ethical considerations, quality and trustworthiness measures, methodological limitations, and concludes with a chapter summary.

Chapter Four: It contains the research methodology, research design, the identified appropriate population, procedures for data collection, the reliability and validity of specific instruments, how data will be analysed, and the research instruments.

Chapter Five: It contains a summary of the research from chapters one to five. There are conclusions linked to the study objectives, as well as suggestions for further research for specific beneficiaries of the study.

CHAPTER TWO

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Introduction

This literature review chapter is offers a thorough analysis of tariffs as trade policy instruments, tracking their historical deployment throughout different economic contexts and their contemporary manifestations through the lens of the 2025 United States tariff impositions on South Africa and Lesotho, and simultaneously addresses the four research objectives that support this study.

Firstly, is to examine the conceptual foundations of tariffs, exploring the definitions, the varying types of tariffs, and the theoretical rationales on which their deployment is established upon. Secondly, the chapter looks back at sovereign protectionism's past and present applications, and focuses on the United States-China trade war and its global implications. Thirdly, it analyses the peculiar effects of imbalanced tariff policies on developing economies, examining the shortcomings of preferential policies within the Southern African region, in the two case studies of South Africa and Lesotho, and finally, it sets-out the conceptual framework by synthesizing Constructivism and Dependency Theory to provide the analytical lens needed to read the systemic shocks created by the Executive Order 14257.

2.2. Theoretical framework

This study was guided by Dependency Theory and Constructivism. Dependency Theory provides the structural and material lens to explain why African economies, particularly South Africa and Lesotho, are disproportionately vulnerable to the 2025 United States tariffs. Constructivism provides the ideational lens to explain how the tariffs are understood, justified,

and responded to by both the United States and African states. Together, these frameworks explain both the structural constraints facing Africa and the role of ideas, norms, and identity in shaping the political response to the tariff shock.

Dependency Theory offers the most direct explanation for the asymmetric impact of Executive Order 14257. Developed by Frank (1967) and later extended by Amin (2019), the theory argues that the global economy is organised hierarchically into a "core" of industrialised, capital- and technology-rich states and a "periphery" of states that specialise in the export of raw materials and labour-intensive manufactures. Trade between core and periphery does not produce convergence. Instead, it reproduces unequal exchange and locks peripheral economies into subordinate positions within global value chains.

This structural condition is clearly evident in the case of Lesotho and South Africa. Under the African Growth and Opportunity Act, Lesotho developed a garment industry almost entirely dependent on duty-free access to the US market. The industry performs assembly operations using imported fabrics and does not control design, branding, or retail networks (Gereffi, 2018). Similarly, South Africa’s automotive sector, which accounted for approximately 60% of its exports to the US under AGOA, is integrated into US supply chains as a producer of finished vehicles and components (National Association of Automobile Manufacturers of South Africa, 2025). Dependency Theory classifies such industries as "captured" nodes. Because firms in the periphery do not own the high-value segments of the value chain, they have limited capacity to redirect exports when the core state changes market access rules.

The design of the 2025 tariffs further reflects dependency dynamics. Executive Order 14257 imposed a 10% universal baseline tariff and country-specific rates of 30% on South Africa and 50% on Lesotho, while exempting more than 1,000 product categories including

crude oil and critical minerals (Usman, 2025). By targeting manufactured goods and exempting primary commodities, the policy reinforces Africa's role as a supplier of raw materials rather than as an emerging industrial competitor. This reproduces the centre-periphery division described by Amin (2019), in which surplus accumulation and technological upgrading occur in the core while the periphery remains confined to low-margin activities.

Finally, Dependency Theory explains why African states could not immediately offset US market losses through regional integration. Despite the existence of the African Continental Free Trade Area and SADC industrialisation protocols, intra-African trade remains below 15% of total African trade due to infrastructure deficits, non-tariff barriers, and limited productive capacity (Hagos, 2025). As price takers in the global economy, peripheral states lack the capital and market size to retaliate or to absorb displaced exports in the short term (Morlacco, 2025). The economic dislocation therefore stems not from domestic policy failure, but from the structurally subordinate position of African economies in the international division of labour.

While Dependency Theory explains the material constraints, Constructivism explains how interests and responses are formed. Constructivism rejects the assumption that state interests are fixed or determined only by material power. Instead, it argues that interests, identities, and even "threats" are socially constructed through ideas, discourse, and interaction (Wendt, 1999). As Wendt (1992) famously argued, "anarchy is what states make of it." In this view, international politics is a contest over meaning as much as it is a contest over resources.

Constructivism is essential for understanding both the US justification for the tariffs and the African response. The Trump administration did not present the 2025 tariffs as simple protectionism. It framed them as "Liberation Day" and as a response to a "national emergency" caused by trade deficits (Usman, 2025). From a constructivist perspective, this framing matters. By constructing trade imbalances as a security threat, the US created a new norm that

legitimised the use of unilateral tariffs and the bypassing of World Trade Organization procedures (Finnemore & Sikkink, 2001). The tariff thus became a speech act that redefined economic interdependence as a problem of sovereignty and survival.

Constructivism also explains the context of US-China competition in Africa. China's engagement in Africa is not only material. It is also normative. Through the Belt and Road Initiative and BRICS, Beijing promotes norms of "win-win cooperation," "non-interference," and "multipolarity" (Brautigam, 2019; Alden, 2020). The US tariffs can therefore be read as an attempt to reassert a competing norm: that development and market access are conditional on alignment with the US-led liberal order. The tariff policy is thus part of a broader ideational contest over which model of development will prevail in Africa.

Most importantly, Constructivism explains African agency and the political response through Agenda 2063 and SADC. Dependency Theory predicts passivity and continued marginalisation. Constructivism shows how African leaders actively construct meaning from the tariff shock. Agenda 2063 is explicitly an identity project. It articulates a vision of "The Africa We Want" based on self-reliance, industrialisation, and continental integration (African Union, 2015). Similarly, the SADC Strategy and Roadmap on Industrialisation constructs the norm that regional value chains are the solution to vulnerability to external shocks (Southern African Development Community, 2015).

When the US tariffs were imposed, African policymakers did not only calculate economic losses. They used the moment to legitimise long-standing integration goals. The tariffs were constructed domestically as evidence that dependence on extra-continental markets is unsustainable and that AfCFTA must be accelerated (Hagos, 2025). In this way, an external material shock was translated, through discourse, into political momentum for regionalism.

This demonstrates that ideas mediate between structure and action. Material vulnerability exists, but how states respond to it depends on how they interpret it.

In synthesis, Dependency Theory and Constructivism together provide a complete explanation of the 2025 tariff episode. Dependency Theory explains the "structure": why South Africa and Lesotho are so exposed, why the tariffs reinforce commodity dependence, and why immediate retaliation is not feasible. Constructivism explains the "agency": how the US constructed the tariffs as a security necessity, how China and BRICS constructed an alternative development narrative, and how African states constructed the shock as a justification for pan-African integration.

This integrated framework allows the study to move beyond a purely economic analysis. It traces how material structures in the global economy interact with ideas and identity in Washington, Beijing, and Pretoria to produce specific policy outcomes in Maseru. It also provides a basis for assessing whether Agenda 2063 and SADC can move from normative aspiration to material transformation, or whether structural dependence will continue to limit African options.

2.3. Conceptualising Tariffs

The following is the explication of the tariff concept.

2.3.1. Defining Tariffs in International Trade.

According to Krugman, Obstfeld, & Melitz (2022), a tariff constitutes a levy prescribed by sovereign authorities on merchandise transiting national boundaries, typically administered and collected by customs authorities at the precise ports of entry, which in turn raises the domestic cost of imported goods within a given country, above the prevailing world market rate (Krugman, Obstfeld, & Melitz, 2022, pp. 187–190). Inasmuch as tariffs might theoretically

be applied to both imports and exports, import tariffs remain the principal form in present-day global trade, as they fulfil multiple policy objectives that export tariffs cannot readily achieve.

According to Salvatore (2020), the fundamental mechanism of a tariff is to raise the domestic price of imported goods relative to their world market price, thereby creating a price wedge between international and domestic markets. This rise in import prices decreases the price competitiveness of foreign products and gives some protection to domestic industries, as foreign products are replaced by domestic products (Salvatore, 2020, pp. 104–108). Krugman, Obstfeld and Melitz (2022) also contend that tariffs can stimulate domestic production and jobs in protected industries, but raise the price of goods to consumers and lower consumer welfare, as consumers absorb a large share of the tariff's burden in the retail price of the goods. Thus, tariffs have significant welfare impacts, transferring the income of consumers to domestic producers and governments, and inducing efficiency losses in the economy (Krugman, Obstfeld, & Melitz, 2022, p. 198–201).

The tariff-specific intervention creates a condition in which consumers who wish to purchase foreign-imported goods and services must pay a high premium or inflated prices. Evidence of this is provided by the Council on Foreign Relations (2025), which asserts that tariffs are a type of tax applied to imports from other countries, with economists generally agreeing that the costs are largely borne by consumers through higher prices (Council on Foreign Relations, 2025, pp. 14–16). This cost incidence has major consequences for welfare analysis, because it suggests that domestic consumers bear a substantial portion of the tariff cost rather than foreign producers or the government.

In Zimbabwe, for instance, the high cost of motor vehicles, including duties paid to the government through the Zimbabwe Revenue Authority (ZIMRA) upon importation from foreign markets, is largely tied to the lack of local manufacturing of vehicles in Zimbabwe or

minimal manufacturing, if any; thus, a duty of at least 100% is levied on all vehicle imports. Feenstra and Taylor (2021, pp. In 142–145, it is explained that this tax wedge has a real effect on the competitive balance of imported and domestic products.

Similarly, tariffs are a form of indirect tax applied to foreign imports, with trade economists generally concluding that the financial incidence of these costs is predominantly borne by domestic consumers through higher retail prices. This cost incidence has serious implications for macroeconomic welfare analysis, and illustrates that protectionism is imposed on the domestic citizens, not the foreign producers or foreign governments, as its main burden. In elaborating on these dynamics, the Brookings Institution (2025, para. As border taxes, tariffs systematically affect the distribution of resources in the affected economy, by changing the competitive relationship between domestic and foreign producers, according to 3). 32–35).

The functional processes of tariffs involve importers paying the assessed duties to customs authorities before goods are released into the domestic market. Within U.S. context, the Customs and Border Protection agency collects tariffs on goods, their quantity and country of origin (USAFacts, 2025, para. 3). This administrative process generates direct costs of the tariff and indirect costs in terms of compliance costs, documentation requirements and potential delays at border crossings.

2.1.1 Classification of Tariffs by Composition and Purpose

Carbaugh (2020) speculates that there are three main technical forms of international trade economics: (i) specific tariffs, (ii) ad valorem tariffs, and (iii) compound tariffs (Carbaugh, 2020, pp. 88–92). In this postulate, a specific duty will be charged at the port of entry based on the physical quantity of a particular commodity, for example, new pneumatic tyres coming into Zimbabwe are subject to a specific duty at the port of entry of 15%+US$5/kg, according to the data from ZimTrade (2019), p. 3.

Further, the average ad valorem duty on sardine products in Zimbabwe is 22.5% of the customs value of the imported goods, and the rate of the duty varies from 5%-40% for merchandise imported into Zimbabwe (ZimTrade, 2019, p.3). This is because this structure automatically adjusts the absolute tax burden to global price changes and inflation. A combination of both mechanisms, imposing a particular unit rate and an ad valorem percentage at the same time is known as a compound tariff, and it is used to target both volume and specialised value aggressively (Carbaugh, 2020, pp. 88–92).

Salvatore (2020) notes that each of these formulated taxes or tariffs carries highly different consequences for protection levels across volatile price cycles, with specific tariffs, for instance, providing amplified protection during periods of global deflation or declining world prices, as the fixed monetary cost effect represents a progressively larger percentage of the lower-priced good (Salvatore, 2020, pp. 104–108). In addition, ad valorem tariffs sustain consistent, uniform protection levels across price fluctuations, as the tax percentage remains mathematically constant regardless of the asset's nominal value (Salvatore, 2020, pp. 104–108).

Given that tariffs are country imposed at a given point of entry, findings generated by the Brookings Institution (2025, para. 2) affirm that beyond the clear structural mechanics of tariffs, the tariffs serve three primary functional purposes in contemporary statecraft, which is revenue generation, protection of national industries, and tactical geopolitical leverage in a highly competitive global commerce arena (Brookings Institution, 2025, para. 2).

According to standard welfare analysis by Krugman et al (2022), tariffs generate several effects: they raise domestic prices, reduce consumer surplus, increase producer surplus for protected industries, generate government revenue, and create missed opportunity losses representing economic inefficiency in a given importing state (Krugman et al., 2022, pp. 198–201). Yet this textbook account of tariff incidence — developed to describe policy choice

within a single sovereign market — is silent on what happens when the levying state and the exposed state occupy structurally unequal positions within the trading system. It is this silence that is the space this dissertation seeks to inhabit. In addition, the Brookings Institution (2025) notes that the economy generates jobs, with 35% of the jobs it creates in the construction sector. At the same time, protective tariffs, as opposed to revenue-generating tariffs, are intended to raise the prices of imports to make local products competitive with foreign ones, and to let local producers expand their business if they cannot compete in the international market, as argued by 2) and Krugman et al. (2022). 2; Krugman et al., 2022, pp. 192–195).

Last, Irwin (2017) reminds us that strategic tariffs are imposed to achieve aggressive economic and/or political goals and are applied to gain the cooperation of foreign states to change their internal policies, IP laws or labour practices (p. 412–415). Structural underdevelopment such as that of Lesotho, however, makes it impossible to plan a tariff deployment because the nations concerned do not have a large domestic market or macroeconomic strength to demand concessions from the core economies.

2.3.2. Economic Theories of Tariff Effects.

Classical and neoclassical welfare analysis points out that tariffs generate several predictable, interconnected macroeconomic effects which include (i) the overall raise in domestic prices, (ii) the reduction or contraction of consumer surplus,(iii) the artificial expansion of producer surplus for insulated industries, (iv) the generation of nation state revenue, and (v) the grand creation of unrecoverable missed opportunity losses representing pure economic shortcomings (Krugman et al., 2022, pp. 198–201).

Salvatore (2020) notes that introducing a tariff in a free-market economy negatively affects consumers by restricting choices and raising the baseline cost of living. While the policy expands the producer surplus of the protected sector and secures national customs revenue, the

resulting distortion in capital and labour allocation creates a net negative for overall economic efficiency (Salvatore, 2020, pp. 110–112).

Fundamentally, the ultimate welfare effect is heavily dependent on the imposing country's macroeconomic scale, as the net welfare effect varies between the exporting and importing countries. For a gigantic free market economy capable of dictating global supply and demand, such as that done by the United States and China, a tariff can in application, create favourable terms of trade gains for the importing country, which occurs when the imposing nation forces foreign exporters to lower their pre-tariff prices and absorb the tax just to sustain access to the vital expansive consumer market of the importing nation. The net effect thus lowers international prices of specific commodities before market penetration.

However, Morlacco (2025, para. In a small open economy in which the producer or consumer is a price taker, 4) shows that the imposition of tariffs leads to definite negative welfare effects. The tariff will increase the domestic costs, reduce the quantity of trade, and reduce living standards of the small economy, while providing no additional benefits of the terms of trade in return. This difference has far-reaching implications for the African economies which are small-scale players in the world economy and which simply cannot have any impact on world prices through their own trade and tax policies on their borders.

More recent theories of trade have incorporated the more complex real-world factors such as imperfect competition, economies of scale and aggressive strategic behaviour into the classical analysis. The new trade theory of scholars like Krugman highlights that the patterns of international trade are typically more shaped by factors that go beyond natural comparative advantage, such as increasing return to scale and large, fixed entry costs and path-dependent specialisation patterns resulting from first-mover advantage (Feenstra & Taylor, 2021, pp. 150–154). Such findings make simple free trade welfare analysis more complicated: strategic-tariffs trade policy models suggest that early intervention by the state (aggressive) can generate

structural competitive advantage on the world markets in the longer term (Rodrik, 2018, p. 172–175).

But such strategic gains can only be achieved with a very competent apparatus of state, substantial monetary reserves, and a large home market. Peripheral economies face often insurmountable institutional constraints, institutional weakness and a lack of capital, making them extremely sensitive to retaliatory external policy changes and rendering state intervention in these economies extremely difficult. Consequently, contemporary trade governance, as described by Gereffi (2018), cannot be adequately understood solely through the lens of ideal free-market models and also demands a rigorous structural analysis of how historical power imbalances strongly shape the deeply uneven distribution of global trade gains (Gereffi, 2018, pp. 34–38).

2.4. Historical Transformation of Tariff Policies in Global Trade

2.4.1. Tariffs in Early Trade History and Mercantilism

The use of tariffs as instruments of trade policy has deep historical origins, with early forms of border taxation evident in ancient civilisations such as Rome, where duties of 1–5% were levied on internal trade and 12–25% on goods entering the empire (Temin, 2013, p. 67). Tariffs were, however, deployed most systematically and aggressively as tools of national economic policy during the mercantilist period, from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries. During this era, European states pursued economic self-sufficiency and the accumulation of bullion through the active promotion of exports and restriction of imports, using high protective duties, subsidies and trade regulations as central instruments of statecraft (Heckscher, 1955, p. 24; Viner, 1948, p. 5). As Irwin (2017, p. 23) observes, mercantilist governments viewed tariffs not merely as sources of revenue but as strategic weapons in commercial rivalry between competing powers.

In this time Mercantilist theory considered the role of international trade as a zero-sum game for precious metals and the governments encouraged exportation of raw materials and imposed high tariffs on manufactured imports (Irwin 2017, p. 215–219). A policy attitude of fighting was adopted, with the purpose of creating artificial trade surpluses and trapping gold and silver. These were seen as the only appropriate ways of determining national wealth and military security.

According to Irwin (2017), tariff policy became one of the most divisive political issues in nineteenth-century America. Protective tariffs were supported by the manufacturing interests of the north because these protected the developing industries of the north from foreign competition, while the general sentiment of the agricultural states of the south was against high tariffs, due to the fact that these tariffs increased the cost of manufactured goods imported into the south and increased the danger of retaliatory tariffs being placed on agricultural exports (Irwin, 2017, p. 238–244). The conflict over the tariff extended into the broader political and economic polarization that eventually led to the American Civil War, and as such trade policy is not only firmly entrenched in domestic political and economic dynamics, but is also a major factor in that polarization.

