

Black Scorpion and the 1970 Apapa Port Congestion: Solving Maritime Gateway-Hinterland Delivery Problems in Nigeria

Edmund M. Chilaka¹ & Augustine O. Agugua²,

¹ Centre for Multimodal Transport Studies, University of Lagos
(<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8342-556X>) / E.M.Chilaka@ljmu.ac.uk
(Corresponding author)

² Department of Sociology, University of Lagos
agugst@yahoo.com

Abstract

The study examined the Apapa Port congestion of 1970 which became an albatross for the fledgling Gowon junta as Nigeria, heavily import-export dependent, grappled with immediate post-civil-war economic difficulties compounded by a clogged maritime gateway that threatened the peace dividend. The regime desperately turned to a noted disciplinarian, Colonel Benjamin Adekunle, *aka* Black Scorpion, the no-nonsense former head of the 3rd Marine Command which had routed Biafra's secessionist forces at Port Harcourt to facilitate Nigeria's victory, but who was untidily shunted aside in 1969, following the clandestine politics of the country and her vicious military sector. Although alienated, Adekunle became the military port commandant charged with clearing the gateway by all means. Using archival, primary, and secondary data sources, the paper examines Nigeria's underlying sociopolitical fault lines using relevant theoretical frameworks and Adekunle's rare oral interview to interrogate his persona, the controversies of the time, the achievements of the military port commandant-in-council, and how the hinterland delivery problems of the era were subjected to management by design strategies in future port and highway developments. The findings include unbalanced national utilization of port facilities in favour of the Lagos port system, with the conclusion that the skew was largely responsible for the frequent congestions whose resolution options must include harmonized nationwide redistribution of gateway functions in line with economic realities.

Key words:

Nigerian Port Authority, congestion, Nigerian civil war, port commandant, Black Scorpion, Biafra

1. Introduction

Nigeria's immediate post-independence government and politics were hobbled by the antecedents of the skewed Lugardian political experiment of amalgamation which began in 1900 (Flint 1969: 252-2; Lugard 1964; Dike 1959; Crowder 1986). Being hastily cobbled together for British ulterior motives, the evolution of nationhood for Nigeria suffered a severe handicap through the interplay of seemingly intractable causes which

climaxed in the 1966 takeovers of power by military juntas. Nevertheless, the politics of the country, even after the onset of civil war in 1967, continued in an invariable pattern of prebendalism, favoritism, and ethno-religious dichotomy which had permeated the military establishment (Joseph 1991; Nnoli 1981; Siollun 2009; Ademoyega 1981). After the recall of Colonel Benjamin Maja Adekunle from the war front in 1969, the incidence of congestion at Apapa Port soon after the war in 1970 brought him into the national limelight again. The man and the problem were enmeshed in separate local and international controversies at various times in the past: Adekunle, from the time the 3rd Marine Command began the push into the Biafran enclave in October 1967, and the port congestion, since the early 1960s (Ogundana 1970).¹ However, the publication of *The Nigerian-Biafran War Letters: A Soldier's Story* in 2004 entrenched a formal push-back from Adekunle's family against the controversies surrounding their son.²

Indisputably, Adekunle (*aka* Black Scorpion), headed the 3rd Marine Commando Division which successfully attacked the eastern flank of the secessionist Biafran enclave in 1968 and paved the way for the effective blockade and strangulation of the region. There have been other narratives about the war and Black Scorpion's roles in particular, some told by his friends, others, by his enemies.³ One of the most castigated of these, *My Command*, written by former President Olusegun Obasanjo made disparaging remarks about Adekunle and has been roundly criticized for "misrepresentations and outright falsehood" by fellow war veterans such as Alabi Isama.⁴ Conversely, Ojo et al concluded that Adekunle was a "good person" despite "criticisms levied against him on humanitarian grounds, mostly by the secessionists..."⁵

Overall, a major gap in the expansive literature is the scanty personal agency in the narratives. Adekunle hardly granted press interviews after the 1968 *coup de grace* which saw him slink back to Army headquarters in Lagos, a deflated man. Even the *Nigerian-Biafran War Letters* appears to be set in stone, too reticent vis-à-vis the heap of allegations. However, by using the exclusive interview he granted the authors before his death, the paper attempts to produce a dialogue by using the question-and-answer format, framing his answers against the rumours, innuendoes, and unanswered questions, and highlighting the real bones of contention. As for the port congestion, it should be clarified that the 1970 incident differs from the "cement armada" crisis of 1975; the seeming confusion in uninformed quarters probably arising from the frequency of the problem in the Lagos port industry. The paper is divided into five major sections: a survey of the controversies in the life and career of Colonel Adekunle; an analysis of the 1970 port congestion and the unique remedies; the theoretical framework of port-hinterland connectivity and the congestion pattern; excerpts of Adekunle's exclusive interview; and, the conclusion.

2. Adekunle and His Controversies

Adekunle (see Plate 1) was known for toughness, some say callousness, on the battlefield. At the height of the war, when the infamous policy of the Federal Government to starve the Biafrans to surrender rankled human rights observers around the world, he made the controversial statement that "I want to see no Red Cross, no Caritas, no World Council of Churches, no pope, no missionary, no UN delegation. I want to prevent even one Ibo from having even one thing to eat before their capitulation..."⁶ Whether he was speaking from

his heart or merely grandstanding could not be vouchsafed as he was later accused by Army Headquarters of aiding the ferrying of Biafran kids to safety abroad (Adekunle's interview). On the other hand, Biafra's apologists and other observers listed genocidal atrocities, including starvation, documented against his rampaging forces of the 3rd Marine Command in the Niger Delta.⁷ Hence, in the obvious cacophony of war, killings tantamount to various appearances of genocide might not be completely gainsaid even though the actors on the ground might also have been playing several adroit war games in pursuit of assorted objectives. Nevertheless, the no-nonsense officer is no angel as certain personal decisions witness to the typical resort to self-help evinced in Joseph's (1991) treatise on prebendal politics in Nigeria. According to a former ship caterer aboard the Elder Dempster ship, *Eboe*, his ship had just called at the congested Apapa Port in 1970 after Adekunle was made the Military Port Commandant and although they fell behind a long queue of 30 ships, the *Eboe* was quickly processed to approach a berth to off-load a luxury car allegedly imported by the 'Big Man' (Adekunle), and promptly sent back out to join the queue and wait her turn to berth properly for the discharge of the rest of her cargoes (Martin 2017).

