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# PORTS, HINTERLANDS AND FORELANDS

By

U. L. ARCHIVES

**PROFESSOR AYODELE O. OLUKOJU**

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# PORTS, HINTERLANDS AND FORELANDS

An Inaugural Lecture Delivered at the  
University of Lagos Main Auditorium  
On Wednesday, June 21, 2006

By

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***“And he had in his hand a little book open: and he set his right foot upon the sea, and his left foot on the earth.”*** (The Revelation of St. John The Divine, Chapter 10, Verse 2, *The Holy Bible*, King James Version)

## **Preamble**

My voyage into maritime history is a paradox that can only be described as an act of God. I hail from Oka in the rocky terrain of Akokoland, in North-East Yorubaland, hundreds of kilometres from lagoons and the sea. Worse still, I do not even swim, no thanks to a near-fatal mishap involving a maternal cousin on our fishing expedition on the Poso River at Owani-Idoani in 1966. Yet, today, by the grace of God, I am presenting this Inaugural Lecture on maritime history! Surely, maritime historians are made, not born.

I owe my foray into maritime history to the order that Professor (then, Dr.) Omoniyi Adewoye gave me to look for “a more challenging topic,” which turned out to be the one on the Port of Lagos and its hinterland. I had been inspired by the publications of the outstanding geographer, the late Professor Babafemi Ogundana, and James F. Shepherd and Gary M. Walton’s *Shipping, Maritime Trade and the Economic Development of Colonial North America* (Cambridge, 1972). My University of Ibadan Ph.D thesis, “Maritime Trade in Lagos, 1914-1950: Its Nature and Impact” (submitted in May 1990, but examined in April 1991) launched me into the broad field of economic and social history, and my pioneering work in Nigerian and comparative maritime history. However, as we shall see, the greatest influence on my post-doctoral career has been Professor Lewis R. “Skip” Fischer of Memorial University of Newfoundland, Canada, editor-in-chief of the *International Journal of Maritime History*, to whom this lecture is fittingly dedicated.

## **Ports, Hinterlands and Forelands: A Conceptual and Analytical Framework**

The term “maritime” broadly defined refers to the sea and all that is associated with it. It is broader in scope than, and is therefore to be preferred to, “marine” which connotes “fisheries.” Yet, there was a Marine Department in colonial Nigeria whose brief had nothing to do with fishing at all! In modern Nigeria, the National Maritime Authority (NMA) is easily identifiable with and taken to represent the maritime sector, given its great visibility as the regulatory entity in the shipping sector. The ready association of “shipping” with “maritime”



to the virtual exclusion of others may be attributed to the glamour associated with seafaring and the controversies over the implementation of the United Nations Commission for Trade and Development (UNCTAD) Liner Code of 1974, to which allusion will be made later in this lecture. It is thus easy to forget that the Nigerian Ports Authority (NPA) and Nigerdock are equally important stakeholders in the industry, and that shipping still needs to berth to load and off-load at ports. This mistaken view thus reflects ignorance of the great interdependence of elements of the maritime sector.

For our purpose, the term "maritime" encompasses all human activities associated with the sea, including those clustered around the port and the port-city (such as city-port industrialization), whaling, sealing, trawling, shipbuilding, maritime labour, as well as passenger and cargo shipping. As sea-related and sea-borne activities expand – with the development of technology and industrial capacity – so has the concept "maritime" become more fluid. To cite an important example, the evolution of Inland Container Depots (ICDs), also called dry ports, consequent upon the container revolution, marks a remarkable expansion of the scope of maritime activities far beyond the port. As well, the development of bulk oil shipping, involving the sea transport of crude and refined oil and gas, has vastly expanded the realm of maritime activity. The point is that we are dealing with a wide-ranging human activity, the diversity of which is bewildering. In this connection, certain maritime activities, such as sealing and whaling, are limited to particular areas of the world, whereas others are more universal.

The related concepts of "hinterland" and "foreland," which are directly relevant to ports, deserve some clarification so that they can be properly understood and contextualized. The port stands between the landward part, known loosely as the "hinterland" and the territory beyond the sea, known as the "foreland." While the latter concept is less debatable, the former is, however, more complicated. For the "hinterland" is actually made up of several components beginning with the immediate or contiguous to the more distant ones. F.W. Morgan (1952) had underlined the complexity of a port's hinterlands, which he suggested could be classified on the basis of the port's export and import traffics, the extent of their catchment areas, and the transport links between them and the port. Indeed, the import and export hinterlands of a port may not necessarily coincide or lie within the same political entity. Moreover, the example of Hong Kong demonstrates that the hinterland of an

island port does not consist in a contiguous land area but could well lie in a location that might as well be its foreland!

A critical factor in shaping the character and extent of a hinterland is the level of technological development at any point in time. Hence, advances in transport technology have, in Paul Hannape and Michael Savy's words, rendered obsolete the "traditional concept of a port's hinterland" (1980:179). The importance of this factor is underscored by the fact that intermodalism and the use of pipelines have distorted the original meaning of "hinterland." The use of barge carriers on inland waterways has created new hinterlands for ports outside the pale of their traditional catchment areas. As an illustration, the use of barge carriers to import papermaking pulp from Scandinavia via the Rhine-Rhone Canal makes Scandinavia a hinterland of Rotterdam contrary to the traditional notion of the hinterland as a protected traffic basin *behind* the port. The point is driven home by the technology of pipelines, which, by transporting oil, makes a distant site a hinterland of a port where a refinery is located. In the American context, the railing of merchandise from the western part of the country to New York on the east coast before it is exported makes the former a hinterland of the port. It can be concluded then that, where there are major advances in technology and innovations in transportation, the traditional concept of "hinterland" becomes inflexible and inadequate, but it is still applicable in contexts where such advances had not been recorded.

That said, an important point to stress at this juncture is that the hinterland plays a crucial role in determining the fortunes of a port not least because it is the site of the industries and human activity that sustain the port's trade and shipping. The city behind the port is where the human population that sustains the port resides both as producers of its exports and consumers of its imports. In any case, for most ports, the decisions about port development and management practices are taken by wielders of political power resident in the hinterland! Lest I be misunderstood, I am not suggesting by any means that the hinterland alone determines the fortunes of a port or of a nation's maritime economy. Several decades ago, scholars debated this question and both sides marshalled very impressive arguments. In a famous passage, the distinguished port geographer, W.E. Boerman (1951:348), advocated the supremacy of the hinterland in the following declaration:

It is the hinterland combined with transport links  
that gives the key to growth of port trade and



development of port industries. No port structure can be understood when not seen together with its hinterland.

This was challenged by a group of French scholars (including Andre Vigarie and Marcel Amphoux) who countered that it was the foreland, rather than the hinterland, which determined the fate of a port (Weigend, 1952). Citing the example of Dunkirk (Dunquerque), they argued that it failed to develop into a major port despite its proximity to a well-developed hinterland. Hence, they posited that the port was more significant as "a window from the sea to the land" as opposed to the traditional view of ports as the "window to the sea."