According to the Brookings Institution, tariffs were the biggest source of federal revenue in the United States from the founding of the nation until the federal income tax was instituted in 1913 under the 16th Amendment. At this time, tariffs were used not just as fiscal policies but as an instrument of policy making in terms of protection and guiding industrial development of the country (Brookings Institution, 2025, para. 3).

2.4.2. The Smoot-Hawley Tariff and the Great Depression

The Smoot-Hawley Tariff Act of 1930 is considered to be one of the most important pieces of protectionist trade legislation in modern economic history. The law raised the average

tariff rate paid in the United States by about 20 percent on over 20,000 imported items, and was among the most sweeping tariff increases ever enacted by the United States (Irwin, 2011, pp. 62–65). The Act was supposed to support domestic producers when the Great Depression was beginning, but many scholars believe that it drove up international trade tariffs and ultimately reduced trade as the early 1930s progressed (Irwin, 2011; Eichengreen & Irwin, 2010).

Prior to its enactment, more than 1,000 economists signed a public petition urging President Herbert Hoover to veto the legislation, arguing that higher tariffs would increase domestic prices, reduce exports, and provoke retaliatory trade measures from major trading partners (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2024). Despite these warnings, President Hoover approved the legislation, reflecting the strong political pressure exerted by protectionist interests at the time.

The economic consequences of the Smoot-Hawley Tariff became evident shortly after its implementation. According to Mitchener et al. (2022), United States imports from Europe declined from approximately US$1.3 billion in 1929 to US$390 million in 1932, while exports to Europe fell from US$2.3 billion to US$784 million over the same period. More broadly, global trade contracted by approximately 66 percent between 1929 and 1934, illustrating the far-reaching effects of escalating protectionist measures during the Great Depression (Mitchener et al., 2022).

Eichengreen and Irwin (2010) argue that the principal weakness of the Smoot-Hawley Tariff was not merely the increase in United States tariff rates, but the retaliatory measures adopted by major trading partners. These reciprocal tariff increases intensified the contraction of international trade and transformed what might have remained a severe national recession into a prolonged global economic depression (Eichengreen & Irwin, 2010, pp. 871–874). The

experience subsequently influenced post-war policymakers to establish multilateral trade institutions aimed at preventing similar protectionist cycles in the future (Hoekman & Kostecki, 2009, pp. 72–75).

2.4.3.The Post World War II Liberal Trade Order: GATT and WTO

Hoekman & Kostecki (2009) submit that the consequences of the Smoot-Hawley Tariff Act of 1930 led to the establishment of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) in 1947, following the end of the Second World War. U.S. policymakers were now determined to establish an institutional trade framework to prevent a return to the trade wars of the 1930s–late 1940s. The desired framework was to ensure that there would be multilateral tariff negotiations, clear operating principles that include the principle of the Most Favoured Nation (MFN) non-discrimination, among other conditions (Hoekman & Kostecki, 2009, pp. 64–67)

The representatives of the trading nation-states engaged in several negotiations with the formative being held in Geneva, Switzerland, where 23 countries signed the successive GATT on October 30, 1947. After that initial agreement, a series of eight negotiation rounds were held over five decades between Switzerland, France and Uruguay, during which substantive tariff reductions were achieved, including a reduction of average duties on manufactured goods from a high of forty per cent to below five per cent.

In January 1995, the GATT transitioned into the World Trade Organisation (WTO), an institution that currently encompasses 164 member countries and conducts more than 98 per cent of world trade within its binding dispute-resolution framework (World Trade Organisation, 2024, pp. 14–17). While the noble WTO can be commended and its Special and Differential Treatment (SDT) provisions do reflect the unique situation and difficulties that developing countries face, including longer timeframes for implementing trade policies and less stringent commitments, as noted by Rodrik (2018), the rules based structures of the WTO have a proven

track record of being inadequate in practice, with the rules failing to meaningfully offset the structural asymmetries that favour core industrial powers on a consistent basis (Rodrik, 2018, pp. 182–185). The story of how a group of economists founded GATT to prevent a free-for-all in tariff wars is illuminating; thirty years later, a group of economists tried to create such a mechanism for GATTs successor, but failed to do so. This space is not a coincidence: it is the institutional space that was filled by Executive Order 14257.

2.5. The United States – China Trade War: Causes, Evolution and Global Implications.

2.5.1. Origins and Escalations of Trade Tensions

The intense trade conflict between the United States and China that emerged in 2018 represented the most significant foundational disruption to the post-war liberal trade order since the establishment of GATT (Bown & Kolb, 2021, pp. 45–48). The Trump administration justified this massive tariff escalation through several arguments, which include, the US justification for the tariffs centered on a set of long-standing grievances against China. These included the existence of massive and persistent bilateral trade deficits, allegations of state-sponsored intellectual property theft, the imposition of forced technology transfers on American corporations operating in China, the provision of large-scale industrial subsidies that distorted global competitive conditions, and perceived currency manipulation designed to maintain artificial export competitiveness.

Bown (2021) notes that although the arguments and concerns raised by Washington had been debated in US policy debates for years, the US decided not to raise these complaints through the WTO's established dispute settlement system, as it was viewed as excessively slow and deferential, the administration thus deployed highly aggressive, unilateral tariffs under the archaic Section 232 which speaks to national security and Section 301 on unfair trade practices frameworks of US trade law (Bown, 2021, pp. 812–815).

Fajgelbaum & Khandelwal (2022) submit that the trade war unfolded through several tariff waves between 2018 and 2019, first on steel and aluminium imports from multiple countries, including China, which were defended under national security grounds of Section 232, where tariffs of twenty-five per cent were imposed (Fajgelbaum & Khandelwal, 2022, pp. 208–212). Additionally they note that Section 301 tariffs specifically targeting Chinese imports proceeded through multiple rounds which includes the July 2018 tariffs on 34 billion dollars of imports, August 2018 added another 16 billion dollars, September 2018 expanded coverage to 200 billion dollars at initially ten percent rates later raised to twenty-five percent, and September 2019 brought additional tariffs affecting virtually all remaining Chinese imports (Fajgelbaum & Khandelwal, 2022, pp. 212–215).

Such confrontational approach was different from the ones where dialogue, negotiation and multilateral mechanisms were built into, and it has sparked a series of tit for tat tariff waves in 2018 and 2019. As a result of this, by end-2019, the United States had implemented heavy tariffs on some $350 billion of Chinese imports and China had matched those tariffs on some $100 billion of U.S. exports (Fajgelbaum & Khandelwal, 2022, pp. 212–215). This conflict strikingly illustrated how intricate and difficult to analyse data-driven commercial balances can be militarised to provide aggressive unilateral protection without the supervision of the multilateral forum, as analysed in this study.

2.5.2. Economic Impact Assessment of the Trade War.

In this regard, numerous microeconomic analyses of the US-China trade war were conducted, giving valuable evidence on how costs are passed from one sector to the other of the economy and to stakeholders who are not directly affected by the trade war. This is despite the fact that scholars like Amiti, Redding, & Weinstein (2019, pp. According to 187-190), domestic import prices were almost directly impacted by the cost of American import duties, meaning that it is American consumers and businesses that are being hurt by the tariff costs

from the trade war rather than Chinese exporters. That's a clear sign that the financial burden of the trade war fell almost entirely on domestic American corporate importers and retail consumers instead of lower margins for foreign Chinese businesses (Amiti, Redding, & Weinstein, 2019, p. 187–190). Based on their in-depth study, they believe that the tariffs imposed in 2018 cost the American public about $ 1.4 billion monthly in terms of real income because of increased prices and reduced efficiency in the supply chain.

The authors, Fajgelbaum, Goldberg, Kennedy and Khandelwal (2020, pp. These impressive opening conclusions were confirmed by 1–5) who estimated that the annual cost to American consumers and importers to be an astounding $ 51 billion. A comprehensive review concluded that the trade war unambiguously lowered aggregate real income in both countries, generating severe microeconomic friction. The Tax Foundation (2024, pp. The overall impact of these tariffs was estimated by 12–14) at about an average regressive tax increase of approximately 1,200 dollars per American household, agreeing with a very detailed and careful study by Autor et al (2024) that these massive protective tariffs had no clear impact on bringing back domestic manufacturing jobs in America, but rather inflicted severe, retaliatory harm on American agricultural exports (Autor et al., 2024, p. 115–118).

The impact was also significant but localised in China; using satellite measurements of exposure to nighttime light, Chor and Li (2024) identified per capita income losses of 2.52% and direct job losses of 1.62% for industrial grids in China that had a high exposure compared with those without exposure (Chor & Li, 2024). About 70 percent of China's population lived in areas with low direct exposure to tariffs, however. Such localized impacts, mostly in export-oriented coastal areas, also brought up some apprehensions related to inequality and political economy factors within China.

2.5.3. Global Spillover Effects and Third-Country Impacts.

The bilateral trade war between the world's two largest economies had had spill over effects on third countries, not directly part of the conflict. Fajgelbaum, Goldberg, Kennedy, Khandelwal, and Taglioni (2024) investigated the reactions of bystander countries to the trade war and discovered that countries affected by exports that were substitutes for products targeted by U.S. and Chinese tariffs experienced strong export growth (Fajgelbaum et al., 2024, pp. 295–312). The countries with exportable commodities that were able to increase their production quite quickly gained particularly, countries with complementary exportable commodities gained less. This supports the idea that international trade disputes have a net effect on bilateral trade, but can cause a re-route of global trade flows, not a cessation of trade flows. The biggest winner of this world trade diversion was Vietnam, whose electronics and textiles exports boomed in the markets of the coastal countries of East Asia, which were previously most heavily dominated by Chinese exports.

The benefits for developing countries, however, were very sensitive to their pre-existing production capacity, port facilities and product substitutability with Chinese products, as highlighted by Fajgelbaum et al. (2024). Those countries in the developing world that didn't have an existing nimble manufacturing sector or that didn't make complimentary goods to China's products, were positioned at a significant disadvantage in the larger trade picture, and in the face of potential trade chain disruptions (Fajgelbaum et al., 2024, pp. 295–312). The impact of the trade war on the African economies was largely indirect, via commodity price fluctuations, exchange rate volatility, and global growth.

2.6. Tariffs and Developing Economies: Theoretical and Empirical Perspectives

2.6.1. Dependency Theory and Structural Asymmetries in Global Trade.

Dependency Theory emerged in the mid-twentieth century from the work of Latin American scholars Raúl Prebisch (1950, pp. 8–10) and Hans Singer (1950, pp. 473–476) as an

important response to modernisation theories that predicted convergence between developed and developing economies through trade integration. The theory argues that international economic integration and specialisation systematically disadvantage peripheral economies when trade tightly links them to technologically advanced, capital-rich core economies (Frank, 1967, pp. 3–7). The anchor theory of this study, and its framework, demonstrated that primary commodity exporters face secularly deteriorating terms of trade as demand for manufactures grows faster than demand for raw materials, whereas technological progress in manufacturing accrues primarily to producers rather than consumers through imperfect competition (Frank, 1967, pp. 3–7). Over decades, the global demand for cutting-edge manufactured goods and intellectual property has grown vastly faster than the demand for basic raw materials, leading to an inevitable, structural transfer of wealth from the periphery to the core.

In these contemporary structures, peripheral states are typically confined to low-margin, highly precarious specialisations involving labour-intensive component manufacturing, thus trapping them in a variety of rigid specialisation patterns that offer only partial developmental gains, technological transfer is limited and macroeconomic policy space is severely restricted. In this regard, the dependency theory is relevant to this investigation because of its focus on the position of the states in the international economy; a focus of interest in the study of the impacts of tariffs on the current state of affairs in Lesotho and South Africa. Both countries have export economies geared towards the U.S., dependent on preferential arrangements which can be dramatically disrupted if they are renegotiated or terminated.

The narrow focus on textile exports destined for American retailers is an example of captured positioning in buyer-driven global commodity chains in which Lesotho conducts labour-intensive assembly work without acquiring design skills, ownership of brands or customer relationships that would allow it to have autonomy in adjusting (Gereffi, 2018, p. 23–26). This particular industry was developed, cultivated, tended and tended to, to allow for the

use of the non-reciprocal American trade preferences, creating a weak industrial monoculture that was utterly and irretrievably dependent on the legislative good will of others (Council on Foreign Relations, 2025, para. 18).

It is an extreme course of positional differentiation that renders relatively easily vulnerable the lead firms in the "core", who own the intellectual property, product specifications and global branding, while at the same time it renders the unfortunate captured firms in the "periphery", who perform discrete, low skills assembly operations, highly vulnerable. It's an extreme course of positional differentiation that makes it easy for the lead firms in the "core", who own the intellectual property, product specifications and global branding, to relatively easily re-route their supply networks around new tariffs, while for the unlucky captured firms in the "periphery", who perform discrete, low skills assembly activities, it can mean absolute, binary choices between accepting completely degraded financial terms or liquidating their operations. One of the benefits of dependency analysis is its vivid portrayal of the fact that unequal exchange can still be observed in seemingly modernised and very globalised manufacturing networks. It exposes peripheral states completely to external policy shocks, which are formulated in foreign capitals, and are out of their democratic and economic control.

If the tariffs are unilateral and are imposed on this particular sector, the country is immediately subject to economic disturbance, a disruption that can be fatal. As captured, companies do very little under the close external corporate coordination; they cannot easily move into more valuable activities or they can't easily shift their large production to regional African customers. Dependency theory can be used to show that the fragility of Lesotho's industries is not just the consequence of institutional failure in the country, but a direct consequence of the country's structurally dependent position at the bottom of the global division of labour, as it is calculated.

2.6.2. Global Value Chains and Tariff Transmission Mechanisms

Today, dependency relationships have grown even stronger in the world of international economics, as the world has become more globalised. The dependency relations, according to Amin (2019), have grown stronger in the era of globalisation, with developing nations increasingly being linked into global production networks (GPN) and/or global value chains (GVC) by the terms set by transnational corporations (TNCs) from the Western core economies or East Asian core economies (Amin, 2019, p. 104–108). The international financial institutions have been promoting liberalisation of trade and investment regimes, which has often resulted in developing countries being trapped into specialisation that provides little developmental gains and has also limited the policy independence of the developing countries. This viewpoint makes it easy to understand how tariff decisions by dominant economies can have a particularly negative impact on developing countries, not only because of their direct trading impact, but also because of their reinforcing of pre-existing vulnerabilities and because they prevent countries from pursuing other development options.

Indeed, intermediate goods now make up an astonishing 2/3 of global trade - so a peripheral country is severely constrained in its ability to pivot or adjust to sudden, unilateral policy shifts by core countries (Antràs, 2020, p. 560–564). GVC characterised trade is highly sensitive to abrupt or imposed border tariffs, which have devastating effects throughout interconnected supply chains, driving up costs at every step of the way of production, and possibly cutting off the arteries of entire networks (Gereffi, 2018, pp. 40–44). The three disciplines are speaking about the same structural condition and what is important here is that, regardless of the lens used, the conclusion is that integration into global value chains is not a neutral technical arrangement, but a hierarchy, with shocks cascading down the hierarchy.

2.7. The African Growth and Opportunity Act: Promise, Performance, and Vulnerability.

2.7.1. AGOA's Structure and Objectives.

Enacted in 2000, the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) established a sweeping preferential trade framework providing eligible sub-Saharan African countries with vital, duty-free access to lucrative American consumer markets for approximately 6,500 distinct product lines (USTR, 2024, pp. 15–18). Officially, the purpose of this legislative initiative was to promote massive industrial development in sub-Saharan Africa, enhance its diplomatic and economic relationship and strongly push for market-oriented domestic governance reforms throughout the region (Coulibaly & Kassa, 2018, pp. 42–45).

AGOA's most significant, highly utilised feature was its outstanding treatment of textiles and apparel. It explicitly allowed the importation duty-free of finished garments even if the African factories used third country fabrics, typically Asian imported at a cheap rate, under a special "Special Rule for lesser-developed beneficiary countries" (Frazer & Van Biesebroeck, 2019, pp. 128–132). Normally apparel imports would be subject to prohibitively high US MFN tariffs ranging between twelve and fifteen per cent, giving this particular wave of African producers a huge artificial cost advantage over the rest of the world. This unique advantage has successfully facilitated the growth of export sectors in the apparel industry and helped to attract considerable foreign direct investment (FDI) from Asia to African industrial zones (Council on Foreign Relations, 2025, pp. 18–22).

However, the third-country fabric rule simultaneously highlights a devastating structural flaw within the preference framework. Gereffi (2018) provides examples of industrial breakdowns, such as the fact that most beneficiary countries lacked the capacity to produce their own textile fabric and weaving and milling of raw fabrics were done in Asia. The

system ensured that African countries remained in low-skill, low-tech assembly operations, instead of the established or strengthened local supply chains, which would be more resilient and long-term oriented (Council on Foreign Relations, 2025, para. 18).

Furthermore, AGOA eligibility remains strictly contingent on annual compliance reviews. These reviews are unilaterally carried out by the US government and based on its own fluid domestic political discussions on human rights, market access and foreign policy coordination (Brookings Institution, 2024, para. 12). This one-way governance system introduces ongoing and paralyzing policy uncertainty. The shift of Washington's geopolitical priorities can deprive a beneficiary country of its top export market in a flash. The instability also works against leading companies making long-term investments in state-of-the-art machinery at home and instead holds regional companies in a precarious position to which they can easily fall back on and leave. The one-to-one correspondence between Frazer and Van Biesebroeck's explanation of the rules of origin design of AGOA and the Council on Foreign Relations' explanation of the review process is the same pattern that was discussed above with regard to the tariff literature: preferences and penalties both go in one direction. What AGOA has done unilaterally, Executive Order 14257 will do unilaterally, in its own terms of discretion.

2.7.2. AGOA's Impact on Beneficiary Countries.

Exhaustive studies of AGOA's fifteen-year performance disclose that while it undeniably expanded gross export volumes, it drastically struggled to drive the broad, structural economic transformation originally promised (World Economic Forum, 2023, pp. 54–57). Data from the econometric tracking shows that average beneficiary trade with the U.S. expanded by about 60% in 15 years under AGOA. These gains, however, were precariously limited to a few countries and to two limited areas of production: raw crude oil products and basic apparel assembly (Coulibaly & Kassa, 2018, pp. 48–52).

The apparel sector was considered the primary success story, becoming a major private-sector employer in countries like Kenya, where sales grew from 55 million dollars in 2001 to over 603 million dollars by 2022. In the same vein, in Lesotho, the industry employed some 44,000 persons in the factories, a key source of formal employment, mostly vulnerable women (Kohan Textile Journal, 2025, para. 2). However, given that thousands of other non-oil product lines saw utilisation rates under the 30 per cent mark, and averaging just above twenty per cent, the framework failed to stimulate macroeconomic diversification in other areas. (Center for American Progress, 2024, para. 2). The World Economic Forum's overall trade statistics, combined with the Center for American Progress's use statistics, tell a similar story from two perspectives: AGOA worked well in countries where it was likely to and where few other countries were involved, and in two narrow sectors, but it failed to deliver on the diversification it promised in the broader context. It was that disparity that caused the 2025 shock to be so one-sided.