Plate 1: Adekunle (alias Black Scorpion), G.O.C 3rd Marine Commando Division, Port Harcourt, 1969



Source: From Brigadier Adekunle's private collection given to the authors

Overall, however, Adekunle spoke of certain affinities he maintained with the Biafran side, of which he said he had to conduct himself with utmost discretion to present a completely different picture of things to his superiors. This attitude seemed apposite especially because of his claims about a secret doctrine called "war booty" propounded by core North officers that he claimed to oppose and for which he suffered retribution.⁸ Responding to the global condemnations of Adekunle, however, George Thomson, Secretary of State for Commonwealth Affairs, informed the British Parliament to downplay Adekunle's alleged boastful language. According to him,

The way to judge a military man is not by the flamboyancy of his language to the Press but by his professional qualities as a soldier...My information is that in his professional capacity, as

distinct from his public relations capacity, Colonel Adekunle leads troops who have shown self-discipline.⁹

However, his counterpart, Sir George Sinclair, promptly opposed the downplaying of the “television statements made by Colonel Adekunle”, and instead tasked “the Secretary of State to consider very carefully the new attitudes that have been shown not only on television but in the reports that we have heard today about the callous disregard for civilian life and for starvation”.¹⁰

In fact, the heated arguments in the British Parliament on Adekunle’s controversial statements were as diverse and expansive as his personal claims about the multi-ethnic composition of his own nuclear family (which included an Igbo wife) and many other issues raised at various points of his military career. For example, there was the 1974 drug peddling conviction of 33-year-old Iyabo Olorunkoya in a UK court, for importing 78 kilogrammes of marijuana. Her arrest at Heathrow Airport in 1969 and statements to investigators became the final undoing of the famous soldier.¹¹ The convict named two Nigerian army officers, including Adekunle, as her accomplices who facilitated her passage through Ikeja International Airport, for which the latter was suspended from the army, and later retired, even though he was not tried.¹² He denied the allegation and put it down to the campaign of calumny and persecution by his foes. From his own narration of the events, it appears that he was somehow acquainted with the convict but she later turned against him, allegedly, at the behest of his enemies who doctored her confession to implicate him. Pained by the betrayal, he reminisced during the interview, “They said I was carrying Indian Hemp. I said, me, carrying Indian Hemp? After you’ve been giving me every week £20m sterling...?”¹³

When we met Adekunle in 2003, he left us in no doubt that he was relentlessly persecuted by Nigeria’s military high command despite his proven battlefield exploits or, perhaps, because of it. We met in his Surulere house after he granted our request for interview on the origins of sea piracy in Nigeria and, although he provided information on this theme, he delved deeper into the politics of the civil war, the north-south ethnic dichotomy which affected the armed forces, and the impact on him and his career as a soldier. Over the space of many months when we interacted at his house, he confided in us the inner dynamics of the war and the mystical aspects of his own personal preparation for the elite struggle for power in the armed forces which, for a true-born Ogbomoshosho adult male, was rigorous and sure-fire. For example, he told us of the arcane ritual his people used to prove a person’s destiny or inner character by reading sand particles collected from the soles of their feet. Doubtless, such mystical procedures could have been used to prepare Adekunle for the hazardous army career, especially in view of his smallish frame. Subsequently, we surveyed the possibility of publishing his memoirs, although this did not eventually materialize.

To be clear, however, the allegations against Adekunle were monumental for a commanding officer in his position, including *coup* plotting against General Yakubu Gowon, disobeying orders from superiors, inordinate ambition, currying the foreign press, selling arms to the Biafran leader (Col. Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu), callous

treatment of troops and civilians, and marijuana trading.¹⁴ On his part, Adekunle accused the Lagos High Command and other traducers of starving his command of ammunition, instigating revolts and mutiny against him, conspiracies to upstage him, plotting genocide against the Igbos, and the skewed appointment of Divisional Commanders from the Northern Region, which he deeply resented.¹⁵ In fact, he was so disappointed with the nepotism in the northern-controlled armed forces that he vowed that were the war to be fought all over again, he would fight on the Biafran side (Adekunle's interview). Many sources corroborated Adekunle's viewpoint on the imbalance of federal appointments in the army. According to Siollun, promotions were so flawed that even Northern captains "holding temporary ranks as majors" such as "Murtala, Shuwa and Haruna" were elevated to Lt-Colonels whereas substantive majors such as "Olusegun Obasanjo, Emmanuel Sotomi, Benjamin Adekunle and Oluwole Rotimi" were left in their positions.¹⁶ This was in tandem with the lopsided appointment syndrome of the Federal Government which the British decolonization policy foisted on the country to ensure a pliable northern administration beholden to subsequent British postcolonial control. The origins of this policy was the intellectual superiority of Southern Nigeria over Northern Nigeria which was loathed by Lugard and resulted in Lugard's amalgamation policy to keep the two protectorates culturally separate while using revenues from the South to augment administrative expenses in the North.¹⁷

Furthermore, Lugard's disdain for Southern Nigerian intellectuals and nationalist leaders and the subsequent covert British manipulation of the 1959 elections to surrender power to Northern leaders further polarized the country and sowed inter-ethnic discord and supremacy struggles.¹⁸ The standards of that supremacy contest were not based on merit but on nepotism and prebendal politics. It resonated nationwide in all spheres and ramifications of government, politics, and war in the country. Hence, Adekunle pointedly identified Colonel Hassan Katsina (see Plate 2) as his persecutor-in-chief, who acted in cahoots with other core-north officers to checkmate his rising military profile. It is instructive here that while Adekunle's command was advancing in the south-east theatre, the 2nd Division, under the command of Lt. Col. Murtala Mohammed, registered series of costly and embarrassing setbacks such as the Abagana massacre of Nigerian troops who were marching to capture Onitsha. Of him, a declassified US Department of State briefing memorandum, after the ouster of Gowon in 1975, said that

...Brigadier Murtala Mohammed was a prime force in the Nigerian coup of July 1966, which brought Gowon to power, and is one of the two principal plotters against Gowon for the past two years. He commanded a division during the Nigerian civil war, was involved in the only documented cases of genocide, won one important battle, and thereafter coasted for upwards of two years until Gowon finally removed him from command and placed him in charge of Army signals, a position which he held until last month, though he combined his military role with the civilian position of Commissioner (Minister) of Communications from July 1973 until the coup.¹⁹

Plate 2: Adekunle (middle) flanked by Hassan Katsina (r) and Diette Spiff (l)



Source: From Brigadier Adekunle's private collection availed the authors.

Thus, even Gowon was hamstrung in dealing with the top echelons of the Nigerian Army, on or off the battlefield - a situation which also contributed to the escalation of rivalry among the field commanders. Nevertheless, Adekunle claimed that his relationship with Gowon, as the Head of State and Commander-in-Chief, was cordial; he claimed unrestricted access to him throughout his posting at the 3rd Marine Command. As he put it, whether it was to “arrange bombs, bullets and tanks” or to ensure the regular payment of the £20m weekly feeding and upkeep allowance for the command, he had Gowon's ears.²⁰ However, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, Nigeria's war-time Commissioner for Finance accounted that only £301.5m was spent on the 30-month war; hence, the weekly expenditure allowance quoted by Adekunle needs further clarification or verification.²¹

Nevertheless, Adekunle adduced four reasons for the persecution he suffered. One, he was pressured by the core-North army leaders to marry a Muslim wife and convert to Islam in order to pass for a Northerner. If he did this, he claimed that they promised that he would receive the full benefits of his labours in the army since his mother, Amina Theodora (see Plate 3), was a Northerner from Numan. However, he resisted this demand which, according to him, was made several times through various intermediaries. Although he did not enlarge on his relationship with his mother, he spoke reverently about her and apparently did not condone his superiors' attempts to drag her into the web of their political intrigues. Two, his wife, Comfort Akie Wilcox, was Igbo from Bonny, a factor that made him a likely suspect of fraternization with the enemy. Three, personality clashes, based on ego and rivalry, became rife the more he continued to prove his mettle on the battlefield. He became the cynosure of the foreign press and world leaders, such as Harold Wilson, the British Premier, with whom he appeared in foreign newspaper pictures. After the flattering pictures of him seated and talking with Wilson and the foreign press and diplomats at Port Harcourt were published abroad (see Plate 4), this fed conspiracy theories about a possible coup plot by Adekunle to overthrow General Gowon.²²

Plate 3: Adekunle’s mother, Amina Theodora



Source: From Brigadier Adekunle’s private collection given to the authors.