Either position can thus be sustained in different and changing contexts. But a leading port geographer, Guido Weigend (1958:200) fittingly concluded the debate by asserting that neither the hinterland nor foreland, nor even the port itself alone could determine the fortunes of a port; that it was a combination of the three elements in the wider context of local and global dynamics that shaped the fate and fortunes of a port at any particular time. Rival ports too have a role to play in determining the fortunes of particular ports given the factor of inter-port competition.

Having dealt with salient aspects of ports as the hub of a nation's maritime activities, it is important to highlight the complementary role of shipping. For the sake of clarity, we need to stress that shipping has the local (coastal) and liner components. The magnitude of either depends on the nature of the country and the organization of its maritime sector. The shipping of Japan and Britain, island nations with extensive indented coastlines and numerous ports with considerable draughts, contain a considerable proportion of coastal shipping as inter-island communication is best served by that variant of shipping. Conversely, West Africa with a long but largely un-indented coastline is almost wholly dependent on liner shipping which also serves its numerous ports, virtually all of which lack natural harbours. The implication of this is that maritime policy and organization in the former may not be directly applicable or transferable to the latter, given the differences in their geography, economy, politics and technological development.

Another issue in shipping is the structure of operations. Conference lines serve regular routes according to a schedule and are often organized in conferences (or cartels), while tramp operators are not tied to any specified routes or schedules. Again, unlike many of the advanced maritime nations, Nigeria, nay, West Africa is served almost wholly by the scheduled liners.

Tramp shipping, which still operates on some routes in other parts of the world, is virtually non-existent in West Africa.

Shipping may also be categorised according to freight: passenger or cargo; cargo too is further categorised as dry bulk and liquid. Passenger shipping has seen better days, and not necessarily because of the sinking of the *Titanic*. While luxury liners still convey pleasure-seekers and holidaymakers on short sea hauls, passenger shipping has since been superseded by the rapid development of civil aviation in the post-World War II era. Air travel confers the advantage of speed if not of cost and safety (even after September 11, 2001) to the point that it has rendered anachronistic long distance journeys by sea, except for pleasure cruises and adventure.

As in the case of ports, shipping is dependent on external factors for its success. While the volume, value, and variety of shipping affect the fortunes of a port, the draught, ease of access to a port, and the technology employed in cargo handling affect the volume of its shipping. Hence, advances in shipping, such as containerisation, place a burden on ports to provide matching facilities while the invention of more efficient methods of cargo-handling, such as “ro-ro” (roll on-roll off), palletization and electric cranes, make for shorter turnaround, which makes a port more competitive. In effect, the key elements of the maritime economy, shipping and ports, constitute the fulcrum around which revolve other economic activities, such as port-induced industrialization.

This conceptual background is necessary for an understanding of my work in Nigerian and comparative maritime history, which will be illustrated with appropriate key publications. I shall conclude this lecture with my reflections on, among others, Nigeria’s past, present and envisaged position in the global or regional maritime order.

## **The Port in Local and Global Contexts**

All maritime activities revolve around the port, which also generates ancillary activities, such as port-induced industrialization, urbanization and political economy. While I shall refrain from advancing a mono-causal view of history – that is, attributing developments to a single cause – I make bold to assert that, for countries with a rich maritime heritage as Nigeria, the role of the ports and their potential and actual contributions to national development cannot be over-emphasized. It is for this reason that this lecture dwells on my pioneering study by a professional historian of the port and maritime industries



of Nigeria in comparative perspective.

The related fields of economic and social history cover a wide array of themes: agriculture, transport, labour, urbanization, money and banking, trade, and business. In my opinion, a specialist in economic and social history should demonstrate depth in one area and competence in several others. This will be illustrated with my publications on maritime, urban, transport, agricultural, currency/fiscal and business history. The connecting point, and my primary area of research interest, is the port. A Biblical image that captures my career progression and the topic of this lecture is that of the angel standing astride land and sea as indicated in the quote cited at the beginning of this lecture. I apologize if this symbolism offends anyone's religious sensibilities – I certainly do not claim to be an angel or a divine personality - but I have chosen this striking imagery to convey the thrust of the discussion which follows.

I started with a focus on the Port of Lagos and its hinterlands (vertical and lateral) and forelands, but have developed beyond that initial thrust. Hence, most of my publications have addressed issues relating to the physical development of Nigerian and Japanese ports (including port engineering), the political control of the ports, and port finances. The lateral hinterland dimension concerns the key issue of inter-port competition, on which I have examined selected Nigerian ports, the coastal environment (Olukoju, 1997d), and aspects of inter-group relations among coastal communities (Olukoju, 2000b). In dealing with the vertical dimension, I have done extensive work on the port city (urban issues of infrastructure, demography, sanitation, labour and cost of living). Behind the port city, I have traced the roots of port trade to the agricultural sector of the hinterland economy, study the transport network between the port and the hinterlands (rail and road transport, in the main), the currency systems that oiled the trade of the port, and the accompanying entrepreneurship and business-government relations. As for the foreland dimension, I have dealt with four major aspects of shipping – cargo and passenger, liner and tramp – and situated my work in the local and global comparative perspectives.

It can hardly be debated that ports are critical to the conduct of maritime trade. What is often overlooked is that ports are multifunctional: they are the hubs of shipping, where they serve as outlets for the trade in either direction; they also generate local, regional, and even national development as growth



poles. These points are highlighted in my studies of Nigerian and Japanese ports. My research interest is seven-fold: port engineering, port administration, port finances, inter-port competition, offshore fishing, the coastal environment, and the economic and social impact of ports.

Although Babafemi Ogundana had done considerable pioneering work on the development of Nigerian ports (Ogundana, 1961, 1966, 1967, 1971, 1972, 1976, 1980), I have added the professional historian's touch in detailing through case studies the dynamics of port development and administration, and the conduct of maritime trade. In doing this, I have established the close connection between port development and wider developments in the Nigerian economy, especially for the colonial period. My first paper on the subject (Olukoju, 1992d), was a study of the process and politics of the development of Lagos port with details of port engineering plans, physical and other constraints, policy options and resolution of various controversies, such as why Apapa, rather than Lagos Island, should be the focus of port development especially after 1919. The interests involved in the various decisions taken were highlighted in the study. The scholarly worth of this article will be highlighted later.

Port engineering was the dominant theme in my study of Port Harcourt (Olukoju, 1996b). That study was pioneering because Ogundana had not done a specific study of that port, though he had written on the Niger Delta ports in general. In contrast to Lagos, this port was constructed from scratch. In the comparative context (Olukoju, 2003-2004, 1996a), Port Harcourt in Nigeria paralleled and anticipated Kashima in Japan (Olukoju, 2004b) in exemplifying the growth pole potential of both natural and artificial ports. I situated the development of the former in the wider political economy of colonial Nigeria, detailing the politics and economics of its development as well as the attendant constraints and benefits. A striking feature of that study of Port Harcourt was the application of the "Anyport" model proposed by the eminent geographer, James Bird.

Publishing in the *Journal of Transport History* in 1992 launched me on a global plane and opened doors beyond my imagination. I was not just the first African to publish on maritime transport in the journal, I was indeed the first Nigerian historian to deal with the subject of port engineering, a feat that was subsequently replicated for Port Harcourt in Nigeria and Japanese ports. Meanwhile, the editor of the *JTH* had drawn my attention to a "new" journal,

founded in 1989: the *International Journal of Maritime History*, based in the Maritime Studies Research Unit of the Department of History, Memorial University of Newfoundland, St. John's, NL Canada.