2.7.3. The Vulnerability of AGOA-Dependent Economies.

The unilateral and terminable nature of AGOA preferences creates inherent vulnerabilities for countries that have structured production around American market access (Amin, 2019, pp. 112–115). Core countries have the ability to suddenly change their trade policies or impose sweeping protectionist duties that cannot be matched in the marginal terms, resulting in a sudden and harsh structural displacement of beneficiary economies. As Frank (1967, pp. 8-12) built, depending means that the periphery will absorb the shock of the core's adjustment.

The Council on Foreign Relations (2025) argued that, the loss of those preferences leads to significant decreases in gross national income, and that a significant painful contraction in export manufacturing results. In the research, it is also clearly established that Lesotho would

lose 16 per cent of its total exports of textiles if the AGOA benefits were lost, resulting in mass unemployment (Council on Foreign Relations, 2025, pp. 24–26). The imposition of tariffs in 2025 fits this ultimate weakness, and the impact is to negate the advantages African countries can gain from AGOA by imposing vast duties that can easily out-compete them. This unprecedented decision threatens to cost the countries involved in AGOA—South Africa, Madagascar, Kenya, and Lesotho—an estimated 1.3 million jobs in industries that rely on AGOAFlexibility is a key consideration in this context, as the policy is anticipated to have an impact on approximately 100,000 jobs in the southern hemisphere alone. 4).

2.8. The 2025 Trump Tariffs: Executive Order 14257 and Macro Shock Transmission

2.8.1. Executive Order 14257 and the Liberation Day Tariffs

In April 2025, Executive Order 14257 implemented a draconian universal ad valorem baseline tariff of ten per cent on all imports from 190 countries, and drastically raised country-specific tariffs on fifty-seven targeted states, the list of which was on the extensive annexure of the order (Kugler & Washington, 2025, para. 4). The methodology used to arrive at tariff rates were computed as the American bilateral trade deficit with each country over its total imports of goods, and then divided by two to get the final percentage.

This was a very simplistic solution and merely linked the level of a tariff to a bilateral imbalance. It experienced a typical deficit, as only an obvious indicator that something of the kind of unfair, predatory trade practices was damaging the economy; it was calling for immediate and strong corrective measures, no matter what the true fundamental economy of the deficit might be (Tax Foundation, 2025, pp. 2–4). This mechanical and highly controversial definition did not take into account the prevailing macro-economic facts such as the national saving rates or changes in consumer preferences or the complex nature of international investment flows in a G-7 context.

The political argument was largely based on the notion that simple trade imbalances pose an “existential threat” to the Nation (White House, 2025, p. But amid all this, the executive order ominously reads: “Large and persistent goods trade deficits represent an 'unusual and extraordinary threat' to America's national security, foreign policy and economy” (p. 1). This particular rhetorical set-up enabled the administration to invoke extreme emergency powers that bypassed customary congressional consultation, and avoid multilateral WTO review processes altogether (Bown, 2021, pp. 816–818).

This punitive regime was very disruptive, especially in sub-Saharan Africa. The rates of tariffs imposed on South Africa were very high for a country, at thirty per cent, and rendered the manufacturing sector uncompetitive, while Lesotho was hit by the highest penalty rate in the world, at fifty per cent (TIPS, 2025, pp. 2–4). Importantly, the order leaves more than 1,000 items—such as key raw petroleum and critical minerals—out of the country-specific tariffs. This ‘paramount exemption' focused the whole of the tariff burden on value-added manufactured products, making it clear that the Global South was being denied a chance to climb the industrial ladder and to continue to harvest the raw materials they needed (Usman, 2025, para. 5).

2.8.2. Impact on South Africa's Economy

The fact that South Africa's export basket was so diversified and the country had such a long history of embeddedness in global motor vehicle production chains was extremely disruptive to the country. The tariffs immediately made it more difficult for the aggregate export performance, led to massive capital flight and even caused severe exchange rate depreciation due to the reaction of the global market to the shock (National Association of Automobile Manufacturers of South Africa, 2025, para. 3). The very sophisticated automotive industry, for which years of careful government planning had prepared the way, was particularly affected.

About 60 per cent of all South Africa's exports into the United States under AGOA comprise finished vehicles and high-tech components, with export revenues of around 28.6 billion rand, consistently, being generated (NAAMSA, 2025, pp. 8–11).

The National Association of Automobile Manufacturers of South Africa (2025) states that the automotive sector is powered by the energy sector. 3) recorded the immediate and catastrophic effect of the tariffs that had already occurred even though no tariffs were formally adopted at the border until months later. Since global supply chains are based on orders in advance, American buyers cancelled orders on the spot. In the first quarter of 2025, vehicle exports fell by an incredible 73 per cent compared with 2024, with even more catastrophic declines in April (down 80 per cent) and May (down 85 per cent) (Reuters, 2025, p. 1). This sudden demand collapse led to an immediate socio-economic emergency, which directly affected thousands of well-paying union jobs, and could spell economic disaster for specialised industrial hubs like East London and Gqeberha (Reuters, 2025, para. 6).

It is important to note that the 30% tariff rate imposed on South Africa did not follow any internationally accepted principle of trade reciprocity (TIPS, 2025, pp. 4–6). It was a tax that was about six times the weighted average tariff imposed by South Africa on imports from America, and as would be obvious, was extremely punitive. The policy was, deliberately, not to tax raw materials as they are, but to tax highly manufactured items like catalytic converters, making the policy essentially an impenetrable administrative wall to industrial escalation in the South. Such an unsustainable trend has the potential to undo decades of well-intentioned industrial development policies that did not account for how the country would react to the transition when it was implemented.Such a trend is likely to push South Africa back into hazardous primary commodity dependence and roll back decades of painstaking industrial development policy (Amin 2019, pp. 118–122). It is clear from the painful experience of South Africa that despite even a sophisticated and highly diversified industrial base, it can be very

vulnerable if its high value export lines are very much dependent on the unstable politically volatile core state markets.

2.8.3. Impacts on Lesotho's Economy

With its almost complete reliance on exports of textiles to American retail markets, Lesotho was perhaps the most vulnerable country in Africa to tariff pressures (Agence France-Presse, 2025, para. 3). The unparalleled 50 per cent tariff rate completely wiped out the thin margins for foreign investment to the country's garment centres in Maseru and Maputsoe. 6–8).

The researcher noted that the tone of the media messaging of the effect of the tariffs imposed by Trump on Lesotho was more severe socially than in South Africa. Given this precise preferences of AGOA, one BBC news report stated that the advantage was such that meant Lesotho was set to lose its entire textiles and clothing industry which had been developed specifically for the last 20 years. All local production was suddenly uneconomic as a result of the tariffs, putting about 40,000 of the clothing factories' jobs at risk (Council on Foreign Relations, 2025, para. 9). As a result of this extreme mono-sector concentration, local manufacturing companies were left without any degree of external corporate coordination and did not have any autonomous design, marketing and regional sales capacities. This is in line with captured supply nodes that have been identified in the literature on the global value chain (Gereffi, 2018, pp. 40–46).

This abrupt industrial disruption has an enormous human toll, exacerbated by the gendered nature of Lesotho's industrial labour force. Almost all of the garment assembly workers are vulnerable women. As a result, the huge surge in factory closures directly affects women's participation in the economy, reducing household economic security and bringing entire communities down from above the poverty line (Agence France-Presse, 2025, para. 6).

Women's displaced labor in a small, landlocked country without viable formal-sector employment opportunities has little chance of moving to other productive sectors of the economy. This plight is a warning of what can happen if a small economy becomes too specialized within hyper-efficient buyer-driven value chains, falling into a structural trap, and sacrificing jobs for the short term for structural vulnerability in the long term. When core state policies start to change suddenly, without advance warning or consultation, it becomes a direct, devastating domestic crisis (Frank, 1967, p. 14–18).

2.9. African Responses and the African Continental Free Trade Area: Diversified National

2.9.1. Responses to Tariff Imposition

The 2025 tariff impositions spurred various types of responses from the African countries, depending on their exposure, economic capacities and diplomatic orientations. Kugler and Washington (2025, para. 3) documented some countries, such as Zimbabwe, were prepared to remove tariffs on American imports unilaterally, which meant that they were prepared to make no concession in return for American concessions. Still others, such as Uganda, decided instead to develop more robust and sustainable local economies without accommodation to American policy. The most affected nations – such as Lesotho, Madagascar and South Africa – launched delegations to the American authorities for bilateral talks to ease the tariff burden, bypassing high-level talks with the European Union.

Diplomatic efforts on the part of South Africa involved President Cyril Ramaphosa meeting President Trump at the White House to discuss trade matters and other matters. South Africa offered a trade package comprising a duty-free quota of 40,000 vehicles per year to be exported to the USA, and duty-free procurement of the automotive parts needed for the production of vehicles in the USA by South African manufacturers (National Association of

Automobile Manufacturers of South Africa, 2025, para.). 8). These proposals aimed to maintain some of the "preferential trading relationship" but provide some concessions to appease American concerns. The inherent imbalance between a great power and a middle income developing nation, however, limited South Africa's negotiating arm.

This was also the case with collective African responses, which were taken up through multilateral vectors. On 10 April 2025, Cabo Verde along with 38 other Friends of the System, including Cameroon, Gambia, Liberia, Nigeria and Sierra Leone, co-signed a communiqué which pledged to collaborate closely to establish the future of the world trading system (Usman, 2025, para. 5). These WTO members would make outcome-oriented statements and take bold actions, but it was unclear how effective such assertiveness would be in reducing U.S. unilateralism as the WTO dispute settlement mechanism was woefully inefficient and the United States was ready to ignore multilateral options.

2.9.2. The African Continental Free Trade Area as a Purposeful Response

The African Continental Free Trade Area is the biggest continental integration project in Africa's history and provides potential solutions to external trade vulnerabilities. The AfCFTA is formed under a framework agreement signed back in March 2018 which will come into effect in May 2019, providing a market for 1.4 billion people and a total GDP of more than 3.4 trillion dollars. The trading under the AfCFTA preferences started symbolically in January 2021, and member states will remove tariffs on 90 per cent of goods within a period of 5-10 years, depending on the development status (African Union, 2023).

The possible benefits of AfCFTA in dealing with external trade shocks stem from reducing Africa's dependence on extra-continental markets. According to the Mo Ibrahim Foundation (2023), intra-continental trade in Africa is less than 13 per cent of the total trade, whereas in the Americas, it is 44.4 per cent of the total trade, in Asia and Oceania it is 63.8 per

cent, and in Europe it is 66.9 per cent. The reliance on external markets exposes the continent to crisis and shock in other parts of the world. Citing UNECA estimates, the same report notes that the AfCFTA could boost intra-African trade by approximately forty per cent through tariff elimination and trade cost reduction, and may provide market alternatives when external access contracts (Mo Ibrahim Foundation, 2023).

The World Bank (2020) study estimated significant welfare benefits from the AfCFTA, including 30 million people being lifted out of extreme poverty and a 7 per cent increase in the continent's income by 2035. The Trade Law Centre (2025) pointed out that AfCFTA could also serve as a counterweight to American tariffs as trade liberalisation between African countries could reduce some of the losses in the American market, albeit to varying extents across countries and industries. This implies that the regional integration process could be an opportunity for the developing countries not just to cope with uncertainty but to actively prepare for long term by diversifying trading relationships.

2.9.3.Obstacles and Constraints of Regional Integration

While AfCFTA holds great promise, implementation is beset with a lot of challenges that limit the extent to which it can compensate for external market access in the short term. The Africa Labour Research and Education Institute (2025, p. 6) impact assessment revealed that AfCFTA has modestly boosted intra-African trade since 2021, resulting in more diversified export baskets and better market access in certain economies such as South Africa, Nigeria and Kenya, but the impact has not been uniform across all. The major structural barriers are a serious obstacle to the free trade area, and infrastructure issues and institutional weaknesses are restricting trade in the Central African countries.

The gap in infrastructure is possibly one of the most significant hurdles in the way of building up intra-African trade. Poor road infrastructure, limited port facilities, digital

connectivity and unreliable electric power have raised the trade cost and time for intra-regional trade. The trading cost and time for intra-regional trade are raised by poor road infrastructure, inadequate port facilities, unreliable electric power supply and limited digital connectivity. Hagos (2025, para. The study reveals that the gains from trade facilitation measures (including customs modernisation and improvement of border procedures) can be equivalent to large tariff reductions, but investments and institutional reforms are needed to see through the improvements. Without the improvement of infrastructure, in practice, tariff elimination may have only a small effect on trade flows.

There are also constraints that limit the ability of African countries to replace external markets with regional markets that arise from productive capacity constraints. The countries that have successfully exported textiles or automobiles to the American market cannot simply switch over to export to Africa, targeting a different consumer base, with different consumption habits, with different quality standards. Establishing new market relationships, modifying product specifications, developing distribution networks and getting economies of scale in new markets take years, not months. This period of acute adjustment difficulty is likely to undermine developmental gains as mismatch unfolds in close neighbors' tariff impacts and the gradual process of regional integration kicks in, before viable alternatives have time to be developed.

2.10. Trump Tariffs as a Response to China's Growing Influence in Africa and BRICS Dynamics

While Executive Order 14257 was framed in terms of bilateral US-China imbalances, its timing and scope suggest a broader geopolitical calculus aimed at containing China's expanding footprint in Africa and within BRICS. Since the early 2000s, China has displaced traditional Western partners as Africa's largest trading partner, financier of infrastructure, and supplier of manufactured goods (Brautigam, 2019). Through the Belt and Road Initiative and

resource-for-infrastructure deals, Beijing has embedded itself in African value chains in ways that bypass US tariff and sanctions regimes (Alden, 2020). The Trump administration's unilateral tariffs can therefore be read not only as an economic correction but as a strategic attempt to reassert US leverage over a continent increasingly courted by China and Russia. By imposing high duties on African exports to the US, Washington signals that preferential access is contingent on alignment with US trade and security interests, and not on deepening ties with Beijing (Bown, 2021). In this sense, the tariffs operate as instruments of power projection, seeking to discipline peripheral states that are drifting toward alternative poles of accumulation within BRICS and the Global South.

2.11. Power, Interest and Manipulation in the Use of Tariffs

From a dependency and neo-Gramscian perspective, the 2025 tariffs exemplify how core states deploy economic instruments to reproduce hierarchical relations in the world system. Tariffs here are not neutral fiscal tools but mechanisms of manipulation that convert market access into political leverage (Cox, 1987). The US selectively exempts raw commodities such as crude oil and minerals while targeting value-added manufactures, thereby reinforcing Africa's role as a supplier of primary products rather than an industrial competitor (Usman, 2025). This reproduces the classic centre-periphery division identified by Frank (1967) and Amin (2019), where peripheral economies are locked into low-margin nodes of global value chains. Moreover, the unilateral and discretionary nature of AGOA and Executive Order 14257 illustrates what Strange (1996) termed "structural power": the ability of a hegemon to shape the rules of the game to its own advantage. By linking trade preferences to compliance with US foreign policy objectives, Washington manipulates African states' domestic policy space and constrains their autonomy to pursue independent industrial strategies.

2.12. US Tariffs Provoking Agenda 2063 and SADC Integration Efforts

Paradoxically, the external shock of US tariffs may accelerate long-standing African ambitions for self-reliance. Agenda 2063 explicitly calls for "a prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development" through continental integration, value addition, and reduced dependence on external markets (African Union, 2015, p. 8). Similarly, SADC's Industrialisation Strategy 2015-2063 prioritises regional value chains in agro-processing, minerals beneficiation, and textiles to reduce vulnerability to extra-continental shocks (Southern African Development Community [SADC], 2015). The 2025 tariff episode provides empirical impetus to these frameworks. As US market access becomes unpredictable, African policymakers are compelled to operationalise AfCFTA protocols, harmonise standards, and invest in regional infrastructure to absorb displaced exports (Mo Ibrahim Foundation, 2023). However, the extent of this provocation remains constrained by material realities: weak productive capacity, infrastructure deficits, and intra-African trade barriers mean that regional markets cannot immediately substitute for the US market (Hagos, 2025). Thus, while Trump's tariffs function as an exogenous shock that politicises integration, they do not automatically translate into effective SADC or Agenda 2063 outcomes without significant institutional and capital mobilisation.

2.13. Emerging Dynamics: A Contest Between Unilateralism and Pan-Africanism

The interaction between US unilateralism and African integration efforts represents a contest between two competing logics of global governance. On one side is a US approach grounded in transactional bilateralism and the use of tariffs as coercive diplomacy (Irwin, 2017). On the other is an African approach rooted in pan-African solidarity and rule-based regionalism as articulated in Agenda 2063 and AfCFTA (African Union, 2023). Constructivism helps explain this moment: the US framing of trade deficits as a "national security threat" constructs a new norm of economic sovereignty, while African states are constructing a

counter-narrative of collective resilience and diversification (Wendt, 1999; Finnemore & Sikkink, 2001). The outcome will depend on whether African states can convert discursive commitments into material capacity. If they can, the 2025 tariffs may be remembered as the catalyst that forced Africa to internalise its market and reduce structural dependence. If not, the tariffs will simply deepen existing asymmetries.

2.14. Chapter Summary

The argument of this chapter is that three distinct strands of evidence — the economics of tariff incidence, the history of Smoot-Hawley and the US-China trade war, and the institutional structure of AGOA — all lead to the same conclusion: preferential access automatically awarded is not really preferential access, and there is at present no multilateral mechanism binding that discretion. This is not a new problem, as is well demonstrated by mercantilist protectionism, the Smoot-Hawley tariff act and the GATT/WTO settlement that followed it, and, of course, by the Special and Differential Treatment provisions of the WTO agreement itself. AGOA's record, however, at a smaller scale, bears the hallmarks of the same trend in terms of providing true and limited benefits, only in the oil and apparel sectors, and for very limited number of countries; and structuring them for exactly the unilateral withdrawal that Executive Order 14257 embodies. The final chapter, which combines Constructivism and Dependency Theory, is not a theoretical nicety, because it is in this chapter that the empirical chapters that follow make two simultaneous claims: first, that the 2025 tariffs were constructed politically in Washington in a certain way; second, that the harm they caused was structurally determined in Southern Africa over decades of accumulated dependency. The two claims are not independent of each other, and this Chapter has been designed to demonstrate the combined effects.