Plate 4: Adekunle (l) in a chat with Harold Wilson, British PM, during the latter’s visit to Port Harcourt in 1969



Source: From Brigadier Adekunle’s private collection given to the authors

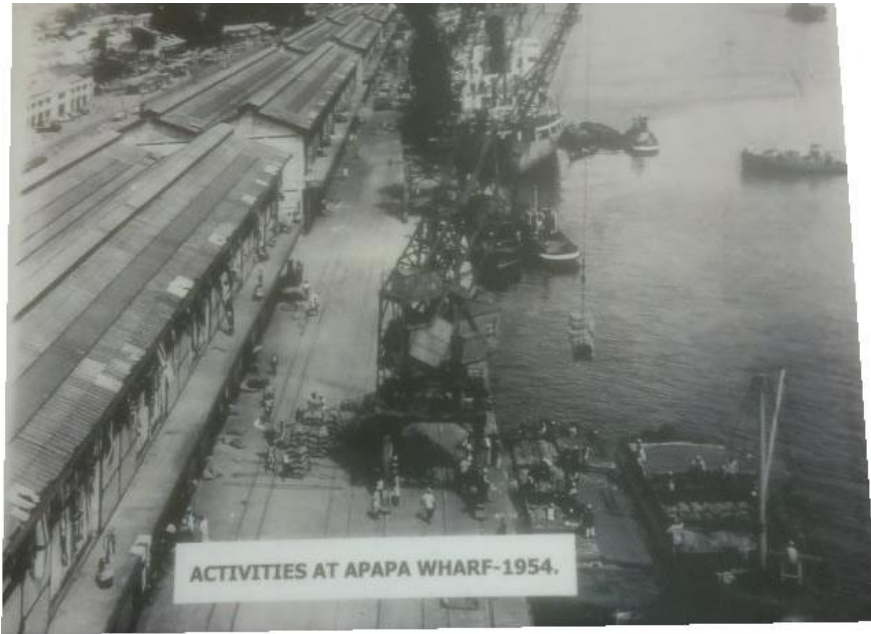
Four, he opposed and worked against the concept of ‘war booty’. According to Adekunle, there was a closely-guarded plan by the core-north officers and leaders to kill off ‘Biafrans’ from their motherland to lay claim to the oil reserves in Eastern Nigeria. This was tantamount to genocide and the hardened battlefield officer swore that this was a well-orchestrated secret plan. Whether this plan became aligned to the subsequent “starvation”

policy implemented by the Nigerian side during the war is open to question and further studies.

However, as issues swirled around the significance of Adekunle's mother, they also resonated beyond the imaginations of the northern army officers, so that his rising profile evoked other ethnocentric reactions. For example, his mother's ethnic group, the Bachama in Adamawa State, claimed the accolades for his rumoured juju esoterica and battlefield exploits, insisting that "by tradition, if he had witchcraft, he got it from his mother's genes, and to the Bachama, the maternal relations own you only when you are a brave heart".²³ Contrarily, when the groundswell against him built up to the point of the recall from the war front, he faced rejection by colleagues and thus became embittered and solitary. His closest comrades and lieutenants, Lt. Col. Alabi-Isama and Lt. Col. Alani Akinrinade, also fell out with him amid recriminations that followed the loss of Owerri and Oguta in 1968. Of the two 1,500-man brigades that attacked the two towns, only 500 returned alive from Owerri while Oguta claimed 1,450 Nigerian soldiers.²⁴ Alabi-Isama summarized the situation lamentably, that "Adekunle's vaunted persona as war general evaporated like a soap bubble while the invincibility of his 3MCDO Division became a joke, especially among his peers already jealous of his earlier successes in the war. His grave mistakes were that he thought he earned the name Black Scorpion alone".²⁵

This marked a major milestone for an overwhelmed Adekunle as his enemies rejoiced, his friends demurred while other observers noted Col. Olusegun Obasanjo's sombre rise for the victory lap on the pile of Adekunle's aggregate achievements. The latter quietly nursed his wounded ego inside a nondescript office at the Defence Headquarters in Lagos until the unique appointment as Military Port Commandant was announced, five months after the war - a post that had no precedent in the nation's military or civilian history. Hence, the embittered war veteran reasoned that this appointment was likely another ploy to lead him to his final Waterloo at the Apapa port which, at the war's end, was in disarray and congested with imported war-time consignments and postwar reconstruction cargoes (see Plate 5 and Plate 6) . Adekunle grumbled that whereas his colleagues were set up in compensatory 'juicy' air-conditioned offices, he was sent to another location of crisis where he had to engage in 'battles' with cunning ship owners, international con men, manipulative stevedores and dodgy dockworkers.

Plate 5: Activities at Apapa Wharf, 1954



Source: Nigerian Ports Authority (Lagos) Public Affairs Department

Plate 6: Ships at Anchorage off Apapa Port 1970



Source: Construction in Nigeria, Bilfinger + Berger, 1981, p.131

3. The 1970 Port Congestion and the Unique Remedy

The congestion problem revolved around Apapa port's installed capacity for cargo handling, a paltry 2.9 million tonnes per annum. Secondly, the other ports in the Niger Delta such as Abonema Wharf in Port Harcourt or the ports of Calabar, Warri, Koko and Burutu were shut down as part of the wartime blockade against Biafra (see Table 1). Historically, Apapa port had always been congested since pre-independence days. Despite the completion of the Second Apapa Wharf Extension which added six berths to the former 12, the congestion problem was not completely solved (see Plate 7).²⁶

Table 1: Nigeria's Port Infrastructure, 1974

	Lagos	Port Harcourt	Koko	Sapele	Warri	Burutu	Calabar
<i>Draught in metres</i>							
Entrance depth	9.1	11.6	4.3	4.3	4.3	4.3	5.9
Harbour depth	8.2	7.3	7.3	7.3	4.9	6.4	4.3
<i>Berths: number / lengths (m)</i>							
Anchorage	7	1	0	9	3	0	3
General cargo	16/2427	6/1360	1/137	0	4/482	2/229	3/177
Container berth	1/220	0	0	0	0	0	0
Silo berth	1/152	0	0	0	0	0	0
Private industrial berth	0	0	0	2/268	0	0	0
Petroleum wharf	1/177	1/143	0	0	0	0	0
Vegetable oil wharf	1/122	1/137	0	0	0	0	0
Coal wharf	1/85	0	0	0	0	0	0
Fishery wharf	1/116	1/65	0	2/195	3/79	0	1/76
Lighter berth							
<i>Storage capacity</i>							
Covered space (sq metres)	165,517	41,059	432	11,040	13,80	22,080	32,170
Transit sheds	120,997	28,573	0	0	0	0	20,726
Warehouses	44,520	12,486	0	0	0	0	11,444
Silo capacity (tons)	67,000	0	0	0	0	0	0
Vegetable tank farm (tons)	16,000	45,000	0	0	0	4,000	15,000
Container berth paved storage (sq. metres)	30,351	0	0	0	0	0	0
Open stacking space (sq. metres)	131,000	27,467	0	0	0	0	0