My first submission on the politics of port administration in Nigeria before the establishment of the Nigerian Ports Authority (NPA) was an instant hit, though there was an inexplicable crisis. As was to be my lot on many other occasions, adversity became an advantage as the crisis inadvertently led me to know the journal's editor-in-chief, the indefatigable Professor Lewis "Skip" Fischer, who later became my main mentor. Upon his discovery that there was no reason for the delay in publishing my revised paper, and having been impressed by the paper, "Skip" ensured its immediate publication. Worth noting is his comment about my work some fourteen years ago: "I admire your work and would be pleased to have additional contact with you." He then added a note in his own handwriting: "We would be delighted to consider any more of your work at any time!" (Personal communication, 22 September 1992; emphasis in the original). That encounter defined my career in maritime history.

That paper is the only scholarly piece on port administration in Nigeria before the establishment of the NPA, a theme that is admittedly the purview of the (maritime) historian. Other scholars simply gloss over this period since they have no clue to it. Yet, that paper contains a typology of port administration on a global scale and details of the problems of port administration in colonial Nigeria - the duality of control (private and government), the multiplicity of authorities (Railway, Customs, Port Engineering and Marine), and the intense inter-departmental rivalry - which, incidentally, have remained the bane of maritime administration in Nigeria to date. But nobody else has bothered to understand such antecedents to current practices, knowledge that could assist in charting the way forward.

My pioneering paper on Nigerian port finances (Olukoju, 1994) focused on the Port of Lagos, which was shown to be an "expensive port," even in the heyday of colonial rule. To date, this detailed study of the economics of port tariffs and their implications for port operations and shipping turnaround in colonial Nigeria has no parallel even for the post-independence period. One of the key highlights of the study was the dilemma of port (financial) administration - port authorities had to charge remunerative fees for their



services but these were not always sufficient to cover the cost of services. Yet, for Lagos in particular, the charges were sufficiently high as to warrant the tag of an “expensive port” by shipping lines and maritime entrepreneurs. It is significant that as late as August 2005, an IMF Report on the Nigerian maritime sector labelled Lagos as the “most expensive port” in the West African sub-region (Adams, 2005:20). This issue will be commented upon later in this lecture.

In effect, between 1992 and 1996, I dealt with three key aspects of Nigerian ports: port engineering, port administration and finances. As well, I also explored the issue of inter-port competition between Lagos and the Niger Delta ports for the trade of Northern Nigeria. In one article (Olukoju, 1996e), I analysed the politics of the diversion of the ancient Kano-Tripoli trade from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic coast of Africa. I demonstrated that the choice of Lagos was not a foregone conclusion. First, Frederick Lugard’s legendary distaste for Lagos in particular (and Southern Nigeria in general) meant that the Niger Delta was a preferred route. Second, working on that project, Lugard and Percy Girouard committed funds and material to the construction of the Kano-Baro railway (which was intended to “behead” the Kano-bound Lagos railway) and the dredging of the Niger, a project that contemporary Nigerian governments are still attempting in spite of the lessons that can be learned from Lugard’s abortive scheme. However, as the study shows, Lagos had attributes and defects as an ideal outlet, but a number of factors eventually tipped the scale in its favour. What is striking about the paper is the effort made to situate those developments in a comparative context and to propose some generalizations about inter-port competition.

### **Behind the Port: Urban and Hinterland Dimensions**

As ports serve primarily as portals (gateways), their sheer existence presupposes human and non-human traffic in opposite directions. Expectedly, some proportion of the traffic drops off in the immediate vicinity of the port while the balance moves away in the seaward (foreland) and landward (hinterland) directions. A second observation is that the port and its trade cannot be understood without adequate knowledge of the nature and origins of the freight. These two lines of inquiry have informed the next aspect of my studies: those dealing with the urban dimensions of the port as well as the elements that underpin the functioning of the port – articles of trade, currency, agricultural systems and inland transport. I shall deal with these in the following

paragraphs.

The City of Lagos has been my laboratory in the study of the port-city in the local and comparative contexts. In numerous publications (e.g. Olukoju, 2004a, 2003a, 1993) I have examined several key issues, including health and sanitation, cost of living, municipal transport, water and electricity supply, and entrepreneurship. I have benefited from the financial support of various local and international organizations, including, the University of Lagos Central Research Committee, CODESRIA (Dakar), the French Institute for Research in Africa (IFRA), Ibadan, and the German (through the DAAD) and French governments. My 1993 paper on population pressure, housing and sanitation centred on the bubonic plague that ravaged Lagos in the inter-war years. A striking lesson from that study is the resilience of a culture of poor waste management and unregulated urban and suburban development in the metropolitan area. Hence, the chaotic process of urbanization of the early colonial period persists to date. The challenges of the city in colonial times have also been taken up in various studies with the following highlights.

First, the connection between culture and economic vicissitudes was demonstrated in my article on the post-World War I maritime economy and society of Lagos (Olukoju, 1992b). That paper established that the *aso ebi* culture (as distinct from *aso egbe*, pioneered by *Egbe Kila*) in Lagos and Nigeria started only in the context of the stupendous and unprecedented accumulation occasioned by the post-war boom of 1918-20. In effect, I debunked received wisdom of a distant antiquity of this wasteful practice with verifiable evidence that it did not exist before 1920. A Lagos newspaper had declared that: "it is not the custom handed down to us by our forefathers." It deplored the "waste and debt associated with it" and, therefore, demanded its prohibition (*Nigerian Pioneer*, 11 March 1921). However, this was part of a culture of conspicuous consumption, including lavish real estate development in Lagos, fuelled by the post-World War I boom, which has survived to this day as a national culture, deplored by only a handful of critical Nigerians (Fred-Adegbulugbe, 2005:46).

Second, I have explored daily life in the colonial (port) city through publications on the segregation of Europeans and Africans in Lagos and other cities, the rising cost of living as the urban population increased steadily, the travails of migrant and wage labour, crime in the city and its suburbs, and the provision (or absence) of infrastructure (Olukoju, 2005a, 2003a, 2003d,



2000a, 1996b). Not only was Lagos an expensive port, it was indeed an expensive city, as exemplified by major indices of cost of living – housing and foodstuff prices. The city was also an early site of labour activism especially in the context of the COLA (cost of living allowance) “wars” of the 1940s, which had their antecedents in earlier strikes. One major outcome of my studies was the establishment of a correlation between commercial prosperity and relative scarcity of labour, on the one hand, with a proclivity for labour militancy, on the other. Conversely, economic depression and a glut in supply of labour correlated with relative docility of labour (Olukoju, 1996c).

While these studies have focused essentially on Lagos, they have also adopted comparative perspectives to highlight what was unique to the city. In a comparison of waste management in Lagos and Tokyo (Olukoju, 2001b), I did not only highlight the expected contrasts in culture and technological development and application, but drew pertinent lessons, including the need for civic education, self-policing, personal discipline and recycling that have been deployed to great and positive effect by the Japanese. These global best practices contrast sharply with the Nigerian “Not-in-my backyard” syndrome and haphazard waste disposal cultures. The fundamental problem of our society is indiscipline and this is reflected in how we litter anywhere from the closet to the commons. Civic education from the cradle, which inculcates respect for others, legally constituted authority and the environment is paramount. It could prove decisive to the quest to rid our cities of their garbage mountains by inculcating in Nigerians the habit of sorting waste at source, which should be coupled with appropriate methods of waste collection, disposal and recycling.