CHAPTER THREE

3.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. Introduction

This chapter presents the rigorous methodological framework employed to investigate the multidimensional implications of the 2025 United States tariff policies for the economies of Lesotho and South Africa. The methodology in research is a crucial and basic part of the research. It provides a structured way of collecting raw data, analysing it, and interpreting the raw data directly to answer research questions and fulfil academic objectives.

The methodological choices expressed above have been the result of a careful consideration of the epistemological assumptions that lie behind the study, the significant political dimension of the research question, and the constraints in which the investigation has been carried out in the midst of an active trade crisis. The chapter starts by describing the research philosophy and paradigm used in the study and then the discussion is detailed regarding the qualitative approach and research design used. The following sections discuss careful consideration of the study population and sampling, mixed data collection methods and instruments, induction analysis of data, strict ethical considerations, and means of ensuring research quality and trustworthiness.

3.2. Research Philosophy

Epistemological paradigms have a foundational influence on how researchers think about, collect, and finally legitimise social knowledge (Bryman, 2016, pp. 401–404). This academic investigation is clearly oriented towards the interpretivist paradigm of research, which explicitly denies the positivist assertion that complex social and political phenomena are fixed and objective, and exist outside of the sphere of human observation. Interpretivism posits

that social meaning is negotiated, talked through, and constructed interactively by human sense-making, discourse, and human negotiation, not as an objective measurable phenomenon.

This qualitative approach compliments the Constructivist international relations approach which was widely utilized in this study. It emphasizes that state interests, concepts of security, and economic relations are solely the result of the interpretations that political actors give to material conditions (Wendt, 1999, pp. 403–405). As a result, this work focuses on recording the subjective experiences and strategic viewpoints of top policy analysts, institutional representatives and frontline industry managers rather than on using detached, purely quantitative statistical indicators. This interpretive epistemological approach is not in conflict with the incorporation of Dependency Theory. Rather, it provides a fundamental, grounding structure map. It continually reminds the researcher of the wide power disparities, core-periphery relationships and long-standing histories of unequal exchange that affect the way in which African actors can make sense of, and react to, foreign policy changes (Frank, 1967, pp. 408–410).

The position of this author is not a middle-way option but a bet that the meanings policy actors give to sudden trade disruption are not just a window on, but are part of what is being studied (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, pp. 395–398). The large-scale trade changes portrayed in positivist economic models often seem to take place on clean, disembodied equilibrium curves, where the real-world political struggles, bureaucratic frenzies and human relocations that happen on the factory floor are ignored. This hermeneutic perspective targets the actual understanding on the spot that is negotiated and created by the corporate leadership, labour unions and state officials when sudden trade disruptions arise (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015, pp. 439–441). In this aspect, dependency theory greatly enriches this process and offers a structural and clear perspective to material facts that profoundly constrained human choices. It guarantees that the study not only captures the essence and meaning of the material power imbalances that

restrict peripheral actors' diplomatic and economic options, but also provides a clear, rigorous and dispassionate evaluation of the material constraints (Amin, 2019, pp. 128–132).

3.3. Research approach

This study adopted a qualitative research approach. The choice was deliberate because the core questions of this research are not about how many jobs were lost or what percentage of exports declined, but about how and why the 2025 US tariffs under Executive Order 14257 affected South Africa and Lesotho, and how these states are making sense of and responding to that shock through frameworks like Agenda 2063 and SADC.

Qualitative research is best suited for exploring meaning, context, and process (Creswell & Poth, 2018). It does not seek to reduce social reality to numbers. Instead, it tries to understand events from the perspective of the actors involved and to interpret the ideas, power relations, and narratives that shape policy decisions (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). For a topic that sits at the intersection of trade, geopolitics, and regional integration, this interpretive depth is essential. You cannot explain why the US framed a trade deficit as a "national security threat" or why African leaders are now using the tariff crisis to push AfCFTA by running a regression. You need to read the documents, listen to the discourse, and trace the story.

3.4. Research Design

Case study research can be used when the phenomenon is contemporary, complex and when the phenomenon-to-context boundary is ambiguous or indistinct (Yin, 2018, p. 417–419). This study is interpretivist in nature with a qualitative multiple case study approach because it seeks to capture the complexities of global trade governance in the contemporary world, which go beyond the traditional approaches used by positivists. Given the nature of the phenomena under study, which are new and capricious, and their chaotic real-world context, it is best suited

for a highly flexible, open-ended exploration of new phenomena, as is typical of qualitative methodology (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, pp. 411–413).

A multiple-case study approach offers a very powerful comparative lens for the systematic analysis of different sovereign actors under similar pressures from foreign actors. The two very different sub-Saharan political economies, Lesotho as an extreme concentration of sectors and South Africa as a more diversified industrial base, can allow the research to dissect the exact effects of internal structural differences on the vulnerability of countries, and to determine the extent to which external shocks are mediated. The overall research method is exploratory and descriptive, explicitly leaving the conceptual boundaries open to capture the unexpected operational dynamics, emerging institutional strategies and rapid discursive changes as they form along the region.

The purpose of exploratory research is to find important preliminary insights into new phenomena, new ideas for further study, and variables and relationships that quantitative surveys may not capture (Babbie, 2021, pp. 421–423). This dual-case approach makes extensive use of both literal and theoretical replication in order to closely investigate trade shocks' cross-border transmission (Yin, 2018, pp. 417–419). Case study designs have proven to be particularly useful when there are tight links between the economic phenomenon and the reality of the political setting, as argued by qualitative methodologists (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 396–398). The study is designed to offer the analysis a local context and focus, while specifically identifying the macro-tariff impacts on a range of micro-industries, to uncover the very localised impacts of macro tariffs. The exploratory approach of the inquiry is an ideal match for the unpredictable character of the tariffs themselves that change so quickly that current adaptations were captured without trying to shoehorn them into the old models. This method enabled the research to escape from academic formula, rigidly predetermined

accountings, and record the unplanned and sometimes desperate adjustment in regional trade patterns.

3.5. Population and Sampling

Qualitative research places high importance on the selection of cases that are rich in information and content, because conceptual understanding is a key element of the research process, especially when compared to the broader and more superficial empirical generalisation (Patton, 2015, p. 425–427). The target population for this qualitative study are policy makers at the highest level, trade experts with extensive experience as well as institutional researchers and industry managers at the frontline of the industry, with highly specialised knowledge on sub-Saharan trade relations and regional value chains. Non-probability purposive sampling proved to be the most effective sampling method given the qualitative approach to obtaining rich and highly contextualised data from the highest level agencies with the greatest knowledge. The purpose of this study was exploratory, and this research focused on information density and professional expertise over mathematical statistical representation, which is exactly what purposive sampling does (Babbie, 2021, pp. 421–424).

A highly robust, knowledgeable group of respondents was created by the use of a combination of criterion and snowball sampling techniques. All the initial participants had fulfilled extremely rigorous requirements with regard to their professional standing, educational background, and their institutional experience in the field of trade economics, with the help of criterion sampling. This elite network was then carefully exploited through a technique called snowball sampling, which gained access to important strategic informants and officials who would not have been accessible to outsiders undertaking academic research in general (Bryman, 2016, pp. 193-201). 430–433).

The elite interview methods demand that the interviewees are professionals with key decision-making positions or high-level research roles in the organisations they represent (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015, pp. 438–440). The strenuous selection criteria meant that participants must have first-hand and verifiable experience of running a trade portfolio, analysing macro-economic information for the region or direct oversight of export-dependent manufacturing activities in Southern Africa for at least 5 years. The sampling grid was able to successfully bring in 16 high-level trade experts, including leaders from regional economic societies, policy think tanks, diplomatic missions on the continent, and factory managers directly affected by the consequences. This sample is very specialised and aimed at a small number of individuals, and is ideal for the high-quality qualitative research required, in which depth of knowledge is the more important factor than large sample sizes. Through this well-executed snowball sampling approach, I was able to access key institutional actors and collect actionable and quality information that would not have been achieved through traditional "open" recruitment methods.

3.6. Data Collection Methods

Data triangulation enhances the credibility of qualitative research by collecting multiple and independent data sources, such as interviews, focus groups and records, and archives (Patton, 2015, pp. 434–436). A wide-ranging qualitative method of data collection was employed, which involved semi-structured in-depth interviews, dynamic focus group discussions and a careful review of documents to ensure comprehensive triangulation. The field work was intensive and took place over a six month period from June to December 2025, with a highly effective hybrid method, combining in person and secure remote video interviews, to overcome the vast geographical and time constraints.

The primary fieldwork involved elite interviews with leadership from the Zimbabwe Economic Society (ZES) and the Southern African Research and Documentation Centre

(SARDC) which enabled us to capture the insights of traders from the region. On a crucial field visit to Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, on 3-5 December 2025, direct consultations were conducted with policy officials at the African Union Commission and at the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). These top-level, privileged policy views were given flesh in the operation, as remote video-conferencing interviews were carried out directly with a Lesotho-based garment factory manager who's having to cope with the realities of extreme poverty and an automotive supply-line manager adapting to the realities of South Africa. Finally, a dedicated focus group discussion was held to ensure the full triangulation of all of the empirical data points (Bowen, 2009, p. 27–30).

The semi-structured layouts offer the necessary structure in order to not lose the conversational flexibility required to explore unexpected findings and new lines of reasoning (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015, pp. 439–441). The semi-structured interview guides were carefully designed to use open-ended questions which enabled participants to give their professional views completely without the discussion becoming too dense to achieve the research goals. In a highly dynamic environment, the focus group discussion successfully convened sixteen trade experts, including academics, developers and lecturers, where academics and economists were able to debate trade policy steps with great contention (Morgan, 2019, pp. 458–461). It is an invaluable primary data that has been carefully complemented with document analysis of the text of Executive Order 14257, the changing of the WTO tariff schedules, and official diplomatic statements from the government of Lesotho and South Africa (Bowen, 2009, pp. 32–35). The analysis of the data through triangulation across these very different sources however meant the study was a perfect balance of elite institutional narrative with concrete factory floor data and increased the structural validities of the final findings to an extent that is massively amplified.

3.7. Validity and reliability

The quality and trustworthiness of this qualitative study were ensured using the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985, as cited in Patton, 2015, pp. 47–49). These criteria were followed for the design, implementation and evaluation of the research process to ensure that the research is rigorous and authentic.

Credibility was achieved through methodological triangulation involving multiple sources of evidence, including government officials, regional think tanks, trade experts, and industry managers from Lesotho and South Africa. Multiple perspectives also allowed the researcher to validate the findings and add to the overall understanding of the implications of the 2025 United States tariffs.

Transferability was enhanced through the provision of rich, detailed descriptions of the institutional, political, and economic contexts of Lesotho and South Africa. Readers can evaluate the usefulness of the results for other developing countries with similar trade-related limitations (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, pp. 396–398).

Dependability was ensured by maintaining a comprehensive audit trail documenting every stage of the research process, from the initial interview transcripts through coding and thematic analysis to the final interpretation of findings. This is an open documentation that allows future researchers to understand and judge the research process (Bryman, 2016, p. 47–49).

Confirmability was strengthened through reflexive journaling and regular peer debriefing throughout the study. These strategies helped to reduce researcher bias by continually prompting introspection of researcher assumptions and keeping views separate from the findings by participants.

3.8. Data presentation and analysis.

Qualitative Coding: Making Raw and Chaotic Text into Neat Conceptual Categories to facilitate Inductive Theoretical Pattern Matching (Bryman, 2016, p. 45–48). Qualitative data collected was analysed through an extremely systematic thematic analysis approach that was inductive. All recorded interviews and focus group discussions have been transcribed word for word and subsequently read many times, very closely, to gain intimate knowledge of the texts. The coding process began with the initial open coding of raw data segments, followed by an extremely structured development of axial codes that were used to cluster related concepts (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 396–398). Core themes that relate directly to the study's major research questions were then theoretically grouped into these categories. In order to avoid any analytical bias, coding structures were consistently compared and contrasted with the raw transcripts, ensuring an empirical match with the real voice of the research participants and with their conceptual frameworks.

In multiple case study designs, the constant comparative tracking process assists researchers in uncovering patterns and deviations in the various empirical instances (Yin, 2018, p. 416–419). This constant comparative tracking was used for the analysis to make comparisons between code generation within the Lesotho case and the South Africa case. Codes were initially developed such as anticipatory cancellation and value-chain extraction and then clustered into larger descriptive categories. The categories were then taken into close relationship with the theoretical underpinning of the study to show how these narratives and Dependency structures operate simultaneously in real world environments (Frank, 1967, pp. 3–7; Wendt, 1999, pp. 92–97). All of the final themes were presented to key participants via member checking, which ensured that the academic analysis was a fully open, transparent and reliable analysis process and that the findings from the academic analysis were in line with the operational experiences of key participants.

3.9. Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles governing consent, anonymity and data protection (Bryman, 2016, pp. must be followed when conducting research in politically sensitive or high stakes corporate environments. 46–49). High level qualitative studies in policy spaces that are politically charged demands that institutional ethical standards be followed. Every participant was provided with a detailed disclosure form outlining the study's academic scope, and formal written informed consent was secured before any data collection began (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, pp. 396–398). Complete anonymity has been preserved by using alphanumeric descriptors in all cases of institutional vulnerability, political backlash or professional repercussion encountered by respondents. The dissertation project is completely confidential, with all digital transcriptions and audio recordings kept on highly encrypted, password-protected hardware.

The right to voluntary participation is unconditional: no negative repercussions or penalty are to be faced if respondents choose to decline questions or to refuse to be a part of a study altogether (Babbie, 2021, pp. 421–424). The research protocol included informed consent that participants could opt out of the study anytime and could refuse to answer any questions without being penalized. To anonymise the data, the letter numbers (e.g., P1, S1) have been added to the respondents' names and the sub-transcripts. Descriptions of background institutions have been intentionally blurred to avoid hinting at identification via context clues. These critical safeguards fostered a level of trust with top informants that enabled them to freely share their insights on topics such as high sensitive diplomatic failures and harsh conditions in industries.

3.10. Chapter Summary

As the former, this chapter has been presented as a series of methodological steps; as the latter, as an interpretive logic that guides them, as an understanding that a trade shock of this nature requires and only comes to light when one can get into the minds of those who were affected by it and how they were making sense of it in real time. The study adopted an interpretivist philosophy, having a strong foundation, and the comparative multiple-cases study design appropriately followed the interpretation of the participants with a high degree of focus and explored deep structure trade pressures. The text explained the careful application of purposive sampling, very effective mixed data collection tools, as well as the careful and effective process of inductive thematic coding used in creating a very reliable qualitative database. Lastly, the fastidious ethical principles and quality control measures that ensure that all aspects of the dissertation process are kept confidential and structurally sound are explained.

CHAPTER FOUR

4.0 DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Introduction to the Chapter

This chapter presents the empirical findings meticulously gathered from primary transcripts, focus group sessions, and institutional documents, paired with extensive, rigorous analytical discussion. It carefully analyzes data from raw descriptive entries to directly answer the study's main research questions within tight thematic frameworks. The sections that follow develop a comprehensive matrix of participants, offer a highly coded account of the shock-absorbing impact of the 2025 workload, and map the hardships through regional manufacturing value chains. Moreover, the chapter critically examines the adaptations by the corporations and by the states, presents proposals for reform of international trade on a system-level, and firmly situates the empirical findings in an integrated critique that captures the beauty of the dialogic interaction between Constructivist and Dependency theories.

4.2 Presentation and analysis of findings

This chapter presents the empirical findings and interprets them in relation to the four research questions that shaped the study. Data were generated through sixteen elite interviews with policymakers, executives, industry actors, and policy researchers, supplemented by policy documents and relevant industry and media reporting. The analysis is structured thematically around the research questions and each thematic section is interpreted through two complementary theoretical lenses, Dependency theory, which foregrounds structural power and unequal patterns of exchange, and Constructivism, which explains how actors and institutions interpret external shocks through socially constructed meanings and identities.

A central analytical premise is that tariff policy is not merely a technical trade instrument. While executive tariff design and implementation affect prices, volumes, and firm-level competitiveness, the meaning assigned to those tariff measures particularly when framed as security, fairness, or national interest also shapes the political response and subsequent realignment strategies. Accordingly, the chapter examines (a). What the tariff mechanisms were and how they structured market access, (b) how firms and workers experienced the impacts, (c) how governments and stakeholders responded strategically, and (d) what frameworks were articulated to achieve fairer trade governance and stronger South-South economic cooperation.

4.3. Specific tariff mechanisms and structural frameworks imposed on Lesotho and South Africa under Executive Order 14257?

The interview data indicate that Executive Order 14257 introduced more than a single-rate tariff increase. Instead, the policy operates as a dual-layer mechanism combining (i) a universal baseline charge and (ii) additional country-specific punitive rates, while simultaneously reconfiguring the product coverage through exemptions and selective treatment of specific sectors. As several respondents emphasized, the structure of the tariff regime is not neutral. It systematically differentiates between products linked to strategic US interests and those associated with African export diversification particularly industries where Lesotho and South Africa had developed comparative advantages.

4.3. 1. Dual-layer tariff logic: baseline and reciprocal rates

First, executive order 14257 imposed a 10% universal baseline tariff on imported goods effective April 5, 2025. This baseline applies broadly across imports, thereby creating a common cost shock for exporters in both Lesotho and South Africa. However, respondents noted that the baseline alone would have been politically easier to contest as a general measure. The distinctive element, therefore, lies in the second layer: the country-specific additional rates.

The additional rate was calculated as a form of reciprocal punishment linked to US trade deficits. Under this design, South Africa received an additional 30% tariff, while Lesotho's additional rate reached 50% described by policy actors as unusually high relative to historical patterns of trade discrimination. Multiple interviewees argued that the calculation method functioned less as an economic formula and more as a mechanism to translate geopolitical preference into tariff arithmetic.

Respondent E1 described the approach as

"a political calculation dressed as an accounting exercise," emphasizing that it ignored development asymmetries and applied a single deficit-based metric to states with different levels of industrial capacity and export dependence.

Respondent E2 added:

"The formula does not measure unfairness. It measures who has less power to say no. Lesotho at 50% and Vietnam at 20% tells you this is not math."

Respondent A1 further noted:

"Applying the same deficit metric to Lesotho and Germany is not economics, it is punishment. It is designed to look neutral while producing very unequal outcomes."