Source: Nigerian Ports Authority cited in Ogundana 1978: p.77

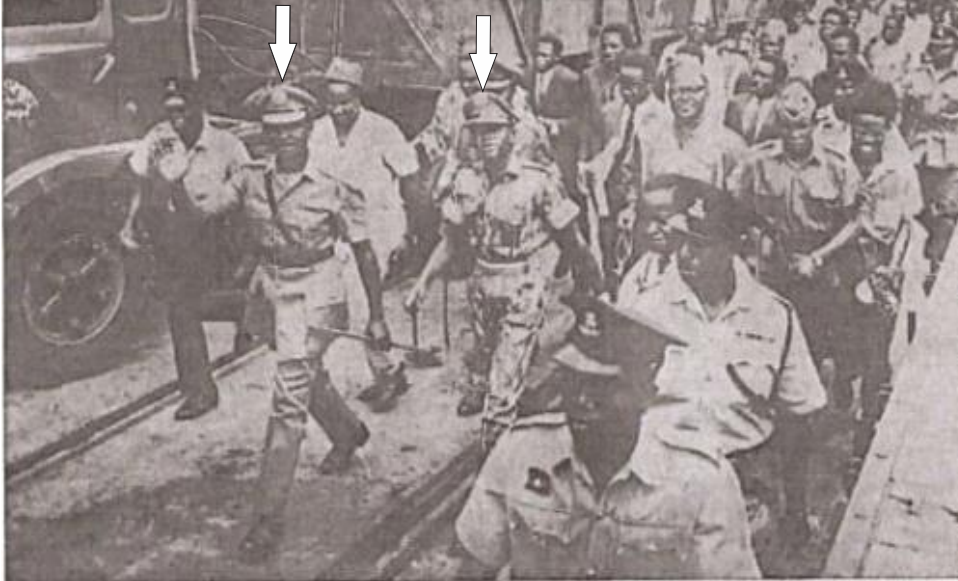
Plate 7: Ships queue at Anchorage awaiting berths at Apapa Port in 1970



Source: Construction in Nigeria, Bilfinger + Berger, 1981, p.95

Thus, the increased tonnage of relief materials coupled with the postwar liberalization of trade opened a floodgate of cargoes many times beyond the port's installed capacity. Hence, the Federal Government declared an emergency, appointed Adekunle as Military Port Commandant with extraordinary powers (see Plate 8), and set up a committee to assist him. Several factors justified the emergency declaration. First, the port congestion had a ripple effect on the economy because not just cement and industrial goods were trapped but also food, household and domestic articles, and sundry provisions that could not be offloaded upon arrival. Demurrage claims mounted and inflation set in as scarcity and hoarding compounded the delicate balance of a tensed country just emerging from the throes of civil war. Had the Nigerian Ports Authority (NPA) a good semblance of orderliness, its infrastructure shortcomings were manageable but the government parastatal operated with a known background for inefficiency, bureaucracy and corruption.

Plate 8: General Gowon (arrowed waving), Adekunle (arrowed) to his left and other officials during a tour of the congested port in 1970



Source: From Brigadier Adekunle's private collection given to the authors

The Port Operations Committee headed by Adekunle had three other military officers appointed to work with him, namely: Lt. Colonel Ochefu, Lt. Colonel Taiwo and Lt. Commander Ajanaku. The rest of the committee members were the Apapa Port Manager, representatives from the Nigerian Railway Corporation, the Nigerian Customs Service Board, the Department of Immigration, the Nigerian Produce Marketing Company, the Nigerian Chamber of Commerce, shipping companies and shipping agencies in Nigeria, the Association of Forwarding and Clearing Agencies in Nigeria, and the Federal Ministry of Transport.²⁷ They were immediately confronted by the peculiar problems of the port, including the need to unstuff containers in the port because they could not pass through the narrow colonial bridges in the hinterland, the railway service performing below 25% of installed capacity, inefficient shipping agents and merchants who delayed the submission of essential clearing documents such as ship's manifest, stowage plan, cargo plan, cargo list and pallet list, and the tedious Customs procedures.²⁸ However, the committee swung into action with a slew of emergency measures. Immediate commencement of 24-hour operations was implemented. The submission of clearing documents by the shipping lines, importers and banks was expedited as well as the pre-ship arrival submission of Bills of Entry at the "Customs Long-room." Also, direct delivery onto trucks was prioritized while banks and importers were allowed to take delivery of up to 90% of their consignments (including overtime cargoes) without customs examination. Lastly, the Port Commandant was given complete liberty to levy penalty against any operator who failed to comply with the emergency measures.²⁹

The study has revealed that, all told, the 1970 port congestion was not totally gloomy, after all. In fact, after the first month of operation by the Port Committee, vacancies at the berths became a problem that necessitated vigorous marketing of the shipping lines because the NPA was losing money thereby. For example, in respect of the 56 vacant berth days recorded in June 1970, one month after the Military Port Commandant

set to work, the NPA lost £168,000.³⁰ NPA records show that for May 1970, imports were 166,466 metric tonnes while exports were 113,444 and for June 1970, imports were 161,737 metric tonnes while exports were 120,980 metric tonnes. Compared with the year-on-year traffic as shown in Table 2 and Table 3, the 1970 figures showed significant spikes.

Table 2: Import, Export, Delivery Figures May and June 1970 (in tons)

Month	Import	Export	Delivery
May 1970	166,466	113,444	148,289
June 1970	161,737	120,980	182,016
Total	328,203	234,424	330,305

Source: NPA News, June/July 1970, pp. 6, 20

Table 3: Cargo Throughput June 1969, June 1970 compared (in tons)

	1970	1969	Difference
Imports	161,737	91,620	+70,117
Exports	120,980	89,236	+31,744
Deliveries	182,016	85,316	+96,700

Source: NPA News June/July 1970, pp. 6, 20

Nevertheless, on the accomplishments of the Port Committee, the progress made to clear the congestion was so significant that it advanced to the next phase which it called ‘residual issues’, including demands for demurrage payments and the stevedore manipulation crisis. Ogundana (1978), Cranfeld (2007), and Elleh (2017) have chronicled the dubious role played by foreign ship owners for demurrage claims against Nigeria, and the problems posed by the port-hinterland communication infrastructure gap during various congestion crises.³¹ Comparatively, however, other salient matters troubled the country, including the impact of the northern-dominated military rule in the country’s social fabric, the smoldering rivalry among the ruling officer corps, the skewed development and deployment of port facilities nationwide, and the crippling manpower and equipment shortages at the NPA. These challenges hampered the peace dividend, frustrated the 3Rs (Reconciliation, Reconstruction, and Rehabilitation) agenda of the Gowon postwar administration and posed some of the problems the port committee aimed to resolve at the Lagos waterfront.

4. Theoretical Frameworks of Port-Hinterland Connectivity and the Port Congestion Problem

Port efficiency marks the difference between a robust and viable commercial port and a struggling one. Since the 1960s, the Lagos seaport system had struggled to cope with congestion of various types.³² The effects of this problem were widely noted, such as drag on “economy-wide dynamism”, increased prices of commodities in the market, increased hikes in freight rates, and insecurity issues.³³ Thus, for more than 60 years, the congestion patterns in the Lagos seaport system exhibited recurring parallels. Huge losses in demurrage claims were intermittently caused by ships waiting to berth and uncleared cargoes all over the quay and port grounds, which peaked in 1970. Although contained through more port constructions, congestion resurfaced off-and-on through the 1980s and 1990s with huge losses in money and man-hours. Forty-seven years after the post-civil-war episode, it worsened to weeks-long traffic gridlock along the Apapa port access roads in 2017.³⁴ The aftermaths included thousands of tons of cargo blocked in the ports, a lack of berths and quay space for waiting ships to off-load and load, and hundreds of haulage trucks stranded at waiting bays and the port access roads.