A key issue that recurs in my studies is the relationship between government and the business community in the colonial and post-independence contexts. This has been illustrated with several case studies of the shipping industry, fiscal policy and agricultural exports (Olukoju, 2002a, 2002c, 2000c, 1999a, 1999b, 1999c, 1998, 1995). My 1995 piece conceptualised business-government relations in a comparative colonial context, analysed pressure group tactics in colonial Nigeria, and focused on the vexed question of export duties, which strained the generally collaborative relationship of the two key players in the colonial economy. My case studies reinforced the position, disputed by some scholars, that there was a special, indeed symbiotic, relationship between government and business, but that



the relationship had its own peculiar complexities.

Yet, in spite of this community of interest, there were instances when the interests of one party jeopardized those of the other, as in the case of government fiscal or tariff policies. Where, for example, the business community balked at higher tariffs and the government insisted, the former applied pressure through formal and informal channels. But at the end of the day, a compromise was reached, which invariably passed the burden to the African producer of primary produce and the consumer of foreign imports. The merchants simply charged higher prices for the latter and offered low prices for the former. That arrangement guaranteed the mercantile profits and government revenue, respectively. Paradoxically, as I have also shown, the business community which deplored the "meddlesomeness" of the government whenever there was a trade boom (as in 1918-20, 1945-50) always clamoured for government intervention in business during a slump, through reduction of import duties and by protectionist tariffs, to secure supplies for "home" industries or to get rid of foreign competition (Olukoju, 1999b, 1995, 1987). Merchants-induced government intervention was invariably solicited to boost their profits.

In short, I have contributed to the debate on the role of the state in the colonial economy. I have demonstrated in my empirical studies that the state was not a Great White Umpire that adjudicated impartially in the fierce contest between indigenous and expatriate business interests. Rather, it was an interested party that, as I also demonstrated with appropriate empirical evidence, gave overt and covert support to metropolitan business. A related conceptual question, which I have also addressed, is the balance of power in the alliance of government and business: Was the colonial state a mere tool of business, or did it have some latitude for autonomy? My own conclusion is that the state combined both elements. Following Bruce Berman (1990), I have shown that, depending on the circumstances, the state subordinated the interests of metropolitan and local business to its own interests (as in the revenue drive in the colonies), but was subservient to the strategic business dictates of the mother country and its nationals (such as in wartime production drive, discriminatory tariffs and allocation of scarce wartime shipping space). In effect, the colonial state was an appendage of the imperial official and business apparatus, and this abridged its relative autonomy. Yet, it took appropriate steps, when necessary, to ensure its own financial survival often

in defiance of the preferences of the metropolitan and colonial business communities. Still, it must be conceded that the personality of the colonial proconsuls also mattered: some were more pro-business than others.

A striking feature of my research is the pursuit of maritime imports, such as alcohol, through the networks of distribution to the point of consumption, while also dealing with the attendant implications. Conversely, I have gone into the processes by which maritime exports, especially primary produce, were generated, processed, and despatched to the port. Regarding maritime imports, I have written three well-cited articles on liquor consumption in Southern and Northern Nigeria, the fiscal implications of the traffic in the South, and the moral dilemmas and racism involved in the entire process. My studies of the liquor trade (specifically "trade spirits," low quality imports from Holland and Germany) have provoked scholarly responses and provided the basis for as many as three articles (virtual rejoinders) by a British counterpart. I was the first scholar to write on the liquor traffic behind the prohibition lines in Northern Nigeria, beginning with my first international article (Olukoju, 1991). The second (Olukoju, 1996d), which appeared in the prestigious *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, examined the racism, the local legal framework, and the international conventions that governed liquor prohibition and consumption in colonial Northern Nigeria. A third article provided a detailed empirical analysis of the fiscal aspects of the trade in Southern Nigeria from 1890 to the abolition of "trade spirits" in 1919 (Olukoju, 1997c). In all these studies, my research highlighted the hypocritical attitude of officials and, even, the temperance movement toward the liquor traffic, and provided a critique of racially constructed drinking stereotypes.

Less controversial items, such as palm produce, cocoa, cotton, and groundnuts, have been examined in the context of produce inspection, agricultural policy, and railway tariffs in the different epochs of the colonial period (Olukoju, 2003e, 1999a, 1998). The study of these items reveals the connection between the local and global, the colonial and imperial, state and market dynamics, indigenous and expatriate entrepreneurship, and the unpredictable factor of the weather. My studies have highlighted various paradoxes, exemplified by the phenomenon of the "producers' perverse reaction to the market" during the Great Depression and in other instances of a sharp drop in world market demand and prices (Olukoju, 2003c).



## **Beyond the Port: Shipping, Maritime Trade and External Relations Across Maritime Space**

Given the schema that I outlined in an earlier passage, my contributions to maritime history have straddled the three critical interfaces – land, port, and maritime space. Having dealt with both the port and the hinterland, I shall now focus on shipping, the link between foreland and hinterland. As those familiar with the literature will attest, there are far fewer scholarly publications on shipping as such, compared to maritime trade, for instance. This is largely because shipping is a secretive and relatively thinly documented field. Yet, I have managed to squeeze out over a dozen articles in international journals, which, to be sure, have covered various aspects of shipping: passenger and freight; liner and tramp; shipping tariffs and fleet development. Some other publications, cited above, dealt with the commodities carried aboard the ships in peace and wartime: liquor, general merchandise and primary produce.

In a major article in the premier *Journal of African History* (Olukoju, 1992b), which has been copiously cited, I unravelled the interlocking issues of the politics of rationalization of scarce wartime shipping space, the alliance of imperial business and government, and the tariff policy of the monopoly firm, Elder Dempster & Co. Ltd. of Liverpool. A major conclusion of that study is that the discriminatory policy of the shipping firms in the face of the inability of African enterprise to mount an effective competition marked the beginning of the marginalization of the, admittedly fragile, indigenous entrepreneurs. Second, the exploitation of wartime exigencies by the shipping line was epitomised by the recourse to the invention of “scale tons” rather than gross tons to calculate fares. This meant that hides and skins, which occupied more space but weighed less than cocoa or palm produce, paid fares according to “scale tons.” The latter was an arbitrary invention supposedly designed to rationalize space, which was a greater consideration than weight. I was the first person to highlight this phenomenon in the literature on Nigerian shipping, a fact acknowledged by one of the assessors of the paper.

An important element of the foreland dimension of ports is the destination of exports and provenance of imports handled by the ports. In the Nigerian case, I have delineated the stable and changing features of these for the colonial period. A case study of Nigeria’s bilateral economic relations with

the United States in the era of British colonial rule (Olukoju, 2007) is still the only such study on the subject for that period. Piecing together material from disparate sources, I highlighted the shipping and merchandise trades, and the impact of American products, especially Ford cars, on the Nigerian economy. Throughout the period, though US share of Nigerian trade hardly hit double-digit figures, the United States was important as a source of automobiles (the backbone of urban transport and road haulage), which enjoyed certain advantages over British manufactures. Indeed, the US was the major source of Nigeria's fuel (petrol and paraffin) especially in the desperate conditions of World War II. As well, Nigerian exports, hides and skins, and cocoa, elicited steady demand from the United States.