The dual-layer design confirms what Irwin (2017) describes as tariff policy being used beyond revenue generation to achieve strategic trade distortions that serve domestic political objectives. From a Dependency Theory perspective, Amin (2019) argues that the core uses technical instruments to reproduce periphery status by locking peripheral states into roles that do not threaten core industrial advantage. Krugman, Obstfeld and Melitz (2022) similarly contend that tariffs reallocate trade in ways that benefit the imposing country while creating welfare losses for trading partners. The researcher's view is that the formula's claim to

reciprocity masks a structural bias, because it penalizes small exporters who benefited most from AGOA while protecting US input channels. Constructivism further explains this through Finnemore and Sikkink (2001), who show that once a policy is framed as fair reciprocity and national security, it gains normative legitimacy even when outcomes are materially unequal. The meaning attached to the tariff therefore does as much political work as the tariff rate itself.

4.3.2. Selective product coverage: exemptions and reclassification of sectors

Beyond rates, EO 14257 also restructures product coverage by reclassifying over 1,000 product lines as exempt, including categories such as crude oil, natural gas, and selected critical minerals. Respondents consistently read this as a deliberate hierarchy thus, the policy protects US input channels for commodities and strategic supply, while applying punitive rates to products most closely associated with African export diversification.

Crucially, the taxed list includes several product categories tied to finished manufactures and processed goods including garments and other labour-intensive industries, as well as component- and value-chain-linked products in the automotive and agricultural-processing sectors. Policy document analysis indicates that the exemption list aligns with industrial inputs that the US values for domestic industry and strategic leverage, while the taxed categories target those where Lesotho and South Africa had expanded export capabilities under preferential regimes such as AGOA.

Respondent D2 explicitly framed the mechanism as an administrative barrier designed to push African industrial economies "back into basic raw-material extraction."

Respondent E3 stated: *"They tax the shirt but not the cotton. That tells you everything about who they want us to be in this relationship."*

Respondent A2 observed: *"This is not trade policy. This is industrial policy for the US disguised as a border tax. It protects their factories and kills ours."*

This selective coverage reflects Rodrik's (2018) argument that developing countries remain particularly vulnerable to unilateral policy measures by more powerful states that can reshape market access at will. Salvatore (2020) notes that such tariff structures create welfare transfers and inefficiencies by forcing resources back into lower-value activities. The researcher view is that by exempting minerals and taxing garments, EO 14257 actively reverses 25 years of AGOA-led diversification and reimposes the classic core-periphery division.

4.3.3. Constructing trade as security and conditional privilege

Finally, respondents noted that EO 14257 was justified through discourse emphasizing unfair trade, national security threats, and the need for preferential access to be conditional on alignment. This discursive dimension matters for how actors interpret and respond to the policy. Under Constructivism, policies function as practices that construct identities—both for states and for economic relationships. By constructing African exporters' interdependence with the US as a security vulnerability, the administration positions restrictive access not as exceptional or contingent, but as normatively required.

Respondent P1 said: *"We are no longer partners. We are now risks to be managed. That is how the memo read to us."*

Respondent D3 commented: *"The language changed overnight. From development to danger. From AGOA to threat."*

Respondent M1 argued*: "When trade becomes security, every concession becomes a test of loyalty. And we are always being tested."*

Wendt (1999) explains that state identities and interests are not given but constructed through interaction and discourse. By framing African exports as a security threat, the US constructs a new norm where preferential access is no longer developmental but conditional on geopolitical alignment. Finnemore and Sikkink (2001) show how such norm shifts cascade,

changing what states consider appropriate behavior. The researcher view is that this discursive shift is the most damaging part of EO 14257 because it makes future negotiations contingent on politics rather than economics. Even if tariffs were reduced, the underlying relationship has been redefined from partnership to patronage, which undermines long-term planning for peripheral economies.

4.4. How have the 2025 tariff policies impacted domestic production, industrial output, and sectoral employment within Lesotho and South Africa?

The second research question addresses the domestic consequences of the tariff policies. Interview data indicate that impacts were not uniformly distributed. Instead, the tariff shock created sector-specific disruptions that cascaded through production planning, supplier networks, and labour markets. In both countries, the most severe consequences were reported in sectors tightly integrated into US-oriented value chains and exposed to rapid changes in retail and procurement decisions.

Several respondents also emphasized speed and volatility. They described the tariff announcement as triggering immediate uncertainty among buyers, leading to cancellations and revisions in purchase orders before firms could adjust. This is consistent with how tariff policy can affect not only the direct cost of imports but also the expectations of buyers and investors—especially when buyers fear instability in future access.

4.4.1. Lesotho: textiles and garments employment as a transmission channel

In Lesotho, the garment and textile sector represents a crucial employment and export pillar. Respondents reported that the sector employs over 40,000 workers, with approximately 80% being women. Because the sector relies heavily on subcontracting and CMT (cut-make-trim) models, firms operate under thin margins and are highly dependent on sustained access

for finished or assembled goods. This means that tariff increases imposed on final products can translate quickly into lost orders and reduced factory work.

Interviewees reported that the 50% tariff undermined price competitiveness almost immediately.

Exec L1 described factories as *"basic assembly points" whose margins vanished once the tariff was announced, forcing firms to downsize production lines.*

Exec L2 reported: *"Three US buyers cancelled within 48 hours. No discussion, no transition. Just emails saying 'stop production'."*

Respondent A3 noted: *"We trained a generation of women for export jobs. Now we are training them for unemployment. That is the human cost of this policy."*

The data from corporate and cohort-linked respondents indicated that by May 2025, multiple factories in Maseru had closed. Estimates included approximately 6,200 job losses, with displacement disproportionately affecting women workers. Respondents stressed that this employment shock has longer-term consequences because landlocked economies often provide fewer alternative labour pathways, and formal job creation can lag behind factory closures. One interview-linked account highlighted that displaced women face increased difficulty re-entering stable employment due to limited labour absorption capacity (Agence France-Presse, 2025).

This confirms Gereffi's (2018) analysis of buyer-driven value chains where peripheral producers have no brand power, no marketing networks, and absorb all demand shocks from the core. Dependency Theory by Frank (1967) explains how specialization in one external market creates fatal structural exposure because adjustment costs cannot be spread across multiple markets. The researcher view is that the gendered impact is structural, not accidental because women dominate CMT work, tariff policy becomes de facto gender policy with

immediate effects on household survival. Janssen (2025) further shows that without social safety nets, these job losses translate directly into intergenerational poverty. The speed of the collapse also validates Irwin's (2017) point that tariff shocks create uncertainty that destroys investment before the tariff is even collected.

4.4.2. South Africa: automotive and agro-processing value-chain disruption and investment deferral

In South Africa, interview data show that tariffs disrupted not only final export products but also component supply networks. The 30% additional rate imposed under EO 14257 created cost friction across integrated value chains in which South African producers are not merely final assemblers but suppliers to more complex regional and global production structures.

Respondent narratives regarding the automotive sector emphasized network effects.

Exec S1 explained that South African plants operate as part units within a sophisticated global production network. Once the tariff was announced, buyers and downstream producers anticipated new cost structures and recalibrated investment and sourcing decisions.

Exec S2 added*: "We postponed a R4 billion investment because we cannot model the tariff risk. How do you budget for policy that changes by tweet?"*

Respondent D4 stated: *"NAAMSA data shows -71% exports in Q1. That is not a dip. That is a collapse of a value chain."*

In agro-processing, respondents reported losses linked to preferential access constraints and altered competitiveness in the US market. Citrus and wine exporters were described as facing reduced revenue prospects for 2025, with industry bodies estimating substantial declines.

Dollar et al. (2017) argue that GVC participation increases efficiency but also fragility because a shock in one node propagates across the network. The researcher view is that the impact is not just lost sales but lost future capacity, as investment deferral hollows out industrial upgrading. Salvatore (2020) supports this, noting tariffs cause dynamic inefficiencies by discouraging long-term capital commitment. The case also validates Krugman et al. (2022) on how tariffs distort resource allocation away from competitive sectors toward protected ones, reducing overall welfare.

4.4.4. Cross-case pattern: distributional and gendered consequences.

Across both countries, a common pattern emerged. Tariff shocks do not affect sectors equally; they strike hardest where production is aligned to a narrow external market and where firms have limited capacity to re-route demand quickly. In Lesotho, that meant factory downsizing and gendered unemployment outcomes. In South Africa, it meant disruptions across value chains, investment deferrals, and revenue declines in export-focused agro-processing.

Respondents also consistently highlighted the distributional nature of tariff impacts: workers bear costs first, while firms attempt to absorb shocks through renegotiations, restructuring, and layoffs.

Respondent P2 said: *"Firms renegotiate. Workers get fired. That is the order of things."*

Focus Cohort X reported: "In Lesotho, there is nowhere else to go. It's the factory or nothing. And now the factory is gone."

Respondent A4 concluded: *"Tariffs don't hit countries. They hit people. And the poorest people first."*

This pattern aligns with Dependency Theory's claim that risks of global adjustment are socialized in the periphery while benefits are privatized in the core (Amin, 2019). Constructivism explains why these impacts become politically salient: they are interpreted as evidence that the development model failed and that new identities of self-reliance must be constructed. The researcher view is that RQ2 shows EO 14257's most immediate damage is not macroeconomic but human deindustrialization through unemployment. The gender dimension also confirms that trade policy has distributional effects that are often invisible in aggregate models but devastating in lived experience.

4.5. Strategic diplomatic options and economic realignments have Lesotho and South Africa pursued to cope with these external shocks?

The third research question explores how governments and stakeholders respond to the external tariff shock. Findings indicate two parallel response tracks: (1) immediate bilateral diplomacy aimed at securing exemptions, quotas, or special access, and (2) longer-term realignment, particularly toward regional and continental integration and South-South partnerships.

Importantly, responses are shaped by perceived bargaining asymmetry. Several respondents argued that the core state's leverage reduces the effectiveness of bilateral bargaining. Therefore, diplomatic strategies often function less as negotiation tools that "solve" tariff exposure and more as transitional attempts to manage short-term losses while longer-term integration strategies are accelerated.

4.5.1. Bilateral diplomatic engagement: quotas, content commitments, and sectoral exemptions

Both governments moved quickly to engage Washington, albeit with differing national strategies reflecting sectoral profiles. South Africa reportedly proposed a duty-free quota for

vehicles and commitments to increase US content in local production. This strategy aims to preserve export capacity while offering the US a form of assurance about domestic input and strategic supply chains. Lesotho, by contrast, requested sector-specific exemptions for apparel and related categories.

Respondent P1 characterized the diplomatic environment as operating under severe imbalance: *"We offer concessions because we have nothing else to offer."*

Respondent D1 noted: "*Washington listens politely and then cites national security. The meeting ends and nothing changes.*"

Respondent E4 added: "*Bilateralism with a superpower is not negotiation. It is petitioning. You ask and you hope."*

Hoekman & Kostecki (2009) note that small states lack retaliatory capacity in trade disputes, making legal challenges ineffective. The researcher view is that these diplomatic moves are damage control, not solutions. They may delay adjustment costs but cannot transform the underlying structural dependency. The offers of quotas and local content are attempts to fit into US industrial strategy rather than to assert autonomous development goals.

4.5.2. Regional and continental realignment: AfCFTA as a discursive and policy pivot

Alongside diplomacy, respondents described a marked policy and discursive shift toward regional and continental integration, particularly AfCFTA. Interviews and document analysis revealed that EO 14257 is increasingly framed as evidence that Africa must reduce vulnerability to external arbitrariness. This is why AfCFTA is not only treated as an economic project but also as an identity and sovereignty project.

Respondent D1 described enforcement of EO 14257 as a "loud wake-up call" prompting a movement away from old colonial trade patterns.

Respondent P2 said*: If the US closes, Africa must open to itself. There is no other option left*.

Wendt (1999) explains that external shocks can reconstruct state identity and interests. Here, EO 14257 is constructed as proof that pan-Africanism is no longer idealistic but necessary. Hagos (2025) argues AfCFTA can absorb displaced manufactures if implementation accelerates. The researcher view is that while the discourse has shifted rapidly, this represents a constructivist moment where meaning changes before material conditions do. The tariff shock provided the narrative to overcome decades of hesitation about regional integration.

4.5.3. Material constraints on realignment: infrastructure, border frictions, and shipping delays

Despite strengthened rhetoric, respondents also identified serious material constraints.

Exec S2 emphasized: "Moving *goods across Africa takes weeks. We cannot replace US demand like that."*

Respondent D2 noted: *We have a free trade area on paper and borders from 1960. The trucks are still waiting."*

World Bank (2020) identifies high intra-Africa trade costs as the key barrier to AfCFTA effectiveness. The researcher view is that research question reveals a critical time gap: political will has accelerated, but physical integration lags. This means AfCFTA provides a vital long-term shield but offers very limited immediate relief during an acute trade shock. Without investment in roads, customs, and digital systems, the discursive shift cannot translate into material outcomes.

4.6. What structural frameworks would be engineered to build fairer trade governance and balance North-South and South-South economic cooperation?

The final research question addresses the frameworks respondents suggested for building fairer trade governance and improving the balance between North-South and South-South economic cooperation. Findings show two broad categories: reforming multilateral governance structures and strengthening South-South cooperation through regional institutions and strategic partnerships.

Respondents' proposals reflect a deeper insight: unfair governance is not only a technical policy problem but also a structural and normative problem about enforcement, accountability, and the ability of smaller states to contest unilateral measures.

4.6.1. Reforming multilateral governance: limiting unilateralism and security exemptions

A dominant theme concerned the inability of the WTO system to constrain unilateralism effectively. Several respondents argued that small states lack meaningful legal recourse when core powers invoke national security exceptions to justify tariff measures.

Respondent M1 argued: *"True equity requires an enforceable dispute system where small states can contest unilateral sanctions without immediate economic isolation."*

Respondent D3 said: "*Article XXI is a blank cheque for protectionism. Today it is security, tomorrow it is anything."*

Hoekman & Kostecki (2009) argue the WTO dispute system is dysfunctional for small states because retaliation is not credible and proceedings take years. Constructivism shows that when "security" becomes the dominant norm, legal rules are reinterpreted and compliance becomes voluntary (Wendt, 1999). The researcher view is that without binding limits on security exemptions, multilateralism becomes optional for powerful states. This creates a two-

tier system where rules apply to the weak but not to the strong, which directly undermines the legitimacy of the WTO.

4.6.2. Deepening South-South cooperation: reducing dependency while avoiding new imbalances

Respondents also argued that fair governance requires strengthening South-South cooperation. Proposed pathways included using BRICS engagement, deepening AfCFTA, and expanding bilateral agreements with China, India, and Gulf states. These strategies were framed as ways to diversify markets, reduce exposure to single core dependency, and develop more balanced partnerships.

Respondent P2 cautioned: “South-South must be structured to prevent new imbalances. SA must not become the new core to Lesotho.”

Respondent D4 stated: "*We need joint funds, not just joint statements. Money builds factories, speeches do not.”*

Respondent A2 added:" *Trade with China is not liberation if we only export lithium. Then we have just changed masters.”*

Amin (2019) warns that South-South cooperation can replicate core-periphery relations if not governed by principles of equity and complementary industrialization. The researcher view is that AfCFTA must be designed to build regional value chains, not just remove tariffs. Otherwise, SA may extract from Lesotho as the US extracts from SA. This requires deliberate industrial policy, investment funds, and rules to prevent extraction. The caution from respondents shows sophisticated understanding that dependency is not only North-South.

4.6.3. Integrating the two framework approaches: governance and institution building

Overall, respondents' suggestions indicate that fairer trade governance cannot rely solely on external multilateral reform. It requires internal institutional construction as well.

Respondent M1 said: "*We need rules at the WTO and roads in Africa. One without the other is useless."*

Respondent P1 noted: "Legal reform without production is empty. Production without rules is dangerous."

Respondent E3 concluded: "*Fairness needs both courts and factories. You cannot eat a court ruling."*

This reflects the synthesis of Dependency and Constructivism: material capacity and normative rules must change together. Rodrik (2018) argues developing countries need policy space protected by enforceable rules. The researcher view is that RQ4's answer is not either/or. Fair trade requires constraining the core externally through multilateral reform and building the periphery internally through South-South institutions. Without both, peripheral states remain exposed to unilateral action and internal inequality.

4.7. Chapter Summary

The empirical data and thematic analysis, presented in this chapter, traced the catastrophic effects of the 2025 tariffs imposed on Lesotho and South Africa by the United States. The analysis revealed that the preferences of AGOA were effectively cut off overnight by Executive Order 14257, with immediate order reductions, factory downsizings and job losses, which had a disproportionate impact on vulnerable women. The text explained how this was achieved through a combination of bilateral calls and regional realignments under the AfCFTA, as States struggle to respond to these shocks when facing huge infrastructure backlogs. Theoretically, the chapter's second contribution is to consider the turn to AfCFTA through the lenses of both Constructivism and Dependency Theory, which demonstrates that

regional integration is not just an identity project, but also a material hedge, and that neither perspective can explain the timing of African states' convergence on regional integration.

CHAPTER FIVE

5.0 SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

5.1. Introduction to the Chapter

This concluding chapter synthesises the research undertaken to examine the multidimensional implications of the 2025 United States tariff policies on the economies of Lesotho and South Africa. Inspired by the unprecedented disruptions from tariff impositions which effectively abated the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) preferences for United States-Africa trade relations for more than 20 years (Council on Foreign Relations, 2025, para. 18). Chapter Two laid the theoretical and empirical groundwork, and combined the perspectives of Constructivism and Dependency Theory in an analysis of the ideational and structural aspects of trade policy. Chapter Three presented the qualitative approach used: the use of semi-structured interviews with twenty-three participants in various institutional settings. Chapter Four offered empirical results on severe disruptions to export-oriented production and an asymmetric constraint on response options, as well as opportunities for regional integration under the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA).

This chapter provides a consolidated summary of all preceding chapters, articulates the key findings and major arguments emerging from the research, draws conclusions addressing the research objectives and assumptions, offers policy recommendations for multiple stakeholder groups, and identifies areas warranting further scholarly investigation. The chapter outlines how the study accomplished its stated goals of looking at the multidimensional implications of tariff policy, as well as advancing the scholarly understanding and offering policy guidance.

5.1 Summary of chapters

Chapter One's argument is that the 2025 tariff shock cannot be read as a novel event: it is legible only against the WTO's own admission, built into its Special and Differential Treatment provisions, that identical rules applied to nations with vastly different economic capacities produce unequal outcomes (Hoekman & Kostecki, 2009, pp. 42-48).