The theoretical frameworks for the study are based on two studies that problematized the spatial difficulties of administration and transportation. The first is a hypothesis by Bernd and Sabine (2002) which argues that “efficient and effective city-hinterland management will only be possible if centred on problems at hand rather than institutional routines”. Using four city-hinterland municipalities within Vienna metropolis, they argued that “problems and conflicts in an urban region arise from the micro (personal level) as well as the macro level (institutional level). Both levels mainly influence actors and co-operations and are vice versa influencing both parties at the same time”. Hence, Austrian municipalities, for example, supposedly in the Vienna hinterland “are legally obliged to St. Pölten the capital of Lower Austria (Niederösterreich) with the result of information losses and missing links between St. Pölten and Vienna”, causing administrative weaknesses and constant need for a sociopolitical interlocutor of sorts to function optimally. It is not difficult to imagine how the lack of handshaking by the interwoven systems can generate chaos at the seaports if the transfer of cargoes is the object.

The other framework that suits our analysis here is Arnout van der Houwen’s thesis on the development of Europe’s premier Port of Rotterdam’s cargo delivery network, based on the construction of two inland container terminals at Valburg and Alblasterdam in the Netherlands, to serve the vast international hinterland of littoral and landlocked countries in the continent also based on six design factors. These were “infrastructural facilities, characteristics of the surrounding area, main directions of containers transported into the hinterland of the port of Rotterdam, environmental impact, costs, social environment, and government regulations”.³⁵ The port’s captive hinterland – primary, secondary, and territorial – was already factored into this operational matrix. Thus, the port-hinterland cargo transfer model posits inland container terminals as ideal to furnish the facilities for delivery and transshipment of cargoes under multimodal arrangements to and from the port gateway at the coast – a design that was markedly absent in the Nigerian port scenario under focus.

The Nigerian port situation in 1970, unlike today, had no luxury of seaports scattered all over the coastal shoreline and competing for customers in the primary, secondary, and territorial hinterlands in view of the war-demobilized Niger Delta ports. The Lagos seaport system at the time ordinarily had a captive and uncontested hinterland that stretched from the port gate, past the northern borders into landlocked Niger, Tchad, Mali, and Burkina Faso, let alone other locations within the country. The supremacy of the Lagos gateway was intensified by the economic blockade against the secessionist Biafran enclave which translated into blocking the ports in her territory, such as Port Harcourt, Sapele, Burutu, Koko, Warri, and Calabar – a blockade widely believed to have been enforced by a detachment of British Royal Navy officers.³⁶ Hence, at the war's end in January 1970, no other gateways were readily open to international traffic to ease the congestion at Apapa port, leaving the Nigerian economy in dire import-export operational constraints.

Maritime transportation, for most of Africa's developing countries, accounted for more than 80% of the available means to deliver international trade. Wood and Johnson echoed Alfred Marshall's view that transportation played the most important role in increasing the wealth of nineteenth-century England as well as the maintenance of US industrial might through multimodal connectivity.³⁷ Hence, the lack of port efficiency was implicated in both the 1970 port congestion and the Apapa traffic gridlocks of the second decade in the new millennium. Ekong (2008), Ogundana (1978), Hilling and Hoyle (1984) concur that the distribution problem for port-hinterland communication in Africa was constantly complicated because the infrastructures considered standard operating equipment for vibrant operations in advanced economies were lacking here.³⁸ For example, whereas the ports in Apapa and Tin Can Island relied mostly on trucks for goods delivery, the European hub port of Rotterdam was connected by road, rail, pipeline, inland waterway, and sea transport infrastructures. In 1996, 42% of containers moved through Rotterdam was transported by truck, 29% by barge, 12% by trains and 17% by coastal vessels with the combined share of barges and coastal vessels being 38% against the other modes as of 2021.³⁹ Conversely, current traffic data for Apapa and Tin Can Island ports show that up to 90% of deliveries were hauled by trucks while rail and barges accounted for the balance.⁴⁰

Furthermore, various theoretical frameworks fitly conceptualize the travails of Adekunle as portrayed by the study. First, it is apt to apply Bayart's interpretation of Aristotelian intellectualism which posited that "Greeks had the right to rule over barbarians as a result of the latter's supposed servility, which was believed to help them to bear [with] despotic power".⁴¹ Thus, Adekunle's lack of expected 'servility' and open affront to Northern military despotism was the problem since many authorities proved undeniably that the decolonizing British establishment in 1960, out of self-help, vested power in the Hausa-Fulani oligarchy by hook or crook.⁴² It is noteworthy that Marxist Africanists often castigated the neocolonial outcomes in Africa's post-independence realpolitik for the seeds of instability sown through the hurried cobbling of incompatible multi-ethnic societies into so-called 'nation-states' in Africa.⁴³ Some of these, such as Nigeria, unraveled in civil wars, the like of which Adekunle was caught in, and for which the colonial masters must bear vicarious liability. In that situation, society, of course, mostly degenerated into virtual

anarchy. In fact, Mbembe postulated on the nitty-gritty of such political problems, arguing that the

substantial alienation of the political sovereignty of African states....created the conditions for privatization of this sovereignty....The principle of appointment remains in theory in the hands of an autocrat who makes no bones about using it....Very commonly, hierarchy or centralized pyramidal organization may no longer exist...[and] most business is conducted orally....⁴⁴

This plausibly mirrors government and politics during the Nigerian civil war, hence sundry ideologues, such as Adekunle, were drawn into the fray of arguments with northern vanguards of the military establishment. In his notable spat with Colonel Hassan Katsina on the functional definition of the “Chief of Staff” and the “Chief of Army Staff”, for example (see details in the interview section below), one can see the outlines of the critical disparity between Northern and Southern Nigerian leaders vis-a-vis intellectual grounding for the positions they held in the power equation (Adekunle’s interview). Adekunle resented the fact that his Northern counterparts were ushered into appointments without proven academic or professional qualifications but based on the tokenistic “quota system”, whereas Southerners were made to demonstrate real bravura and competence for their elevation or any hope of it.

Second, by applying the Marxist concept of the state and the tendency of political actors to hinge policies essentially to covet power for the sake of appropriating national resources for a select few to the detriment of others, this paper offers an opportunity to interrogate the politics of the Nigerian military sector and how it was aggrandized by opportune actors in their drive for hegemony and containment of opponents. In the Nigerian civil war, for example, Adekunle distinguished himself as an accomplished soldier, albeit an apparent outlier to the Northern ruling cabal as he was Yoruba by ethnic group and his world view and attitudes rankled the inclination and goals of his Northern colleagues, compounded by his blatant refusal to convert to Islam or marry a Northern wife to ‘belong’ to the privileged group (Adekunle’s interview, 2003). The evolution of this politics in the Nigerian military followed the northern military cabal’s manifest seizure, consolidation, and control of state power as a postwar dividend. The Marxian concept of historical materialism conceptualized this instrumental theory of the state where, in capitalist societies, it is a tool in the hands of the capitalist class and its agents, the bourgeoisie, for control and manipulation of selfish political choices, some of them hurtful, others dysfunctional.⁴⁵ Eventually, the critical human agency in political struggles revolved around the concepts of ‘power bloc’ and ‘ideological hegemony’, which explains scenarios where several different social groupings, usually under the control of particular groups, effectively monopolize political power in a relatively stable society for the furtherance of sectional goals as encapsulated in Gramsci Antonio’s concepts of hegemony - a definition of Mussolini’s fascist regime.⁴⁶