In a multilateral context, I highlighted in a study of Nigeria's maritime trade between 1890 and 1960 (Olukoju, 2003c) the dynamics of the then British colony's engagement with the world market. The imperial power of United Kingdom constituted the major foreland of Nigeria, but Germany, Holland, Austria, France, Italy, and the United States played similar, though less significant, roles. The point is that even though Britain's power was virtually unassailable for the entire period, global as well as local factors affected the fortunes of those forelands. The two World Wars, for example, eliminated "enemy countries" (Germany and Austro-Hungary in the first; and Germany, Italy and Japan in the second) from the list of Nigeria's external trade partners. The resultant elimination of the shipping of those countries – the German Woermann Linie, in particular – also facilitated the eclipse of the "enemy countries" and riveted the grip of Elder Dempster on the West African shipping trade (Olukoju, 2001-2002). The prohibition of certain imports, such as trade spirits by international convention after 1918, affected the fortunes of Dutch exports to Nigeria. Another factor that affected Nigeria's external trade was the Great Depression, which curtailed exports in the face of low producer prices and falling demand. As well, observance of quality controls on the world market – a foreland dimension – also affected Nigerian produce exports in the 1920s till they were subjected to a stricter produce inspection regime instituted by O.T. Faulkner in the inter-war years (Olukoju, 2003e, 1998).

An interesting factor in the delimitation of Nigeria's forelands was the volume of domestic production of cotton in the United States and India, groundnuts in India, whale oil in Europe or palm oil in Sumatra (Indonesia), which largely determined the quantity of exports of such commodities from



Nigeria. In years of drought, bad weather, crop failure or poor harvests, or of an unusually high domestic consumption of such commodities in the aforementioned countries, the reduced supply in the world market generated a high demand for Nigerian produce. The fortunes of colonial-era produce foreshadowed those of Nigeria's oil exports in contemporary times whenever the United States or Saudi Arabia flooded the market with their strategic reserves, or, conversely, when a major disruption in a major oil-producing country (such as during the 1973 Arab-Israeli War and the two Gulf Wars) redounded to Nigeria's disadvantage and advantage, respectively.

Protectionist tariff policy also affected Nigeria's external trade and the extent of the country's forelands. In a paper on the subject (Olukoju, 1999b), I have shown how a differential export duty was deployed to ensure that virtually all of Nigeria's palm kernel exports went to the mills built by the British to absorb them in the attempt to capture the proportion that went to German crushing mills. Import quotas were also imposed on Japanese textiles, which dramatically reduced the proportion of Nigerian imports of textiles from that country and, by implication, its share of Nigeria's external (maritime) trade. As well, US import quotas in the desperate conditions of the 1930s also affected Nigerian exports (Olukoju, 2007).

My studies of seamen's welfare in the context of tramp shipping (Olukoju, 2001a) and the destitution of deserters and abandoned seamen (Olukoju, 2006b) shed light on the social aspect of maritime history. The saga of the distress of the crew and the disposal of the American schooner, *Allanwilde*, in Lagos between 1920 and 1922, is a rare study that sheds light on the precarious operations and hopeless prospects of tramp shipping in the heyday of the dominant Conference lines. In the event, the hapless crew of the doomed ship became pawns in a game between the American shipowners, the US government and the Nigerian colonial government. The abandoned crew became wards of the colonial government and their ill-fated vessel was auctioned in Nigeria. The US government, however, reimbursed its Nigerian (British) counterpart, though the sailors received poor compensation for their travails. Even so, the "coloured" crew were worse off than their "white" counterparts, a reflection of the social realities of that age.

In all, my studies have shown that the external relations of Nigerian ports (and their hinterlands) across time and maritime space have been influenced by the country's vulnerability to the vagaries of global economic,



political, and climatic conditions. The two World Wars, the Great Depression, droughts, crop failures, pandemics (such as the Influenza Pandemic of 1918), the intensity of domestic demands for certain raw materials, hostile (protectionist or discriminatory) tariffs and subsidies, competition from other primary producers, the threat posed by synthetic substitutes, and the impact of superior production techniques or quality control regimes in other lands, have combined to shape the scope and nature of Nigeria's foreland relations.

## **A Career Astride Land and Sea**

Vice-Chancellor, permit me to present a profile of my publishing record. In a post-doctoral blitzkrieg between 1991 and 1996, I posted fifteen sole-authored journal articles and two book chapters across four continents outside Africa. In 1997, I applied for the post of professor with thirty publications in print, of which seventeen had appeared in foreign (non-African) outlets. Of my current total in print of seventy-nine (including one co-authored), fifty are international, sole-authored publications. Permit me at this juncture to situate these publications in the port-hinterland-foreland framework of this lecture and to highlight some of my career milestones with their respective national, continental or global significance.

First, my articles have appeared in leading specialist journals across North America, Europe and Oceania: a record five times in the flagship *International Journal of Maritime History*, four times in *Itinerario: European Journal of Overseas History*, twice each in *Journal of Transport History* (JTH), the world's only specialist journal in the field, and in *The Great Circle: Journal of the Australian Association for Maritime History*, and also in *The Northern Mariner/Le Marin du Nord*, *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, *International Review of Social History*, *Journal of Third World Studies* and *Labour History Review*. Others have been published in Africanist journals (*Journal of African History*, *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, *African Economic History*, *Afrika Zamani: Journal of the Association of African Historians*, *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, *History in Africa: A Journal of Method*, *African Studies Review* and *Indian Journal of African Studies*) or as chapters in books. Considering the number, quality, diversity and inter-continental spread of my publications, this is a record of some sorts.

Second, my book, *The 'Liverpool' of West Africa: The Dynamics and Impact of Maritime Trade in Lagos, 1900-1950* (Trenton, NJ, 2004) has been

selected for a Roundtable of the *IJMH*, an honour accorded any book adjudged path-breaking in the field. Third, my publications on Japanese ports belong to an exclusive set written in English by a handful of non-Japanese, a distinction shared with the distinguished Australian geographer, Peter J. Rimmer. By that token, I belong to the rare breed of scholars who have published on different continents in the field.

Fourth, my publications are catalogued in numerous libraries and have been copiously cited by my peers across the globe. Indeed, one Englishman perfected the art of using my articles as basis for several of his own by writing virtual rejoinders to mine! Several scholars have also conveyed their appreciation in private correspondence, only two of which are cited here. The aforementioned Englishman made the following remarks: "So glad you've set off an historical controversy – good for both our CVs! ... I really admire you – few Nigerian academics can see the value of writing articles, which can lead onto fellowships and more articles and more (sic) overseas conferences. How I wish others could see the light and make such noble efforts." (Simon Heap, correspondence, 11 September 1999). An American colleague, who subsequently invited me to his campus to give a lecture, wrote as follows: I "just finished your article ... on nepa which i enjoyed very much. it really is an excellent piece. I myself am an anthropologist who works on media... i think your piece was very well done on a number of levels ... and i enjoyed most the way you highlight the inefficiencies of Nepa and the way people respond to them." (Brian Larkin, correspondence, 9 July 2004)

Fifth, these publications are products of interdisciplinary bridge building between history, on the one hand, and cognate disciplines, especially port geography and economics, on the other. This has enabled me to conceptualise my subject matter and to profit from debates in those fields. I have been influenced by eminent port geographers and maritime economists as is indicated in the bibliography to this piece. Consequently, my publications have been enriched by a positive engagement with various concepts such as spatial analysis, criminality as resistance, ecology and development, and working class consciousness, Gresham's Law, and the "Anyport" model.