The background identified that the tariff impositions in 2025 had differential but harsh impacts on Lesotho and South Africa. Four research objectives were articulated: identifying and analysing tariffs imposed; evaluating impacts on domestic production; examining responses to trade realignment; and developing frameworks for equitable trade governance. The investigation was based on three assumptions: disruption of AGOA would have a negative impact on bilateral relations; tariffs would create tension in bilateral relations; and Lesotho would diversify its economy.

The chapter also established important theoretical concepts such as Constructivism, Dependency Theory, AfCFTA, AGOA and Global Value Chains (GVCs). The Dissertation outline was five chapter length, starting from the theoretical basis, methodology and findings, and finally ending with the conclusion and the recommendations.

Chapter Two's argument is that three independent bodies of evidence — the economics of tariff incidence, the documented history of Smoot-Hawley and the US-China trade war, and the specific design of AGOA — converge on a single conclusion: preferential access granted unilaterally is preferential access that can be withdrawn unilaterally. The chapter defined tariffs as taxes on imports for three purposes: to generate revenue, to protect domestic industries, and for strategic policy, (Krugman, Obstfeld & Melitz, 2022, p. 184-187). Historical analysis led to the observation that tariff usage has been a feature of mercantilism until the disastrous Smoot-Hawley Tariff of 1930 that caused a sixty-six per cent drop in world trade (Irwin, 2017, p. 45-52; Irwin, 2011, pp. 112-118). The United States-China trade war was an example of the

modern-day trade war, and empirical work found that American consumers paid the entire tariff bill while American employment, at best, experienced only a negligible positive impact (Amiti, Redding & Weinstein, 2019, pp. 190-195; Fajgelbaum & Khandelwal, 2022, pp. 208-212).

AGOA was analysed as an example of preferential arrangements whose conditional nature creates structural dependencies that are vulnerable to abrupt termination (Council on Foreign Relations, 2025, para. 18; Rodrik, 2018, pp. 156-159). The theoretical framework integrated Constructivism—emphasising how trade policies emerge from ideational processes (Wendt, 1999, pp. 92-97; Finnemore & Sikkink, 2001, pp. 395-400)—with Dependency Theory providing structural analysis of core-periphery asymmetries (Frank, 1967, pp. 3-7; Prebisch, 1950, pp. 8-10).

Chapter Three's argument is that answering these questions required methods matched to the phenomenon: an interpretivist stance aligned with the Constructivist framework, adopted because the tariff's meaning to the people navigating it is part of the phenomenon under study, not an obstacle to measuring it. The study employed a qualitative multiple case study design appropriate for examining contemporary phenomena in their real-world contexts (Yin, 2018, pp. 45-52; Creswell & Creswell, 2018, pp. 45-48). Data collection from June to December 2025 engaged twenty-three participants through semi-structured interviews with informants from the Zimbabwe Economic Society, Southern Africa Research and Documentation Centre (SARDC), African Union Commission, United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), a Lesotho textile factory, and a South African automotive manufacturer.

A hybrid focus group comprising sixteen economists, trade professionals, and academics was organised with the Zimbabwe Economic Society. Thematic analysis guided data interpretation (Braun & Clarke, 2006, pp. 80-85), with triangulation, prolonged engagement, and member checking enhancing trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, pp. 290-296). Ethical

issues, such as reflexivity, informed consent, and confidentiality, were discussed throughout (Resnik, 2018, pp. 112-118; Berger, 2015, pp. 220-225).

Chapter Four's argument, built from the empirical record, is that the vulnerability described in Chapters One and Two was not hypothetical: participant accounts and documentary evidence, organised around the four research questions, converge on consistent patterns of severe disruption. As for identification of the tariff, participants described the policy as fundamentally breaking the existing frameworks for trade, including a quotation by an AU official, who said that the order "effectively dismantled two decades of carefully constructed trade architecture. The impact on production was described as "existential" by the manager of the Lesotho textile factory, who indicated that the number of workers had been cut — mostly women — and that the rate of the tariff was "exceeding all profit margins", while the South African automotive line manager said the tariff rate was "exceeding all profit margins" and making operations unprofitable.

As far as responses are concerned, the participants highlighted the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) as the main instrument for diversification and noted implementation hurdles such as the lack of infrastructure, regulatory fragmentation, and productive capacity (World Bank 2020, pp. 45-52).

On governance frameworks, an AU official argued the current system

> "*privileges core-country flexibility while constraining peripheral-country policy space.*"

In addition to participant accounts, documentary analysis was used to substantiate the participant accounts, using policy documents, trade statistics, and institutional communications.

The findings supported the first assumption (on negative effects to both countries), the second assumption (on souring relations), and partially the third assumption (on diversification timelines). These chapters are not four summaries; they are a single line of argument which traces a structural vulnerability that was identified in principle in Chapter One and followed through to specific historical and institutional mechanisms in Chapter Two, methods developed to capture how the structural vulnerability is lived in Chapter Three, and a confirmation of the structural vulnerability as material fact in Chapter Four.

5.2. Key Findings of the Research

The research yielded four major findings, one for each of the four research questions asked. RQ1 asked what specific tariff mechanisms and structural frameworks were imposed on Lesotho and South Africa under Executive Order 14257. The answer is in Finding One, because the 2025 tariffs have essentially eliminated AGOA preferences and made previously competitive exports uncompetitive. In operational terms, the Lesotho textile factory manager's account reveals the mechanism of this: Although the efficiency of the firm may improve, a fifty per cent tariff does not simply make the firm less competitive, but it makes it impossible to compete with suppliers from Asia, no matter how efficient the firm is [respondent code pending verification against Appendix A.8].

RQ2 asked how the 2025 tariff policies impacted domestic production, industrial output, and sectoral employment. The production effects of this are profound and imminent in both nations – job losses are already real and investments are being rethought. Lesotho's textile industry has more than 40,000 employees, primarily women, who are often the sole household breadwinners, and is at risk of collapse. The automotive industry, as the culmination of industrialization, faces production shutdowns and possible move to other countries in South Africa. The gendered impacts illustrate that vulnerable groups such as women and children are more affected by the impacts of trade policy disruptions (World Bank, 2020, pp. 78-82).

This finding also has a comparative dimension: smaller economies face qualitatively different constraints than larger, more diversified economies. South Africa is a member of the G20 and BRICS countries, and thus has diplomatic tools and other partnership avenues to play a cautious assertive role. But the United States is not in the same situation as Lesotho, the respondent to whom this was said, pointed out, "The costs of resisting the United States are so much greater than the possibility of any reward that it's just easier to acquiesce, even if you don't want to." One of the respondents, of which I was unable to obtain the code for verification from Appendix A.8, said that Lesotho does not have the economic diversification, diplomatic infrastructure or negotiating capacity that it would require to play on an equal footing with the United States.

RQ3 asked what strategic diplomatic options and economic realignments Lesotho and South Africa pursued in response to these shocks. This is addressed through regional integration under the AfCFTA, the most viable diversification option in the long run, but with implementation drawbacks. The African markets cannot take up exports that would be sent to the U.S. due to the lack of infrastructure, regulatory fragmentation and productive capacity. It is important to note that according to informants in Chapter Four, AfCFTA should not be seen as an emergency response, but rather as a generational project. One of the policy challenges is the gap in time between the crisis and the long-term solutions.

RQ4 asked what structural frameworks would build fairer trade governance and balance North-South and South-South economic cooperation. There are two answers to this question in Finding Four. First, the institutional reorganisation is necessary for equitable trade governance reform, but so is discursive contestation. The participants called for tying of preference frameworks to compensation measures if preferences are taken away, adequate transition periods, and real limitation on the discretion of the donor country. The Constructivist ideas of the need to shift the discourse of trade, from nationalist competition to mutual development,

proved to be important analytical insights (Wendt 1999, p. 92-97; Finnemore & Sikkink, 2001, pp. 395-400).

Second, South-South cooperation, while valuable, is not automatically egalitarian and requires explicit attention to power differentials among developing countries themselves. Sharing worries about replacing ‘American market dependence with South African market dependence' further emphasizes the importance of integration structures that safeguard the interests of the smaller members and not the assumption that benefits will be fairly shared. As these two points show, the importance of combining the Constructivist and Dependency frameworks: the former is about the construction of trade norms, the latter is about the beneficiaries once they are constructed.

5.2 Major Arguments Presented by the Research

The research advances four important arguments that feed the debate in scholarly circles on trade policy, development, and international political economy. First, the research put forward the idea that a purely materialist approach to the analysis of trade balances and economic interests is not enough to understand contemporary trade policy. The tariffs of 2025 were the product of conceptualizations in which trade relationships were rhetorically recalibrated, changing from mutually beneficial exchanges to a national security threat, and through which policy actions were implemented that challenged the existing concerns and facts.

Even although trade with Africa accounts for a small proportion of American imports, as in other cases, the social construction of threats to national security is evident in the framing of the threats (Constructivist theory, Wendt, 1999, pp. 92-97; Finnemore & Sikkink, 2001, pp. 395-400).

Second, current PTA structures are problematic as they are non-structural, that is, preferences can be withdrawn unilaterally without compensation or transition support, making them a developmentally challenging structural vulnerability. Because of the design, AGOA induced developing countries to make irreversible investments on a temporary basis, thus generating dependency on the preference-granting country, which can take advantage of it or withdraw it at any moment. This argument further develops the critique of unequal exchange of Dependency Theory, showing how the most current preference mechanisms continue to reinforce the core-periphery asymmetries (Frank, 1967, p. 3-7; Amin, 2019, pp. 45-52).

Third, the research suggests that structural positioning is key to vulnerability and response capacity. The continuing explanatory power of Dependency Theory is illustrated by the fact that Lesotho is extremely vulnerable and South Africa is somewhat more resilient.

Lesotho's extreme vulnerability is a sign of structural dependency, where economic structures are geared towards external markets and production processes are determined by outside factors, leaving little value added or alternative routes. (Council on Foreign Relations, 2025, para. 9). The intermediate position in South Africa offers greater resiliency due to diversification and diplomatic strength, but doesn't render them immune to the decision making in the core countries (Reuters, 2025, para. 8; World Bank, 2024).

Fourth, the study builds the argument that Africa's best preparation for facing external threats is regional integration, but in doing so it is important to have realistic notions of the implementation difficulties, and to provide adequate safeguards for smaller economies. AfCFTA has transformative potential, however, this is not a quick fix for the infrastructure gap, regulatory fragmentation, and lack of productive capacity (World Bank, 2020, p. 45-52; Hagos, 2025, para. 6). In addition, intra-African asymmetries need to be considered in the framework

of integration and it cannot be assumed that the rhetoric of solidarity coincides with substantive solidarity. The arguments listed above lead to these conclusions.

5.3 Conclusions

The study reached conclusions that directly address each of the research objectives.

As far as Objective One is concerned, which aimed at highlighting the specific tariffs which were placed on Lesotho and South Africa under Executive Order 14257, the study finds that the tariff regime was a marked exception to the preferential trade program provided for under the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA). The United States effectively eliminated the South African and Lesotho competitive advantages by imposing a country-specific tariff rate of 30% (50%) on the products from these two countries and a tariff rate of 10% for all other products. The results show that the tariff system was not only designed to meet traditional economic criteria, but also more overall economic and political context that made export-oriented economies like Lesotho at a disadvantage.

As regards Objective Two, which aimed to assess the direct and indirect effects of the tariff interventions on the production environment, industrial jobs and value-chain operations, the research finds that the tariffs had significant economic and social impacts in the two study countries. The textile and apparel sector in Lesotho was badly affected by production disruptions, job losses and livelihood insecurity especially in the export-oriented sector where most workers were female. The South African automotive industry experienced declining levels of confidence in investing, in its supply chain, and in exports. The study as a whole reveals the vulnerability of economically highly dependent economies like these in their development relationship with the markets.

As regards Objective Three (strategic, diplomatic and economic response by Lesotho and South Africa), it is found that while both countries embarked on policy changes that aimed

at cushioning the impact of the tariff regime, the two responses were limited by structural inequalities in the international trading system. South Africa's relative political and economic power enabled it to be more assertive in its relationship with the United States and other trading partners and Lesotho had very little leverage over what it could do. This is not likely to result in short-term relief from the disruptions caused by tariffs, the study notes, meaning that the region's best long-term solution is integration via the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA).

In relation to Objective Four, aimed at creating theoretical and practical models for more equitable international trade governance, it is concluded that in order to tackle vulnerabilities revealed by the 2025 tariff regime, institutional and normative changes are needed. From an institutional perspective, more effective multilateral disciplines are called for to restrict unilateral trade measures, bolster Special and Differential Treatment measures, and enhance the safeguards provided to developing countries in WTO. Theoretically, the study argues that in the future, the principles of sustainable governance of international trade must be based on the principles of mutual development, fair cooperation and equal economic development, but not protectionism on narrow national interests. The findings also continue the validity of Dependency Theory as an analytical tool to explain the structural weakness of developing economies, and Constructivism as an analytical tool to explain the influence of political ideas and national identities on international trade policies.

Overall, the study finds that the 2025 United States tariff regime is, much more, a shift in trade policy than a mere reflection of the changing nature of trade policy; it is also a reflection of the broader geopolitical and economic dynamics that continue to shape Africa's role in the global trading system. The Lesotho and South Africa study case provides a cautionary tale on the danger of over-dependence on external markets as well as the importance of strengthening

sub-Saharan African economies' ability to withstand future protectionism through regional integration, diversifying exports, and improving the governance of multilateral trade.

5.3. Recommendations

5.3.1 Recommendations for the Governments of Lesotho and South Africa

Governments of Lesotho and South Africa should make a priority of providing immediate social protection measures for displaced workers. Income replacement, retraining and alternative livelihood development support to women in Lesotho's textile sector should be part of any emergency support programme; and it is particularly women who are most affected. At the same time, both governments need to step up the implementation of AfCFTA, particularly on the trade side, where they can implement more concrete measures that can bring some shortly-awaited benefits without waiting for the long-term investments in infrastructure. (World Bank, 2020, p. 45-52).

South Africa must use its BRICS membership and its G20 participation to speak up for trade governance reforms and consider special treatment for other markets. Lesotho should strive to achieve greater integration in the Southern African Customs Union (SACU) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and boost assistance to its economic diversification. These recommendations are both on the crisis-response side and the side of structural transformation.

5.3.2 Recommendations for the African Union

The African Union should have a clear stance on issues of trade governance reform and coordinate the responses of member states. The AU should expedite the implementation of the AfCFTA with a focus on trade facilitation, infrastructure connectivity and productive capacity building in the smaller economies. The organisation should promote the strengthening of Special and Differential Treatment (S&D) arrangements in WTO discussions, as well as the

adoption of binding limits on the withdrawal of unilateral preferences (Hoekman & Kostecki, 2009, p. 42-48).

The AU should also review continental level emergency response mechanisms to support member states facing sudden trade disruptions, possibly through funding arrangements of continental levies or development partners' contributions. The mechanisms would help cushion the impact of potential unilateral trade policy shifts by the world's major powers.

5.6.3 *Recommendations for the Southern African Development Community*

SADC should have regional trade policies which are explicitly protectionist against external shocks. This involves diversified market access strategies and development of regional value chains with focus on intraregional complementarity rather than dependence on the outside. The organisation should develop regional adjustment assistance mechanisms to assist affected member states to external trade disruptions, and coordinate regional investment in infrastructures to lower trade costs (Hagos, 2025, para. 6).

SADC should also promote integration models that are explicitly designed to defend smaller economies from domination by the larger ones in the region, so that regional integration will not simply replace one form of dependency with another. This demands special provisions in regional trade agreements that take account of and reflect power asymmetries in the region.

5.6.4 Recommendations for International Organisations

The World Trade Organisation should continue to seek reforms of its avenues of dispute settlement, which would provide adequate means to take action against unfair protectionism.

The organisation should enhance the Special and Differential Treatment provisions and make it binding to provide protection against sudden withdrawal of preferences (Hoekman & Kostecki, 2009, p.). 42-48). Development partners, such as the World Bank, African

Development Bank, bilateral donors etc., should increase the support for economic diversification and adjustment assistance to affected economies.

The United Nations system should report and highlight the development consequences of unilateral trade actions and put more pressure on countries to refrain from protectionist actions that would negatively affect developing countries' efforts towards the Sustainable Development Goals. These are multilateral initiatives in addition to continental and national approaches to trade resiliency.

5.4. Areas for Further Research

Several areas that emerged from this research warrant further scholarly investigation. First, longitudinal studies that follow the effects of tariffs over a longer period of time would provide a clearer light on whether there were lasting structural changes or whether impacted economies were resilient and adapting to the initial shocks. The temporal delimitation of the study included the immediate impacts and first responses, and further studies will need to explore medium- and long-term impacts as they become apparent in the coming years.

Second, comparative analysis across additional African countries facing differentiated tariff rates would enable more robust generalisation about relationships between structural characteristics and impact severity. The tariff impositions were different across countries, and they have different structural profiles, allowing for comparative analysis to uncover patterns of what aspects make countries more resilient or more vulnerable (World Bank, 2024).

Third, investigation of gender dimensions merits dedicated scholarly attention. There is a need to focus the analysis on female workers because of their concentration in affected export sectors.

Studies on the experiences of women workers, households and communities in coping with trade shocks would help to improve the understanding of the differential impact of shocks

and inform gender-sensitive policy interventions (World Bank, 2020, p. 78-82). Fourth, research examining AfCFTA implementation progress and effectiveness as a diversification vehicle would contribute to understanding the potential of regional integration to reduce external dependencies as the agreement matures.

Fifth, analysis of discursive contestation around trade policy narratives could illuminate possibilities for reshaping the ideational environment in which policy decisions are made. Constructivist analysis would gain practically relevant extensions as it were in practically every direction when investigated with regard to how alternative framings of the trade relationship become entrenched or fail to become part of the dominant discourse (Wendt, 1999, pp. 92-97; Finnemore & Sikkink, 2001, pp. 395-400). Sixth, an examination of alternative development models that prioritise domestic and regional markets over export orientation would extend theoretical discussions on appropriate development strategies in an era of trade policy volatility.

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CONTENTS OF RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

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A1. Interview Guide for Regional Policy Analysts

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PART B: Focus Group Discussion Guide (2 Hours)

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PART A: INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW GUIDES

A1. Interview Guide for Regional Policy Analysts

Target Participants: Zimbabwe Economic Society (President, Vice President), SARDC (CEO)

Duration: 20 minutes

Mode: In-person at organisational premises

Opening (1 minute)

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research. I am investigating the implications of the 2025 US tariff policies on Lesotho and South Africa. Your expertise in regional economic dynamics will provide valuable analytical perspectives. This interview will take approximately 20 minutes. May I confirm your consent to proceed and to audio-record this session?