This scenario manifestly played out in the Nigerian civil war coalition in which several ethnic groups were involved in the win-the-war effort against the Biafran

secessionists, yet the Hausa-Fulani ethnic formation saw themselves as the dominant group, and therefore had this triumphalist feeling of calling the shots in the post-war peace - an attitude Adekunle tried to confront in his own way. The point to note here is that most times, the interests within the group will be different, and on occasions conflicting, but they continue to hold power in society as a whole by pursuing political projects which promote their general interests at the expense of other groups, in a pattern reminiscent of Vilfredo Pareto's thesis of circulation of elites between one group using craft and cunning, termed foxes, as against another group that thrives in the use of force to achieve their aims, tagged lions.⁴⁷ This connotes that to effectively maintain power by any of the groups requires a considerable degree of political skill and, sometimes, the bloc may become unstable or even fall apart. Pareto's thesis here showed that at that point of instability, in the scheming between the foxes and the lions, one group supplants the other, as what took place in the history of Adekunle's military campaigns where, at a point, he had to be recalled for Obasanjo to take over his command. At another opportune juncture, he was saddled with the port decongestion assignment as a way of placating him or, from Adekunle's critical lens, to set another trap for him to fail so that they continue to malign him. To cap this Marxist instrumental theory of the state is the theme of ideological hegemony which refers to the framework of ideas available to ruling power blocs and applied to corral other ethnic groups into accepting political and cultural domination by the ruling class. In modern societies, the hegemony, in this sense, is supported by the mass media which promotes the emergent statecraft and nationalism and receives the grant of salutary welfare concessions.⁴⁸

Over the years, various task forces and policy measures have been set up and battled in vain to clear the congestion-induced traffic gridlocks at Apapa with the port-hinterland communication infrastructure shortages possibly being the crux of the problem. Hence, being the same cause that catalyzed the appointment of the first Military Port Commandant, is it implausible to contemplate an encore, that is, the re-appointment of a "Port Tzar" with accompanying plenipotentiary powers over the port-hinterland cargo delivery problems of the Apapa gateways in the new millennium? This echoes the prescriptions of an earlier study conducted in league with postgraduate students of the Lagos State University School of Transport most of whose recommendations have been largely implemented, viz: night operation, diversion to Niger delta ports, barge transfers to Ikorodu port, and expedited rail deliveries to inland container depots.⁴⁹ In fact, with the recent opening by Hull Blyth of scheduled rail services between Apapa port and Wasimi in Ogun State, greater mitigation of the problem is in sight.⁵⁰ Hence, it is hypothesized that a "Port Tzar", as part of a city mayoral authority, would possess the essential fiduciary powers to access financing from the international capital market to redesign Apapa for optimum port performance and other futuristic preparations geared for national and regional competitiveness.

5. The Interview: Cleaning the Augean Stable by Martial Law

In this segment, we focus on Adekunle's personal perspectives on the antecedents to his appointment as the Military Port Commandant, the achievements he made with the Port Congestion Committee in clearing the congestion, and his responses to the swirl of controversies around his persona. The exclusive interview series were conducted over the space of six months at his home in Surulere Lagos Nigeria from April 2003 and first published in *Transport Monitor* (Lagos Nigeria) in June 2003. The excerpts:

Question: Many have sought to probe into the circumstances of the 1970 port congestion. Historians have also tried to find out the sufferings of the seafarers who were stranded in our shores and how they were attacked by pirates...?

Adekunle: The problem was not a question of piracy as such. Nigeria had so much money, a lot of money really from the oil and the rest of them. The money was accrued to the Federal Government through a sort of war booty. War booty was just that to the northerners, the civil war that started because of the killing of some of their leaders, some Nigerians, particularly the Ibos, were to be punished. The oil money was going on because the booty had come in. In the first instance, calling the acquisition of crude oil "war booty" was wrong.

Question: But the greater majority of the populace never understood this?

Adekunle: Look, I have got one peculiarity. And I thank my father for it. The reason why I was able to face the northerners was that my mother was not Yoruba. My mother, Hausa, my father, Yoruba, the wife I married, Igbo. Now the intention of the Northerners then was that if they got into the heartland of Igboland then they will kill like mad, destroy the place and everything moving, everything standing must be cut down. So, I said the best thing is just to get hold of these places. And that will not only stop the Northerners when they were coming down, so that they will not come into the hinterland of the Igbo area. When Hassan Katsina found out that they could not get down to Umuahia and Owerri and Aba, he turned round to say, "Well, Adekunle is not obeying orders, and the best thing is to bring him back". How can we bring him back? The world knows a lot about him. Let's strangulate him, let's not give him ammunition anymore. Then they started this strangulation. So, I had to write a letter to the Head of State, telling him "look, I didn't cause the war. You people caused it, particularly you yourself".

Question: That's to General Gowon?

Adekunle: [Yes] Gowon. You were among the officers who told General [Aguiyi] Ironsi carry on, and you turned round against him. And Hassan Katsina coming and having killed most of the Southerners who were in the North, he then came down [to Lagos], got Ejoor out of the way. Now he took over as Chief of Staff, thinking that being the first Chief of Staff, that he will be the most effective. I was the one who asked him, 'Excuse me sir, what's the difference between Chief of Staff and Chief of Army Staff?'. He said they are the same thing. I said never. The Chief of Staff, the origin, Prussian. Frederick the Great was the one who was using Chief of Staff because the front in Germany, then Prussia, was too wide. The King couldn't go to all the places, so he used to send the chief of my own staff, the Chief of My Staff. It was the Chief of Staff that could go round and come back and report to the Commander-in-Chief. The Commander-in-Chief will then give him

instructions to pass on to the field commanders. Not orders, instructions. Pass the following instructions to this commander, pass this one to the other and pass the other one to that. Tell all of them, I have passed the following instructions out so you can merge the whole thing together. Do it the same time, liaise within yourselves so that the thing will work out properly. But Hassan thought he was Chief of Army Staff. (*Turning to the author*) What do you understand by Chief of Army Staff?

Question: *Well, that would be somebody performing this role for the Army...*

Adekunle: No. The Chief of Army Staff had executive powers. He could give instructions and orders without going up to the Commander-in-Chief. Total executive power. All he had to do was just to tell the Commander-in-Chief this is what I have done. But the Chief of Staff had no authority, just a delegate, a messenger. Go and find out for me what has happened and come and report. Did you have any conversations with the commander out there? What did you cover? Then you have to come back and tell your commander-in-chief. So, Hassan thought he was Chief of Army Staff but he had no executive powers. So, I had to tell him you couldn't give me any instructions on operation. You can't. The only thing you ask me, what logistic support do you want? Manpower, fuel, food, money, aircraft, arrange them for me, arrange bombs for me. That's all. But for you to come round and tell me, "you will ...", I said no way, you can't. I will not take it from you. So, he strangulated me here, Owerri [*illustrating on a piece of paper*]. So, I was told to come back.

Question: *Come back to where?*

Adekunle: Lagos.

Question: *You were tracing the story of how they brought you back to humiliate you?*

Adekunle: Yeah, they brought me back and the next thing they did was, I was made Director of Training and Planning. I was very young. I wasn't even up to 30, still in headquarters. One morning I was just called to say we've got a problem, economic problem. Will you go to the port and find out what happened there? The economy was under distress. Find out what can be done. So, I had to go there and I saw most of them were drinking their brandy or whisky and pepper soup in the port, the staff of NPA. And they were making money left, right, center.