Sixth, adopting global best practices has helped me to maintain an unbroken chain of international publications (with as many as four to seven in print in particular years) each year since 1991, and of local publications since 1987 (with the exception of 1990). My paper on Lagos port was the only



one on Africa selected for inclusion in a collection (Williams, 1997) of the best articles on maritime transport published in the first forty years of *Journal of Transport History* (1953-93). Likewise, my paper on the cost of living in Lagos, 1914-45 (Olukoju, 2000d) was only one of seventeen chapters selected from more than one hundred papers presented at a University of London Conference in 1996, published in a key text in use at many foreign universities.

Seventh, I have earned international recognition in numerous ways: my publications are required reading in several British and American universities; I have won seven post-doctoral research fellowships (including the British Academy, Japan Foundation and DAAD), and several grants and awards in Europe and North America; participated in several international research networks; served as chair or member of international bodies, including editorial boards of international journals; consulted for international publishing houses and grant-awarding bodies, and delivered the keynote address at the 12th Annual Conference of the Latin American Association for Asian and African Studies in Mexico City (November 2003).

Eighth, several of my journal articles have earned me international recognition in diverse ways. The editor of *Labour History Review* (Edinburgh) urged me to expedite the revision of my article for publication (Olukoju, 1996b) because it was, according to him, the first ever on Africa and by an African. I have enjoyed free subscription to the prestigious *International Review of Social History* (Cambridge/Amsterdam), since my controversial but highly regarded paper on currency counterfeiting (Olukoju, 2000a) appeared in it. My article on NEPA (Olukoju, 2004b) is currently advertised on the website of *African Affairs* (London) as a model for the journal's prospective contributors. That paper has also earned me invitations to give lectures and to participate in research networks, especially in the United States.

Ninth, I have demonstrated that the accomplished maritime historian should not be restricted to the port or any other core maritime subject. My publications on culture (2006), infrastructure (2005a, 2004a, 2003a), business-government relations (2002c, 2000c, 1998, 1995), agriculture (Olukoju, 2003e, 1998), currency, tariffs and fiscal policy (2002d, 2000a, 1999a, 1999b, 1997a, 1997c, 1994) and social history (2005b, 2003d, 1996c, 1996d, 1993), which appeared in leading specialist and Africanist outlets, only validate my earlier dictum that the accomplished historian should be grounded in one and competent in other aspects of the discipline. But beyond

versatility, my research efforts underscore the interconnectedness of ports, hinterlands and forelands, and, as demonstrated in the next section, the relevance of history to public policy.

Tenth, I have been involved in institution and capacity building in the discipline. Here at the University of Lagos, I coordinated as Head of Department the nomenclature change and curricular overhaul that advertised the re-branding of the discipline and the establishment of the *Lagos Historical Review*, a refereed internationally subscribed and respected journal (the current issue, Vol. 6, 2006 is being published) with a notable web profile. The first four issues (vols. 1-4, 2001-2004) were published during my 39-month headship. As well, I have pioneered the teaching of maritime history at the undergraduate level not only in Nigeria but in West Africa. I supervised the Ph.D theses of Obichere Iwuagwu and Uche Igwe, lecturers at the University of Lagos and Babcock University, respectively. Messrs Paul Osifodunrin and Ikenna Obi are currently working towards completing their theses under my supervision, having utilized fifteen-month scholarships in France facilitated by my research networking with the University of Paris VII and the French Institute for Research in Africa (IFRA), Ibadan. At a higher level, the repositioning of the Faculty of Arts under my leadership is continuing apace.

## **Reflections on the Governance of Nigeria's Maritime Industry and Economic Relations**

Vice-Chancellor, most Nigerians cynically deride the discipline of history as an irrelevant pastime, but are quick to refer to "history" to buttress their claims to contested chieftaincy titles, landed property, rights and privileges. Only a few imagine that history is relevant to national development beyond its role as an ideological weapon in the struggle for independence. An official of the Nigerian Ports Authority smugly asked me in 1993 what history had got to do with ports! Such ignorance is bliss, even in our universities, where people preoccupy themselves with defending their narrow areas of specialisation. I am, therefore, constrained to show how my applied maritime history can aid maritime administration and reforms in contemporary Nigeria. My thoughts on this have been articulated in a position paper published by the Nigerian Economic Summit Group, with which I have been associated since 2001 as a member of the Infrastructure Policy Commission (Olukoju, 2001c). It is also significant that in the landmark resource control suit filed by the littoral states,



the lead judgment of the Supreme Court relied on my sworn affidavit as an expert witness (for Lagos State) and specifically acknowledged me by name (See website of Delta State Government). Conversely, the deliberate neglect of history – as in the Bakassi case, where Professor Anthony Asiwaju's legendary expertise was ignored to our peril - has been a major reason for the country's continuous motion without progress since "independence." The point is that professional historians are capable of applying their trained, dispassionate and disciplined minds to national policy with happy results. At least, the historians' unrivalled competence in handling the *longue durée* will invest policy formulation with the indispensable long-term perspective, the absence of which is the ruin of many a policy in modern Nigeria. In what follows, we shall see how applied (and comparative) history can inform public policy and aid national development.

A major theme handled in my publications on ports, shipping, colonial economic history and ancillary subjects has been the fate of indigenous entrepreneurship in the face of the structural disadvantages of the colonial and, even, post-independence global maritime order. Whether in the passenger or commodity trades, indigenous entrepreneurship was either squeezed out completely or marginalized (Olukoju, 2002c, 2002a, 2000c, 1998, 1992c). It is striking, however, that the lessons that can be drawn from my studies appear to be lost on the promoters and implementers of previous and current policies in the industry.

First, the role of government in fostering local enterprise, often by unfair means, has been highlighted in the alliance between the colonial government and the Conference Lines. In modern Nigeria, the government not only does not aid local enterprise in the maritime sector as did the Japanese in a similar context— exemplified by the long exclusion of local operators from cabotage in the oil industry— it actually privileges their foreign competitors by default or design. Second, the decision to fund fleet development as a cover for primitive accumulation by cronies, associates, and agents of the military and political power elite has made mockery of an otherwise laudable strategy.