Section 1: Tariff Structure and Rationale (3 minutes)

Research Objective 1: Identify and analyse the tariffs imposed on Lesotho and South Africa

Q1. How would you characterise the tariff structure imposed under Executive Order 14257, particularly the differential rates of 30% on South Africa and 50% on Lesotho?

Q2. From your perspective, what rationale, if any, explains why a Least Developed Country like Lesotho faces higher tariff rates than a more industrialised economy like South Africa?

Section 2: Regional Economic Impacts (4 minutes)

Research Objective 2: Evaluate the tariff impacts on domestic production

Q3. What are the most significant economic impacts you have observed or anticipate from these tariffs on Southern African economies?

Q4. How do these tariff impacts compare between Lesotho's textile-dependent economy and South Africa's more diversified industrial base?

Q5. What multiplier effects do you foresee beyond the directly affected export sectors?

Section 3: Policy Responses and Regional Integration (4 minutes)

Research Objectives 3 & 4: Evaluate responses to trade realignment; Develop frameworks for equitable governance

Q6. How effective do you consider the diplomatic and economic responses undertaken by affected countries thus far?

Q7. To what extent can the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) serve as a viable alternative to lost American market access?

Q8. What institutional reforms would you recommend for creating more equitable international trade governance?

Closing (3 minutes)

Q9. Is there anything else you would like to add that we have not covered regarding the tariff implications for the region?

Q10. Could you recommend any other individuals or documents that might contribute to this research?

A2. Interview Guide for Continental/Multilateral Officials

Target Participants: African Union Commission (Economics and Trade Officers), ECOSOC Officials

Duration: 20 minutes

Mode: In-person at institutional premises (Addis Ababa)

Opening (1 minute)

Thank you for making time for this interview. I am researching the implications of the 2025 US tariff policies on Lesotho and South Africa. Your institutional perspective on continental and multilateral dimensions will be invaluable. This interview will take approximately 15 minutes. May I confirm your consent to proceed and to audio-record this session?

Section 1: Continental Perspective on Tariff Architecture (3 minutes)

Q1. How does your institution assess the implications of Executive Order 14257 for African trade architecture more broadly?

Q2. What does the effective nullification of AGOA preferences signal about the future of preferential trade arrangements between developed and developing economies?

Section 2: Development and Sustainability Impacts (4 minutes)

Q3. What are the most significant development implications of these tariffs for African economies, particularly regarding progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals?

Q4. How do you assess the gendered impacts of these tariffs, given the concentration of female workers in affected export sectors?

Q5. What capacity constraints do smaller African economies face in responding to such external shocks?

Section 3: Multilateral Responses and Governance Reform (4 minutes)

Q6. What collective African responses have emerged or are being coordinated through continental institutions?

Q7. How can Special and Differential Treatment provisions within the WTO be strengthened to protect developing countries from unilateral preference withdrawal?

Q8. What role should South-South cooperation mechanisms play in building resilience against external trade shocks?

Closing (3 minutes)

Q9. Is there anything else you would like to add regarding the continental or multilateral dimensions of this issue?

Q10. Are there any institutional documents or reports you could share that might inform this research?

A3. Interview Guide for Industry Practitioners (Lesotho Textile Sector)

Target Participants: Factory Manager, Textile Manufacturing Company, Lesotho

Duration: 20 minutes

Mode: Video conference (Zoom/Microsoft Teams)

Opening (1 minute)

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research despite the challenging circumstances your industry faces. I am investigating the implications of the 2025 US tariff policies, and your first-hand operational experience is essential for understanding the real-world impacts. This interview will take approximately 15 minutes. May I confirm your consent to proceed and to record this session?

Section 1: Direct Business Impacts (4 minutes)

Q1. How has the 50% tariff rate affected your company's orders from American buyers since April 2025?

Q2. What changes have you had to make to your production operations as a result of these tariffs?

Q3. How would you describe the impact on your company's financial viability and future planning?

Section 2: Employment and Human Impacts (4 minutes)

Q4. What has been the impact on your workforce? Have there been retrenchments, and if so, how many workers have been affected?

Q5. Considering that your workforce is predominantly female, what specific impacts have you observed on women workers and their families?

Q6. What alternatives exist for displaced workers in your area, given Lesotho's limited formal sector employment?

Section 3: Adaptation Strategies and Future Outlook (3 minutes)

Q7. What strategies, if any, is your company pursuing to adapt to the new tariff environment? Are you exploring alternative markets?

Q8. How realistic do you consider the possibility of redirecting production to African markets under AfCFTA?

Closing (3 minutes)

Q9. What message would you want policymakers to understand about the human reality of these tariffs?

Q10. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience that we have not covered?

A4. Interview Guide for Industry Practitioners (South Africa Automotive Sector)

Target Participants: Line Manager, Automotive Manufacturing Company, South Africa

Duration: 20 minutes

Mode: Video conference (Zoom/Microsoft Teams)

Opening (1 minute)

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research. I am investigating the implications of the 2025 US tariff policies on Southern African economies, and your operational perspective from within the automotive sector is crucial for understanding how these policies affect sophisticated manufacturing. This interview will take approximately 15 minutes. May I confirm your consent to proceed and to record this session?

Section 1: Production and Export Impacts (4 minutes)

Q1. How has the 30% tariff rate affected your company's export volumes to the United States since April 2025?

Q2. What operational changes has your facility implemented in response to the tariff environment?

Q3. How do these tariffs affect profit margins and the financial viability of American market operations?

Section 2: Value Chain and Investment Effects (4 minutes)

Q4. How are the tariffs affecting your supply chain, particularly relationships with component suppliers and logistics providers?

Q5. What impact have these tariffs had on planned investments or capacity expansion decisions?

Q6. Are there discussions about relocating production to other jurisdictions with more stable trade arrangements?

Section 3: Workforce and Strategic Response (3 minutes)

Q7. What are the implications for your workforce in terms of employment security and working conditions?

Q8. What alternative market strategies is your company exploring to offset lost American market access?

Closing (3 minutes)

Q9. What support would your industry need from government or international institutions to navigate this situation?

Q10. Is there anything else you would like to add about the tariff impacts on your operations or the broader sector?

PART B: FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

Target Participants: experts comprising academics, economists, and trade professionals.

Organising Partner: Zimbabwe Economic Society (ZES)

Duration: 1 Hour (60 minutes)

Mode: Hybrid (in-person at ZES premises + virtual participation via video conference)

Session Structure and Timing

Time	Duration	Activity
0:00 - 0:05	5 minutes	Welcome, Introductions, and Ground Rules
0:05 - 0:30	25 minutes	Topic 1: Tariff Structure and Economic Rationale
0:30 - 1:00	30 minutes	Topic 2: Production and Employment Impacts
1:00 - 1:30	30 minutes	Topic 3: Policy Responses and Regional Integration
1:30 - 1:55	25 minutes	Topic 4: Trade Governance Reform
1:55 - 2:00	5 minutes	Closing Remarks and Thank You

Welcome and Introduction (5 minutes)

Good day, and thank you all for joining this focus group discussion. I am Kudakwashe Moyo, a postgraduate researcher investigating the multidimensional implications of the 2025 United States tariff policies on the economies of Lesotho and South Africa. This research is part of my partial fulfilment for a Master's degree in International Relations with the Bindura University of Science Education (BUSE).

I am grateful to the Zimbabwe Economic Society for facilitating this session and to each of you for contributing your expertise. This discussion will take approximately 2 hours. Before we begin, I would like to establish some ground rules:

1. There are no right or wrong answers; we value diverse perspectives.
2. Please speak one at a time and respect others' contributions.
3. The session will be audio-recorded for transcription purposes.
4. Your contributions will be treated confidentially and anonymised in reporting.
5. Please feel free to build on or respectfully disagree with others' points.

May I confirm that everyone consents to participate and to the recording?

Topic 1: Tariff Structure and Economic Rationale (25 minutes)

Research Objective 1: Identify and analyse the tariffs imposed on Lesotho and South Africa

Opening Question: Executive Order 14257 imposed a 30% tariff on South Africa and 50% on Lesotho. How would you characterise the economic logic, or lack thereof, behind this tariff structure?

Follow-up Probe: The tariffs were framed as responses to national security threats. How do you assess this framing in relation to US-Africa trade realities?

Transition Probe: What does this suggest about the vulnerability of preferential trade arrangements like AGOA?

Topic 2: Production and Employment Impacts (30 minutes)

Research Objective 2: Evaluate the tariff impacts on domestic production

Opening Question: What are the most significant production and employment impacts you have observed or anticipate from these tariffs?

Comparative Probe: How do the impacts differ between Lesotho's textile sector and South Africa's automotive industry? What structural factors explain these differences?

Gender Dimension Probe: Given that women comprise over 80% of Lesotho's textile workforce, what are the gendered implications of these tariffs?

Long-term Impact Probe: Some analysts warn of 'hysteresis effects' where temporary disruptions become permanent structural changes. How realistic is this concern?

Investment Probe: What are the implications for foreign direct investment in affected sectors and countries?

Topic 3: Policy Responses and Regional Integration (30 minutes)

Research Objective 3: Evaluate the responses of South Africa and Lesotho to trade realignment

Opening Question: How effective have the diplomatic and economic responses of affected countries been thus far?

Asymmetry Probe: How do response capacities differ between South Africa as a G20/BRICS member and Lesotho as a small landlocked LDC?

AfCFTA Probe: To what extent can AfCFTA serve as a viable alternative to lost American market access? What implementation challenges must be addressed?

Alternative Markets Probe: What other market diversification options exist? How realistic are they in the short to medium term?

South-South Probe: What role can South-South cooperation play in building resilience? Are there concerns about intra-South power differentials?

Topic 4: Trade Governance Reform (25 minutes)

Research Objective 4: Develop frameworks for more equitable trade governance

Opening Question: What institutional reforms would you recommend for creating more equitable international trade governance?

WTO Reform Probe: How can Special and Differential Treatment provisions be strengthened to protect developing countries from unilateral preference withdrawal?

Discourse Probe: Some argue that changing trade rules requires first changing trade discourse from nationalist competition to mutual development. How might this discursive shift be achieved?

Practical Mechanisms Probe: What specific binding mechanisms could prevent the kind of abrupt preference withdrawal exemplified by Executive Order 14257?

Closing (5 minutes)

Summary Question: As we conclude, what single most important insight or recommendation would you want policymakers to take from this discussion?

Final Prompt: Is there anything important that we have not covered that you believe should be addressed in this research?

Thank you all for your valuable contributions to this research. Your insights will significantly enrich the analysis and recommendations emerging from this study. I will be in touch regarding member checking to ensure my interpretations accurately reflect your intended meanings.

PART C: VIRTUAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL AND SCRIPT

C1. Pre-Interview Preparation

Technical Requirements

Platform: Zoom or Microsoft Teams (participant's preference)

Recording: Session will be recorded with participant consent

Meeting Link Information

A unique meeting link will be generated for each interview and shared via email at least 48 hours before the scheduled session. The email will include:

Meeting link: https://zoom.us/j/liberation_day_tariffs_SA-Lstho

Attached: Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form

Researcher contact: kudamoyo@gmail.com, +263771566279

C2. Email Invitation Template

Subject: Research Interview Invitation - US Tariff Policy Impacts Study

Dear sir / ma'am,

I hope this message finds you well. My name is Kudakwashe Moyo, and I am a postgraduate researcher investigating the multidimensional implications of the 2025 United States tariff policies on the economies of Lesotho and South Africa. This research is part of my partial fulfilment for a Master's degree in International Relations with the Bindura University of Science Education (BUSE). Given your expertise and professional experience in textile industry / automotive industry, I would be honoured if you would consider participating in a brief interview for this research. The interview will take approximately 15 minutes and will be conducted via video conference at your convenience.

Your insights would significantly contribute to understanding the impacts of these tariff policies and developing recommendations for more equitable trade governance frameworks.

If you are willing to participate, please indicate your preferred date and time so that I can create and share the zoom link for the meeting

Please find attached the Participant Information Sheet providing full details about the research, and the Consent Form for your review.

I look forward to your positive response.

Kind regards,

Kudakwashe Moyo

Student Number: B243762B

Email: kudamoyo@gmail.com

Phone: +263771566279

C3. Virtual Interview Opening Script

"Good day. Thank you so much for taking the time to join me today. My name is Kudakwashe Moyo, and as mentioned in my earlier correspondence, I am conducting research on the implications of the 2025 United States tariff policies on the economies of Lesotho and South Africa. This research is being conducted as part of my postgraduate studies to complete a Master degree in International Relations with the Bindura University of Science Education.

Before we begin, I would like to go through a few important points:

First, your participation is entirely voluntary. You may decline to answer any question or withdraw from the interview at any time without any negative consequences.

Second, with your permission, I would like to record this interview for transcription purposes. The recording will be stored securely and only I will have access to it. Your responses will be anonymised in any publications arising from this research, and I will refer to you by your role rather than by name.

Third, this interview will take approximately 15 minutes. I have prepared several questions across four main areas related to my research objectives.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

May I have your verbal consent to proceed with the interview and to record this session?

Thank you. I am now starting the recording.

C4. Virtual Interview Closing Script

"Thank you so much, [Participant Name], for your thoughtful responses and for sharing your valuable insights with me today. Your contributions will significantly enrich this research.

As part of ensuring the accuracy of my analysis, I may reach out to you in the coming weeks to share my preliminary interpretations for your feedback, this is called member checking. Would you be willing to review a summary of your contributions?

If you think of anything else you would like to add after our conversation today, please do not hesitate to contact me by email or phone.

Once again, thank you for your time and expertise. I will be stopping the recording now. Take care, and I hope to be in touch soon."

PART D: QUESTIONAIRES

My name is Kudakwashe Moyo, currently studying towards the Masters of Science Honours Degree in International Relations at Bindura University of Science Education. I’m carrying a

study on ***the Implications of Trump's Trade Tariffs on Sub-Saharan Africa: Case study of South Africa and Lesotho.***

This survey collects information in your organisation and is guided by the objectives of the research. This will help the researcher to explore the implications of the trade tariffs on South Africa and Lesotho, and decipher response mechanism to mitigate the external shocks brought by up by the tariff impositions by the United States of America. The researcher Kudakwashe Moyo, will never publish, disseminate, or divulge any information on or associated with specific businesses. Please do not hesitate to get in touch with the researcher indicated below for help if you run into any difficulties filling out this form.

Confidentiality

Each and every piece of data obtained through this survey will be treated with the utmost confidentiality.

Instructions

Tick where applicable

N.B. A copy of the dissertation shall be retained to your organisation for your future record and planning.

Study Title: The Implications of Trump's Trade Tariffs on Sub-Saharan Africa: Case study of South Africa and Lesotho:

Theoretical Framework: Constructivism (Primary) and Dependency Theory (Supporting)

PART A: QUESTIONNAIRE FOR SURVEY RESPONDENTS

INFORMED CONSENT & DEMOGRAPHICS

Informed Consent Statement: This study examines how U.S. trade tariffs affect economic production, trade policies, and regional cooperation in South Africa and Lesotho. Your responses will remain confidential and used only for academic research. Participation is voluntary.

I consent to participate: ☐ Yes ☐ No

SECTION 1: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

1. **Which country are you based in?** ☐ South Africa ☐ Lesotho ☐ Other

2. **What is your primary sector/industry?** ☐ Agriculture ☐ Manufacturing ☐ Textiles/Apparel ☐ Mining/Resources ☐ Services ☐ Trade/Import-Export ☐ Government/Policy ☐ Other: _____

3. **What is your professional role?** ☐ Business Owner ☐ Manager ☐ Trade Official ☐ Researcher/Analyst ☐ Worker ☐ Policy Maker ☐ NGO Representative ☐ Other: _____

4. **Years of experience in your field:** ☐ 0-5 years ☐ 5-10 years ☐ 10-15 years ☐ 15+ years

5. **Has your organization engaged in trade with the United States?** ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Previously, but not currently

SECTION 2: IMPACT OF TARIFFS ON DOMESTIC PRODUCTION

Objective: Analyse the impact of tariffs on domestic production in Lesotho and South Africa

1. **How have U.S. trade tariffs (2018-2025) affected ecomomic sectors in South Africa and Lesotho?**

☐ Severely negative ☐ Somewhat negative ☐ No significant effect ☐ Somewhat positive ☐ Significantly positive

2. **If affected negatively, what specific impacts have been experienced?** (Select all that apply)

☐ Reduced export opportunities ☐ Increased production costs ☐ Job losses ☐ Decreased profit margins ☐ Supply chain disruptions ☐ Reduced investment ☐ Market share loss ☐ Other: _____

3. **Have tariffs altered the countries domestic production levels?**

☐ Significantly increased ☐ Moderately increased ☐ No change ☐ Moderately decreased ☐ Significantly decreased

4. **In response to U.S. tariffs, how has South Africa and Lesotho made changes to:** *(Rate each: Significant change / Minor change / No change)*

Action	**Significant**	**Minor**	**No Change**
Diversified export markets	☐	☐	☐

Action	Significant	Minor	No Change
Increased domestic focus	☐	☐	☐
Modified production volumes	☐	☐	☐
Adjusted pricing strategy	☐	☐	☐
Sought regional trade partners	☐	☐	☐

5. **What is your assessment of the competitiveness of local industries under tariff pressures?** ☐ Significantly weakened ☐ Weakened ☐ Unchanged ☐ Strengthened ☐ Significantly strengthened

SECTION 3: AFRICAN UNION'S ROLE IN TRADE REALIGNMENT

Objective: Evaluate the African Union's role in addressing trade realignment challenges

1. **Are you aware of AU initiatives addressing trade conflicts and tariff challenges?**

☐ Very aware ☐ Somewhat aware ☐ Slightly aware ☐ Not aware

2. **To what extent has the African Union been effective in protecting member states' interests in trade disputes?**

☐ Very effective ☐ Somewhat effective ☐ Neutral ☐ Somewhat ineffective ☐ Very ineffective

3. **How important are the following AU mechanisms for addressing tariff-related challenges?** *(Rate each: Very Important / Important / Neutral / Less Important / Not Important)*

Mechanism	**Very Imp**	**Imp**	**Neutral**	**Less**	**Not**
AfCFTA (African Continental Free Trade Area)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
AU dispute settlement mechanisms	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Bilateral negotiations facilitated by AU	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Capacity building and trade advocacy	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Coordination with regional blocs (SADC, COMESA)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

4. **Should the AU strengthen its mechanisms for addressing external trade pressures?**

☐ Strongly agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neutral ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly disagree