Question: *In what kind of business?*

Adekunle: You know, you've imported things and the next thing is how can I get my goods and the rest. The duty is this. You give the customs man something. The NPA man will say is that the only place [you will give]? ...And to make matters worse, the stevedoring companies were the ones who would off-load and load ships. When you get in, in the morning, they work 3 shifts a day. In the morning, you find everybody complete. One hour later after you counted the number, come back again, you will not find three-quarters. They've gone.

Question: *To where?*

Adekunle: Vamoosed. So, they get their money, but they don't do the service. You ask Nigerian Railways, bring your wagons across to the port, they will say the wagons are there

but the locomotives have broken down. You, the ship owner, you've come all the way from Europe, get the ship to berth. He will tell me, 'the engine is bad'.

Question: *Was this rampant?*

Adekunle: Absolutely. Okay, if you are able even to take the ship and berth it, use your cranes to off-load what you've brought, they will say the seamen are out on break or they are on holiday inland. So, what do you have to do? We had to use all the equipment that the NPA had to offload that ship. But then, three quarters of the NPA equipment were bad, never serviced. No spare parts. Then, you the owner of the goods are going to pay the ship owner demurrage. How will the prices not go up? Most of the governments overseas were very happy because they were making money for their own country, through demurrage. The only way I stopped demurrage was when I started sentencing them [the seamen] to prison.

Question: *How did you do that?*

Adekunle: The decree says you, Adekunle, were alpha and omega. The laws were in my hand; whatever I interpreted the law to be was the law.

Question: *As the Port Commandant?*

Adekunle: As the Port Commandant. And that was how I was able to contain them. Then, I had to do something else. If a ship leaves Antwerp, let's say, before you leave there you have to report to London.

Question: *A designated NPA office in London?*

Adekunle: I opened one. Then opened office in Ireland [Dublin], opened three in the United States. Scandinavia, I opened four. So any ship coming to Nigeria, you've got to go and report there. You've got to tell me what you are carrying and what you are bringing. If you don't offload within the time given to you, the Captain is going to KiriKiri prison. They [military authorities] thought it was all... he will fail. Then if he fails, his reputation will be tarnished.

Question: *And that's why you used maximum methods.*

Adekunle: [Nods]. No nonsense. It got to a stage, whereby even [General] Gowon's brother, Moses, imported a vehicle. He came round to me. "Excuse me sir, I imported a car... I have no customs duties". Then [I said], we can sell the car, whatever we realize after taking our customs duty, taking our NPA dues, taking stevedoring dues, then the anchorage dues, whatever change remains, then we will give it to you... That was the end of it because, in the first instance, I was not taking a bribe from you. If you bring in a consignment of drinks and the rest of them, you imported them, I will say yes, am taking six bottles. You say, are you taking them to your house? I will say no, I am drinking them. Where are you going to drink them? I'd say follow me and you will see it. I used to sleep in the port. I slept there, I had my own sleeping room, I built them there. So you can't come along and begin to tell me we didn't see the Port Commandant.

Question: *Did you work long hours?*

Adekunle: Yeah. I established canteen inside the port. I established hospital inside the port, post office, banks. If I have a bank there and you have got the goods there, you want to pay me, the NPA or you want to pay the Customs, you give me a stupid cheque. I give it to the bank there and I give you one hour, I want this cheque to be cleared. If your own branch is there and I have told you already, you are bringing these goods, these are the banks that I use, all your cheques must be drawn on them. You have no alternative once I take that cheque and give it to the bank.

Question: *Now, by the time you took over, we understand that some ships, up to 300 or 400 were already queuing at anchorage?*

Adekunle: I met more than 200 ships out there but that's how I worked them. If your ship is such that it has broken down mechanically and the rest of them, you know what that means, guess? You start paying demurrage, the owner of the goods and the person who chartered the ship. The goods will start paying demurrage. You pay the NPA for staying at anchorage, for your water, for your food which you ask NPA to go and buy me this food.

Question: *Do you still remember the exact date you were appointed?*

Adekunle: Honestly, I don't, [but] it's 1970. Then the only experience I had about a ship was, I boarded a ship from the southern UK to France. That was the only time I know something about ships, I was still a cadet.

Question: *Did the army know that you did not know much about ships?*

Adekunle: Of course

Question: *That's why you believed you were sent there to go and fail?*

Adekunle: Yes, there are some naval officers here, a lot of them senior to me. They knew more about ships and the rest of them but they never took them. Let Adekunle go and fail so that we wipe out his name from history. So the Northerners will take the glory. We conquered Nigeria. So we can do anything we want with it. And he refused to accept that the mother being Hausa, he should claim to be Hausa. Let me give you something that really caused a problem. When Hassan Katsina called me, he asked, "your mother from Numan?", I said yes. Then he asked, "why do you bear Adekunle when the father of your mother, the name was Hamda, why don't you change your name to Hamda? So we call you Col. Hamda? Then you become full Northerner". I asked him, "What's the benefit of becoming a full Northerner?"

Question: **On the matter of stealing while the ship was in port, did you have any reports of that or criminals accosting the seafarers?**

Adekunle: If it is that you are doing offloading and they intentionally throw the thing into the sea, you find ships waiting downstream [the thieves' accomplices], very few. [However], if you come in and you see about 8 people just lined up, 24 lashes each, take your pants off, will you do it again? And mentholatum and iodine mixed and rubbed on your buttocks before the flogging? Okay, very cold water applied after the caning, then bandage it... The man will be pissing in his pants!

Question: *So, this was the punishment for people caught [in pirate activities]?*

Adekunle: Yes, there's no question, whether you are an official or not, I couldn't care one bit. Anybody who saw me at that time said 'look at this small boy coming to give orders'. That was why I was very very strict and I couldn't take any nonsense from any of them.

Question: *Were the punishments handed down by a tribunal set up or the regular court?*

Adekunle: Me, I was the tribunal. Check that decree [Port Decongestion Decree No. 13 1970], its absolute. I mean, I was god almighty in the port. It does not require referring anything to anybody. You take the decisions there. And that was why I used to find too many snakes in the office, you find charms all over the place.

Question: *How long did the assignment as Port Commandant last?*

Adekunle: Six months, but I landed in the hospital.

Question: *With what sickness?*

Adekunle: [Stood up and pulled up his flowing gown to reveal a long sewn up cut down his lower stomach] Ulcer. I collapsed.

Question: *Was it because of the job hazards?*

Adekunle: The hazards and no eating, no sleeping, except drinking and the rest of them. That's my own personal problem.

Question: *But for you it was a small price to pay to maintain your reputation since you said you were sent there to go and fail?*

Adekunle: Yes. The decree said six months but I did it in four months. I made good money for the government.... [Yet] they were out against me. But I thank God for living with Awka people, the iron-smiths. I lived with them from 1942. I was born in 1937, so I lived with them from 1942 and they taught me so many things: how to be self-reliant; how to make your own decision; how you arrive at them. You didn't need to go to class, its question of listening to them, seeing them do it. You sit among the people with the hammer, he is knocking that iron, and at the same time he is singing. The next thing he sits down, he takes *akidi* [local beans], if it's bitter leaf and cassava [fufu], okay, lets' go, you learn from all these. I was hardened by them. A lot of people didn't know this unless I say it, this is what happened to me.

Question: *We understand you also introduced the ship entry notice, SEN?*

Adekunle: Oh yes, that's why any ship coming in, you have to say when you are leaving the UK. I am leaving for Nigeria, I am going to Sapele, am going to Warri or I am coming to Lagos.