Third, the failure to learn from other settings and adopt best practices from them continues to hinder the development of the industry. For instance, the recourse to nurture capital in merchant fleet development, which has been a colossal failure in Nigeria, succeeded admirably in Singapore and



South Korea, albeit with necessary safeguards which vested interests have hampered in our own country (Iheduru, 1996). The Singaporean model that entailed direct subsidy for a limited time in such a manner that private operators voluntarily opted out because it was more expensive than raising capital from the open market, is worthy of close study and adaptation. As this was not done before the laudable idea of the Shipbuilding and Ship Acquisition Fund was launched and implemented, the depletion of the fund and non-recovery of loans became inevitable. Fourth, judicious government intervention, as in the Japanese tradition of enforcing the merger of shipping companies—the success of which was recently demonstrated in the enforced consolidation of commercial banks in Nigeria—and the Darwinian principle of supporting the strong against the weak, are also worthy of emulation. Lest supporters of small scale enterprises accuse one of pandering to mega firms and monopolies, it should be stated clearly that shipping is inherently Darwinian and the scope for sole-proprietor, small scale operators is too narrow to merit consideration in the Nigerian context.

My studies of port operations as they affect shipping have shown that a major bane of post-independence performance in this industry is the dismal record of shipping turnaround. In my comparison of the Nigerian, West European, and Japanese experiences since the Second World War (Olukoju, 1996a), Nigeria is not only far behind, it is not making any progress on the critical issue of shipping turnaround. To be sure, as my colonial era studies have shown, that problem is not new. What is new is that human failure, otherwise known as the “Nigerian factor,” has become an overwhelming constraint. During the colonial period, when port facilities were more rudimentary, technology was the major constraint on shipping turnaround (Olukoju, 1992a). In the subsequent period, the human factor is the single greatest obstacle to the development of the Nigerian maritime industry.

It accounts for why port projects were designed and implemented for narrow political and personal reasons; why obsolete equipment were acquired—when the vote was not simply misappropriated; why there is a multiplicity of security agencies at the ports, the highest at ports of comparable size in peacetime in the world; why the multiplicity of those agencies has not streamlined the process of customs, anti-narcotics and port health administration at the ports to ensure quick turnaround; why, given the heavy presence of security agencies, Nigerian ports are notorious for the damage

and/or theft of cargoes by seemingly faceless persons, otherwise known as "wharf rats"; why, in defiance of the stark reality of the loss of trade to Cotonou port, port and other charges remain uncompetitive; why nobody bothers about the country's image or seeks to secure the much-coveted position of regional shipping hub for the Lagos ports complex; and why the industry has become a cartel dominated by identifiable vested interests, which have partitioned the maritime sector into fiefs and ethnic enclaves, making for unbridled institutionalised corruption and breaches of the national security.

I am aware that the Apapa ports complex has been placed under a regime of port concessioning, which is expected to make for more efficient service delivery. The jury is out on the success of this step, which I had actually recommended in some publications (Olukoju, 2003-2004, 2001c, 1996a). But this can only succeed in the framework of a comprehensive plan for repositioning the industry. The starting point is for policy makers to broaden their horizons by reading academic publications based on original research in the field, as opposed to mere acquaintance with secondary literature and self-serving "policy papers." Such an exercise will bring comparative perspectives to bear on policy formulation and implementation. Surely, maritime policy is too pivotal to be left to the whims of bureaucrats and vested interests.

On bridge building between academic research and the industry, for which the University of Lagos is admirably suited, I will not recommend the establishment of a Centre for Maritime Studies, even though it is an attractive proposition. This is not only because such a call, coming from me, will be seen by cynics as self-serving but because experience has shown that personality and patronage politics, including turf fights, will sooner than later distort the original concept, and supplant initiative and competence in the running of such an outfit. I would rather suggest that a Maritime Studies Research Group, on the model of the Maritime Studies Research Unit at Memorial University, St. John's, NL Canada, of which I have been an Associate Member since 1993, be constituted by scholars who have demonstrated competence, such as through international publications, in the field and have engaged the local industry. While details of its *modus operandi* would be worked out by its members, the group/unit should seek to focus on joint research and problem-solving.



The quest for a regional hub status for Nigerian ports is critical to Nigeria's maritime and overall ascendancy in the West African sub-region. Ordinarily, the choice of Nigeria (read Lagos) should have been taken for granted given the overwhelming advantages of population density (read market), capacity of port infrastructure and sheer economic wealth concentrated behind the port(s). But as indicated above, tiny Benin has captured an increasing share of the "traditional" trade of Lagos, thanks to sloppy port operations, unstable government policies (cf. destination vs pre-shipment cargo inspection), unrealistic port charges and insecurity at the ports. Apart from lack of transshipment and high port tariffs, slow turnaround time is a major problem that needs tackling. As a ship captain argued, "If a ship owner can finish discharging at Cotonou within 12 hours, he would refuse to come to Nigeria where he would discharge for one and half days"! (Omoni, 1995: 13) As liner companies are in the business to make profit, their decision will be driven by economic rationality. What Nigerian maritime planners seem oblivious of is that even Lobito in Angola, with its natural harbour and deep draught is a potential rival as Angola too is rich in minerals, including crude oil, and its railway system is being modernised and de-mined in the aftermath of its over thirty years of civil war. If the companies calculate that that port will be a suitable hub for distributing cargoes to smaller, less efficient, expensive and unsafe ports, they would not hesitate to endorse it. Though this sounds far-fetched in the short run, Nigeria's complacency coupled with strategic opportunism could tip the scales in favour of other possible sites.

Whatever position anyone might take on this issue, it is undeniable that "radical reforms" which I have recommended elsewhere (Olukoju, 2001c) is required in the maritime sector. The systematic pursuit of regional shipping hub status will also entail reforms of the tariff regime. This will ensure that a balance is struck between central tariff setting for cross subsidization and market driven charges to reflect the comparative advantage of individual ports. If the latter prevails, some ports will literally die; but the former policy, which stifles initiative, could be expedient to ensure the survival of otherwise unviable ports. The second issue is to determine the strategic thrust of port development policy. The choice is between developing ports in anticipation of trade or embarking on such only in the face of congestion, such as Nigeria's infamous cement armada saga of the 1970s.

Assuming that current policy directions were maintained, it is likely



that the fortunes of the Nigerian maritime industry might change for the better, all things being equal. The destination inspection scheme might be laborious and time consuming, but it is much better than the pre-shipment scheme, which has proven a threat to national security in the face of the so-called "Nigerian factor." Second, with Lagos ports as a test-case—and Port Harcourt, hopefully, next in line—port concessioning is a development that will, at least, commit the country to a definite policy. That is, Nigerian ports, at least those managed by concessionaires, will be *landlord* rather than *comprehensive* ports. I am aware that concessioning is fraught with its own peculiar problems, especially the fear that privatisation, which is what it is in practical terms, amounts to selling the family silverware to local and foreign private interests, who are driven solely by the profit motive. A second issue is whether the new managers have the capital to install the requisite expensive and sophisticated cargo-handling and ancillary infrastructure given their drive for profits. A third is whether they have the technical expertise, as opposed to the financial wherewithal, to manage such sensitive and technical operations. This last issue is important in view of our recent experience of privatisation where preferred bidders had to employ technical partners to run their newly acquired enterprises. The fourth issue is the management of the labour question, considering the knotty problems of compensation for disengaged labour – a collateral damage in such privatisation exercises.