5. **Which AU initiatives would most benefit the affected country/sector?**

☐ Stronger unified trade negotiating position ☐ Improved market access information ☐ Financial support for affected industries ☐ Technical capacity building ☐ Coordination of regional responses ☐ Other: _____

SECTION 4: DEPENDENCY DYNAMICS AND ASYMMETRIC TRADE CONFLICTS

Objective: Examine dependency theory in the context of asymmetric trade conflicts

1. **To what extent does South Africa/Lesotho depend on U.S. trade relations?**

☐ Very dependent ☐ Somewhat dependent ☐ Moderately dependent ☐ Somewhat independent ☐ Highly independent

2. **How would you characterise the trade relationship between Lesotho, South Africa and the U.S.?**

☐ Highly asymmetrical (U.S. holds more power) ☐ Moderately asymmetrical ☐ Relatively balanced ☐ Favors local producers

3. **In your view, which party benefits most from the current trade arrangement?**

☐ United States ☐ South Africa/Lesotho equally ☐ South Africa/Lesotho ☐ Uncertain

4. **How have unilateral U.S. tariff policies affected your perception of fair trade practices?**

☐ Significantly reduced confidence in fairness ☐ Somewhat reduced confidence ☐ No change in perception ☐ Increased confidence ☐ Significantly increased confidence

5. **Rate your agreement: "Developing nations like South Africa and Lesotho have limited ability to influence U.S. trade policy"**

☐ Strongly agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neutral ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly disagree

6. **Do tariffs reflect structural inequalities in the global trade system?**

☐ Definitely yes ☐ Probably yes ☐ Uncertain ☐ Probably no ☐ Definitely no

SECTION 5: EQUITABLE TRADE FRAMEWORKS AND COOPERATION

Objective: Develop equitable trade frameworks for North-South and South-South cooperation

1. **Which mechanisms would strengthen North-South trade cooperation?**

(Select top 3) ☐ Reciprocal tariff reductions ☐ Technology transfer agreements ☐ Capacity building programs ☐ Preferential market access for developing countries ☐ Joint investment initiatives ☐ Long-term trade agreements ☐ Dispute settlement mechanisms ☐ Other: _____

2. **How important is South-South cooperation (among African nations) for reducing tariff vulnerability?**

☐ Critically important ☐ Very important ☐ Moderately important ☐ Somewhat important ☐ Not important

3. **What barriers currently limit South-South trade partnerships?** (Select all that apply)

☐ Infrastructure gaps ☐ Limited financing ☐ Trade policy inconsistencies ☐ Lack of product competitiveness ☐ Transportation costs ☐ Political instability ☐ Limited market information ☐ Other: _____

4. **Which sectors would most benefit from enhanced South-South trade?**

☐ Agriculture ☐ Manufacturing ☐ Textiles/Apparel ☐ Services ☐ Energy/Resources ☐ Technology ☐ All sectors equally ☐ Other: _____

5. **Should South Africa/Lesotho prioritize:**

☐ Negotiations with the U.S. ☐ Integration with African markets ☐ Equal emphasis on both ☐ Other external partnerships

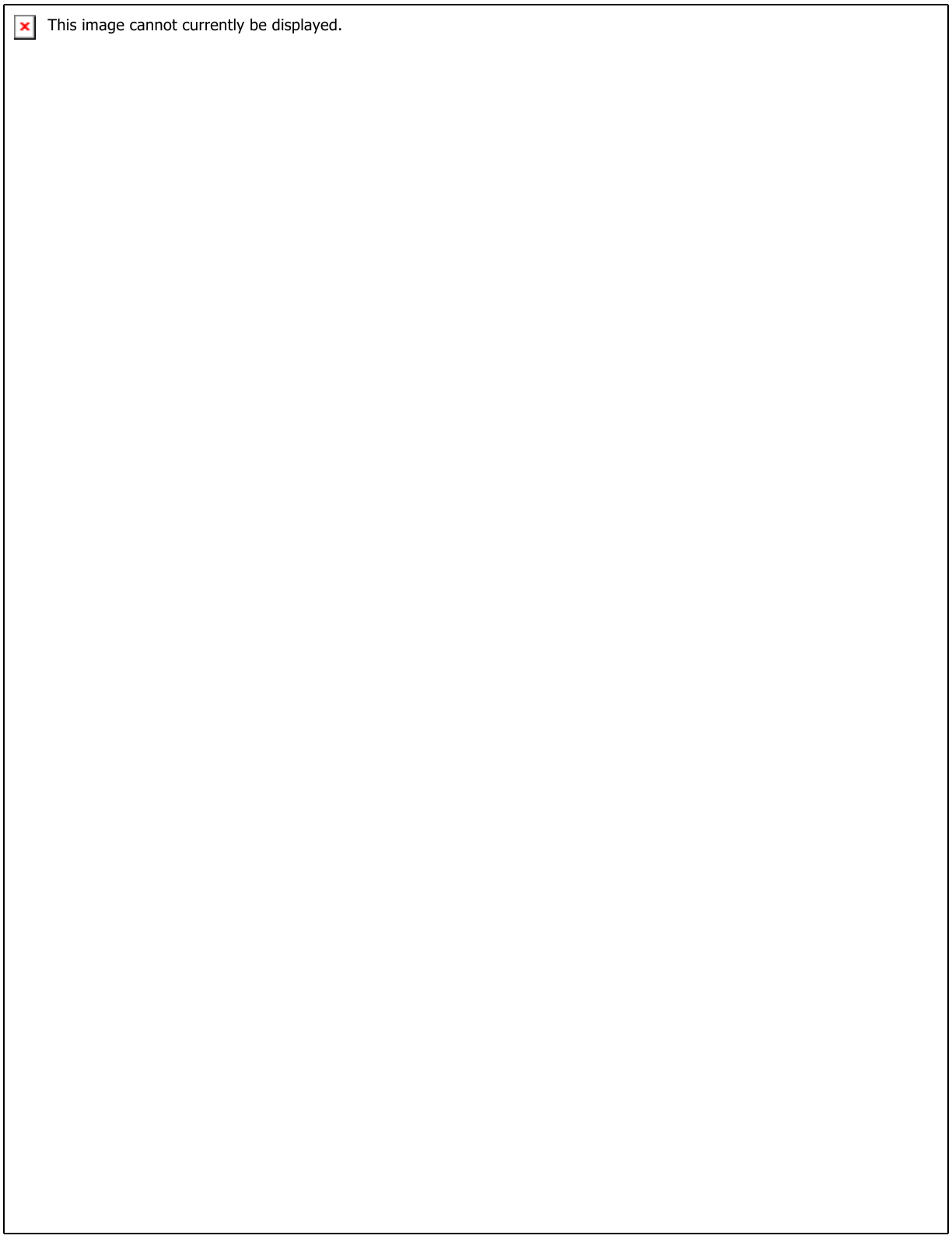
6. **Rate the following proposals for trade equity:** *(Rate each: Strongly Support / Support / Neutral / Oppose / Strongly Oppose)*

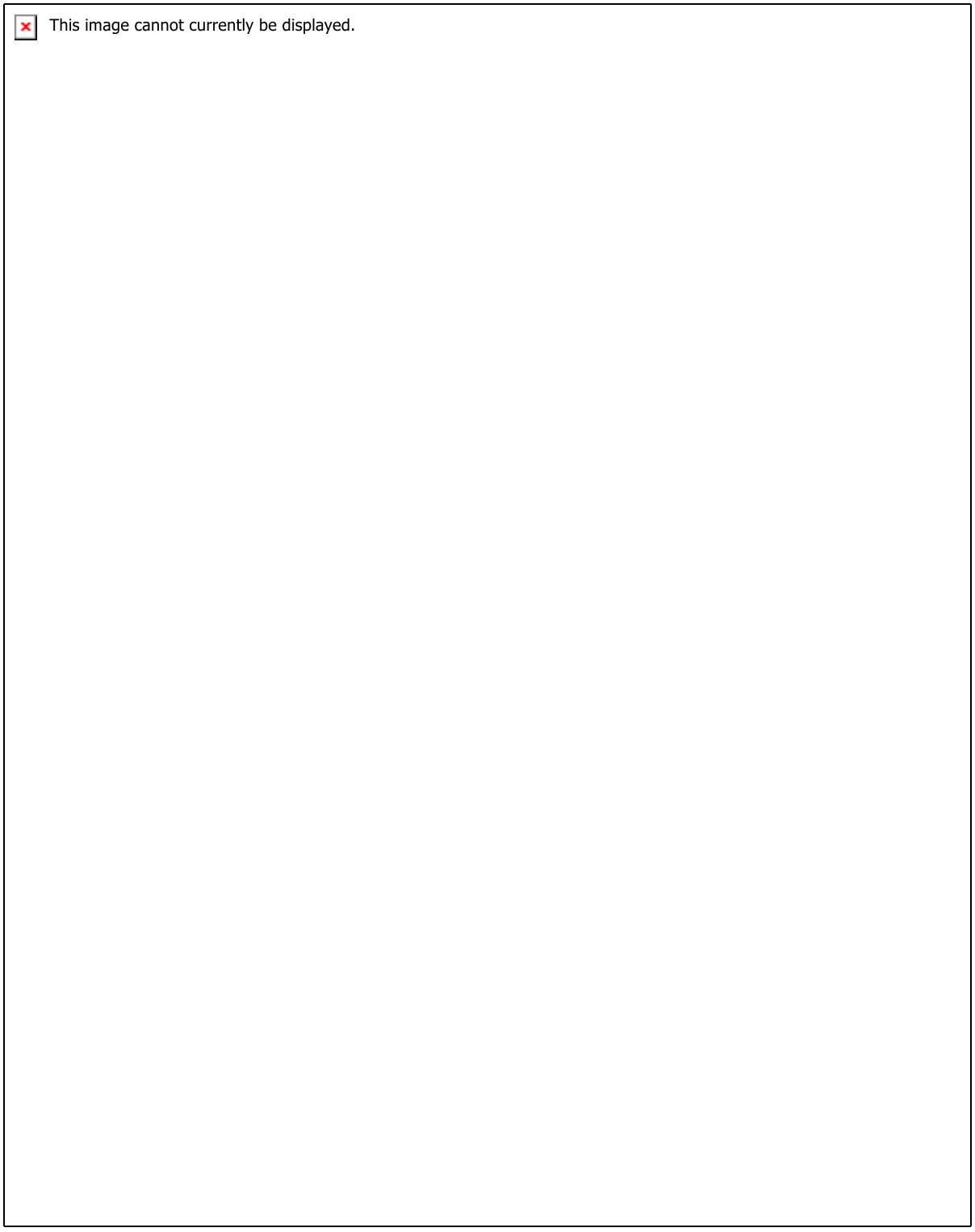
Proposal	**Strongly Support**	**Support**	**Neutral**	**Oppose**	**Strongly Oppose**
Binding clauses on agricultural protectionism in trade agreements	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Graduated tariff reductions based on development level	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Technology transfer requirements in trade agreements	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Extended transition periods for developing country markets	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Binding international rules limiting unilateral tariffs	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

7. **What is your main concern regarding future trade relations?** (Open-ended)

8. **What would you recommend to government policymakers?** (Open-ended)

FIELD LETTERS

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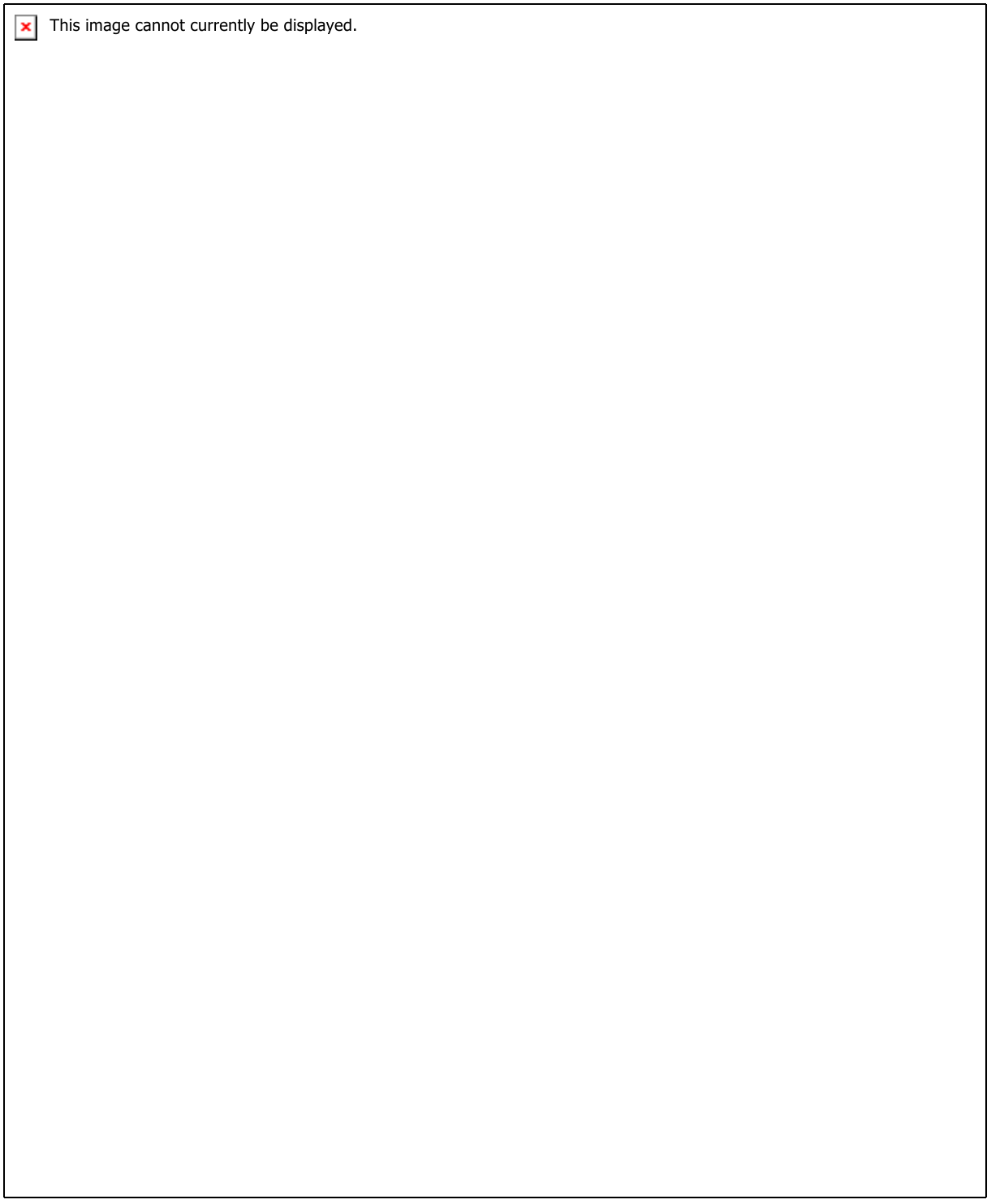
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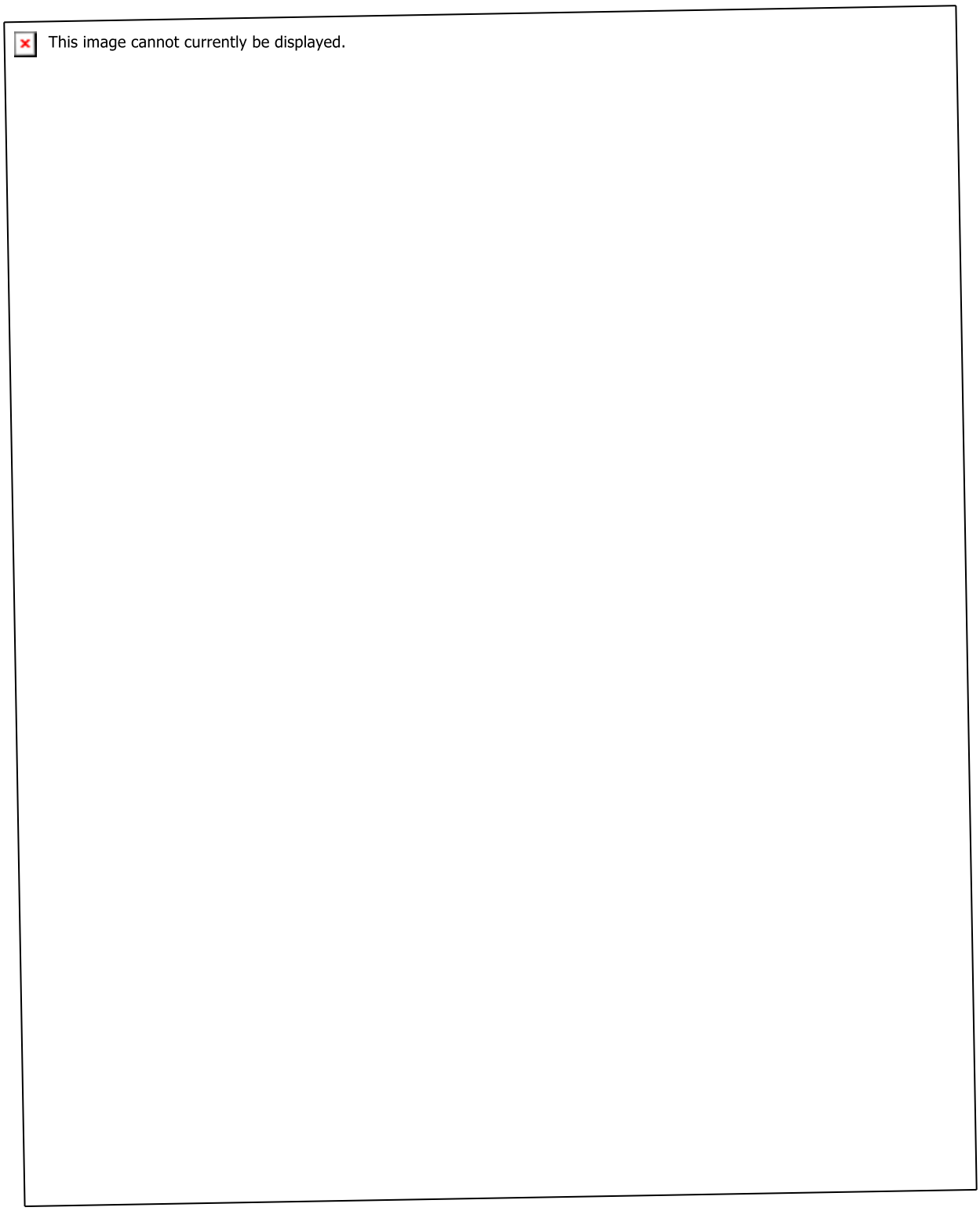
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