Question: *Did you have empathy for what the ship crews went through in the congestion?*

Adekunle: What they went through is their own palaver. But if you come round to say demurrage to be paid because the ship has been staying there, I'd ask you open your engine, let's see. Start it, and if it doesn't start, then you are a liar.

Question: *So, instead of claims what will happen?*

Adekunle: Kirikiri [prison], finish.

Question: *Did you meet any syndicates or ruffians, people that were doing bad things entrenched in the port?*

Adekunle: Yes, stevedoring companies.

Question: *How were they operating?*

Adekunle: At 3 o'clock, they will be complete, you will see them, you will count them; come back one hour later, you will not see the 21 people, you might see only 8. And you, the importer, you are going to pay for 21 people, but this is only 8 people that are working. Now you the NPA, all your timetable will read 21, all your timing will be wrong, all your off-loading schedule will be wrong.

Question: *Was there collusion between NPA and stevedores in doing this?*

Adekunle: There was collusion between NPA [officials], stevedoring companies and the ship owners. They collect the money, the stevedoring companies, and they share with the NPA [staff]. You see, they were making the money like mad. Then I started arresting them and putting them in Kirikiri. I think the worst one I ever did was S.B. Bakare. I called him out. You see I was looking for an example, a person very senior to me, and very old, the famous kind: B. Bakare or Biney. Biney was Ghanaian, it would not be right; they would say because he was Ghanaian. Therefore, Bakare would do. When I got Bakare, he was asked for three gangs. He produced the three gangs. One hour later, two gangs have gone away, remaining one. What is one gang [when] you've got your off-loading quantity? So, they couldn't just operate the derricks. The off-loading was not done quickly, the quantity to be taken, instead of taking 21 bags, let's say, you will take 7. "Excuse me, sir". He said, "yes". "You are going to Kirikiri", I said. He said, "*Omo mi, ki lowi [my son, what did you say?]*". I said, "you are going to Kirikiri, sir". He asked, "Kirikiri?". I said, "Kirikiri prison. It's either you confess or I would send you to Kirikiri". I was filling the detention order, had already signed it. Then I asked him, "how many times did you cheat? Come on, start talking". He said, on this day, the gang was 15 short; on this day, they were 8 short; on this day.... I said "that's it. Now, you pay. If I asked that you bring some new gangs to come and work to recoup whatever you've stolen, I would never get the money because they will tell me you've gone to the U.K. to go and see your doctor. So, go and bring the cash. You are suspended, you are not going to prison but 24 hours I want the cash." That's how I got them? That was how I broke their backs and they hated me. So, I was finding snakes and scorpions inside my office. Even women, they sent.

Question: *How do you mean that?*

Adekunle: To compromise me.

Question: *You were also instrumental to giving the NPA its first General Manager who became the Head after you, you recommended Alhaji Bamanga Tukur?*

Adekunle: Yes, there is a bit of history there. Bamanga Tukur is from Adamawa, he's from Yola. The Yoruba man who is dead now, I don't know what they called him...very

junior to Bamanga, the number 5 in rank from the NPA people. You, No. 5 come and do this work. You know it, don't you? You are vast in customs duties.

Question: *Was your making these appointments covered by the same decree?*

Adekunle: The same decree. So, you will not be able to sit down and accuse me of being tribalistic (sic). I have used a Yoruba man, here I have used an Igbo man there, my justification is they have delivered, they have done their work properly. Like I told one Australian who came here and asked me, don't publish anything about me until I am dead. He said you've been in every stage where coups are being staged, I said yes. And you've been there, you know about the coup before the actualization? I said yes, even the first coup I know a lot about it. When I was retired, there was a big reaction. How can you retire this man with everything he has done? What did he do? They said I was carrying Indian Hemp. I said, me, carrying Indian Hemp? After you've been giving me every week £20m sterling.

Question: *For what?*

Adekunle: For the soldiers' food, medicals, during the war...

Question: *£20m per week?*

Adekunle: Yes, and I will give the account of how I spent it. I'd give you the list of those who are dead, those who the chief paymaster knows he must not pay anything to again. Write the family of the man, so you know what you are getting. This is what you've given me and this is what I've spent. The food from....Go and check. The medical supplies which I bought, these are the places I bought it.

Question: *This was while you were outside Lagos?*

Adekunle: Yes

Question: *But £20m was a lot of money*

Adekunle: For the war?

Question: *Yeah. Did it include the procurement of armaments?*

Adekunle: No, food.

Question: *And how many men were you catering for, approximately?*

Adekunle: About 8,000. If I buy cows here, I don't buy less than 50 every month. Garri, yam, oil, eventually I had to stop buying oil and stop buying fish because Bonny, Port Harcourt, Burutu, Sapele, Opobo, Calabar were available for fish. Created jobs for the people. I will buy any fish you bring. You are not fighting them to eliminate them. You are sustaining them at the same time. And as for school children, it's alright, how many schools have you got? When was the last session? What classes? Who are the last classes? Who are those in the universities? Who are those who came from overseas? I managed to get a lot of Igbo boys out of the Eastern Region to go to America. Go, I am not fighting you. Just go, you'll come back to your country.

Question: *You keep talking of how your multi-tribal family helped you, your focus, etc?*

Adekunle: Look I've been lucky. I told you my mother, Hausa; my father, Yoruba; my wife, Igbo. I have no reason not to help people. You are a human being first to me; then after that, you can be your Itsekiri or anything, it doesn't concern me. One other thing, which I did which they didn't like. I found most of the girls there [Niger-Delta] were typists, stenographers, and the rest of them. Why not collect some of these girls, train them, put them in uniforms, give them ranks into the armed forces. You get more manpower. These girls will be doing all the jobs which any other man can do. That's the beginning of this nonsense army girls which at times were only recruited there so the men can have access to them! I meant well but the thing is up till tomorrow the political northerners do not believe that this country belongs to you and me. We are all tenants to serve their own purposes. And all their whims and caprices is greed; they are after stealing, putting themselves first as if they are god.

6. Conclusion

Obviously, Adekunle's strong personality traits were honed by his multi-ethnic parentage, the Ogbomoso-mythical connections, and his early affinities with Awka iron-smiths' mentoring. Though physically diminutive, his rare boldness evinced fear and respect wherever he asserted himself, at the battlefield or the waterfront. The location or circumstance was immaterial, all that mattered was the astute philosophical constitution of the man who was as relaxed sitting with the British Prime Minister and the world press as he was playing the game of empathy for refugees and stranded children orphaned by civil war. Nevertheless, at the Apapa port, he was confronted by equally Herculean tasks that proved his mettle to the end, and succeeded in taming the congestion despite the swirling controversies or perhaps because of them.

Despite the most elaborate orchestrations and the construction of more port facilities around Lagos and the Niger Delta, the skewed and sometimes incompetent management of the sub-sector continued to hamper the efficiency of the industry and even degrade the position of the port system against regional rivals. The trend around West African maritime nations towards deep-sea and deep-water port systems and service hubs preferred by the mega carriers will surely test the historical dominance of the Nigerian port system in the coming years. Even so, the competence, altruism, and flair deployed by Adekunle would seem an indispensable option in Nigeria's quest for port efficiency, optimal performance, and best practices in the new globalized business arena of international shipping, especially the prescription of a Port Tzar whose imprint should erase the choke points along the path of seamless port-hinterland cargo transfers. The war and taking sides in it were decided by global geopolitics and Nigeria's ethnic fault lines, especially the immediate circumstances of the Igbo, Yoruba, and Hausa-Fulani interests at stake.

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