The tariff question must be tackled head-on in the larger interest of domestic industry and external trade relations. On the one hand, the imperatives of national economic interest dictate that fiscal policy should serve as commercial policy. In that case, hostile tariffs should keep out imports that are harmful to domestic industries, such as textiles and cement, which are currently beleaguered. On the other hand, the loss of potential customs revenue to Cotonou has to be tackled by operating a flexible and competitive tariff regime, which enhances the regional pre-eminence of Nigerian ports. The danger in the proposed competitive, invariably lower, port tariffs is that Nigeria would be flooded with foreign imports—given our penchant for foreign products—which would effectively destroy the aforementioned domestic industries. The argument that those industries are churning out sub-standard products—which are also sold at inflated prices that further enrich a parasitic business elite—overlooks the fact that their decimation would lead to job losses and greater social crises in the country. My position is that while

losses and greater social crises in the country. My position is that while government formulates specific and general policies that will aid the flowering of domestic industries — such as by the provision of the all-important power, water and transport infrastructure — it should harmonise such with the West/Central African regional maritime aspirations of Nigeria.

Capacity utilization at Nigerian ports is an issue that must be addressed in the national interest, which includes our regional maritime power politics. As indicated above, port development policy faces the dilemma of waiting for trade and risking port congestion in the event of a sudden boom, or creating excess capacity that will be idle in a slump. In our present circumstances, the latter is the lesser evil though it is financially burdensome. Such might be excused if it was a product of over-optimism or tactical miscalculation rather than the outcome of wasteful political patronage in defiance of expert advice. However, I am not in any way justifying what has been a major feature of our post-independence maritime policy, with Calabar as a notorious example of an under-utilized port. The major reason for this—which underscores the importance of the hinterland to a port's fortunes—is that Calabar's natural hinterland is in Cameroun. In the face of current frosty relations with our eastern neighbour, only a successful regional integration scheme that transforms international boundaries from barriers into bridges would grant the port access to that hinterland. Even so, the requisite regional transport infrastructure will have to complement goodwill and market possibilities across the divide. In the interim, the free trade zone being created around the port is likely to resuscitate the port and its Nigerian hinterland.

The synergy of the comparative advantages of Nigerian ports is a potential asset that is waiting to be harnessed. In practical terms, this means that Nigeria could adopt a modified version of the Japanese policy of classifying ports in terms of their size and strategic value. Thus, while Lagos could be a "specially designated port" in view of its expected role as a regional hub, Port Harcourt, Calabar, Bonny and Warri could be classified as "major ports," with smaller ports serving as local/feeder ports. One each could be developed in the western Niger Delta and the Cross River basin, as appendages of the national ports. This classification would specify the traffic and tariffs of each particular group of ports.

After all is said and done, the efficiency of Nigerian ports will determine the overall health of the entire maritime industry. Regardless of the size or



ownership structure of our shipping fleet, chaotic port operations will make Nigerian ports a dreaded destination. Unfriendly port charges will seal our reputation as the region's most expensive ports, an appellation that had applied to Lagos even during the colonial period (Olukoju, 1994; cf. Adams, 2005). In addition, the brazen corruption at the tollgates in and beyond the ports is a nightmare and an embarrassment of colossal proportions. In this connection, the tollgates which hindered Lagos trade from the last quarter of the nineteenth century to 1907 (Olukoju, 1987), and which had to be removed by military and administrative intervention, have been replicated today in the ports and the roads linking the port with the hinterland, with the same effects! What is required, therefore, is seamless port operations that entail removal of all impediments to legitimate transactions by means of efficient inter-modal transportation of freight from ship to shore and beyond.

In this regard, the port merely acts as a bridge between maritime (shipping) and surface (rail, road and river) transport systems. The virtual collapse of our railways is detrimental to this ideal because road haulage will never be able to cope with the traffic. Yet, the vaunted heavy investment in rail transport revitalization and road construction fails to match the reality of a dilapidated road and rail transport infrastructure all over the country. If it is true that the fabled road lobby, which has invested billions of Naira in haulage trucks, has frustrated a successful salvage of rail transport infrastructure, or, if that lobby also works in concert with fifth columnists who pillage the railways from within, the hopes of a synergy of maritime and overland transport and industries will remain a chimera. However, the news that the Nigerian Railway Corporation (NRC) plans to acquire twenty-five new locomotives over the next five years (Akintunde, 2006: 64), is welcome, though this falls short of the panacea for the collapse of Nigeria's rail transport sector. Nothing short of a repeal or an amendment of the Railway Act, which grants the NRC monopoly will save the rail sector. This impediment has already frustrated the initiatives of a Canadian consortium, which had planned a three-hour rapid rail service between Lagos and Abuja, and the Oodua conglomerate, which had proposed a twenty-five minute rail link between Lagos and Ibadan.

For the maritime industry to attain its full potential, a comprehensive urban and regional transport network has to be developed in such a way that haulage from port across the city to the hinterland is carried on seamlessly. A co-ordination of urban, regional and national planning is required in the ambit



of harmonious inter-governmental relations. This should restrict heavy trucks to designated routes and hours within city limits, and permit the railway to convey containerised cargo to inland container depots. Undoubtedly, strategic investment in, and the efficient operation of, rail transport in particular will make the idea of inland ports (ICDs) more realistic. Functional ICDs or dry ports would decentralize maritime operations and de-congest the seaports and other coastal terminals by simply shifting a fair proportion of the bottlenecks around the ports to dispersed locations, which are strategically selected across the country. That in turn would have multiplier effects or developmental impact that a “developer port” was designed to have in the Japanese context (Olukoju, 2004b). The regional developmental impact of the port as a growth pole, exemplified by the Japanese example and the West European Maritime Development Areas (MIDAs), can also be effected through the export processing and free trade zone concepts, as is being attempted around Calabar port.

## Conclusion

Vice-Chancellor, I have demonstrated in this lecture that maritime history does not begin and end at the ports, and that ports are veritable portals, pivots and growth poles. Second, that the historians of this age must be *total* historians with multiple competencies and capacity for straddling disciplines. My own research and publications have cut across various divides in the discipline: periodization (pre-colonial, colonial and post-independence); scope or levels of analysis (micro and macro); genres (pure and applied); and types (case studies and syntheses). Third, historians should seek to relate or apply their primary research to societal development, taking advantage of information technology, as has been done by other practitioners. Fourth, they must reproduce themselves through inspirational teaching, production of Ph.D candidates and the mentoring of younger staff. This is historical scholarship of a sterner stuff.

I can assert that I have striven to live by these ideals over the past quarter-century and hope to sustain the tempo in the years to come. For the future, I am committed to doing more of the same things: motivating and mentoring people; building institutions, especially the Faculty of Arts; reinforcing research and other networks; and distilling my massive unpublished data on Nigerian and Japanese ports, imperial business pressure group

activity, and currency counterfeiting in West Africa into scholarly books and articles. As well, I shall be working on my memoirs. I certainly have no ambition of a third term as Dean of Arts!

Vice-Chancellor, I have taken the audience across land and sea while tracing the trajectory of my career. Like the Apocalyptic angel, I stand astride land and sea, with the little book in my hand as a pointer to what God has empowered me to do in half-a-lifetime. I now return you (landlubbers) to the harbour of hope to resume life's journeys, while I continue my voyage into the uncharted waters of life and scholarship, hoping to see you again at my Valedictory.

Thank you for listening and God bless!

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