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Patriotism in Nation-Building: A Study of Brigadier-General Benjamin Adekunle, also Known as the Black Scorpion

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Abstract

This article used data from descriptive background to examine the person of late Brigadier-General Benjamin Adekunle, the icon of the Nigerian civil war on the subject of patriotism in nation-building. Also, it delved into his life history. The study equally explored his unbeatable military strategies that granted victory to Nigeria during the civil war. Further to that, the study examined various criticisms levied against him on humanitarian grounds, mostly by the secessionists, using some of the existing literature on patriotism and on nation-building. The study concluded that **The Back Scorpion** was not a wicked person but a patriot par excellence.

Keyword: patriotism, nation-building, late Brigadier-General Benjamin Adekunle.

1. Introduction

The peaceful co-existence of Nigeria as a nation had been threatened in the past and in recent times (Okpaga et al., 2012; Alozieuwa, 2012; Anyadike, 2013; Omegoh, 2014; Wakil, 2014; Basse, 2014) by several problems, which demand patriotic solutions. These include: the political impasse in the post-independence era; "secession" from the then Eastern Region (Famoriyo, 2014); and decades of military imperialism (Anyadike, 2013; Onyema, 2014).

In recent times, the nation has been confronted with the problem of Boko Haram, from the North-East. Boko Haram is an Islamic guerrilla force, which (Schwartz, 2010; Walker, 2012; Anyadike, 2013) considers a threat to the continual and harmonious co-existence of Nigeria as one

entity. The challenge of Boko Haram has again exposed the unpatriotic nature of many Nigerian elites (military personnel and civilian), with grievous effects on lives and property (Olupohunda, 2014; Oyedepo, 2014; Chukwudinma, 2014). Most Nigerian elites pursue their personal, group, family, clan, tribal, regional and religious interests (Adejumo, 2014).

Patriotism is perceived as a positive and supportive attitude to a 'fatherland' by individuals and groups (Adejumo, 2014). The 'fatherland' in this context connotes a region or a nation and it covers attitudes such as: pride in its achievements and culture, the desire to preserve its character and the basis of the culture, and identification with other members of the nation (Adejumo, 2014). This scholar continues that patriotism implies individuals placing the interests of the nation above their personal and group interests. On this note, Ihenyen, (2014) asserts: *"To be patriot to one's nation is not a duty or an obligation, it is a way of living, a way of dreaming and a way of dying for it"*. This is in consonance with Ogwuonu, (2014) who views patriotism as the love someone has for his or her country and willingness to defend it. According to this author, a patriot is a person who loves his or her country and who is ready to defend it against an enemy.

Nigeria is blessed with some of such patriots (Onyeama, 2014) but her inability to reward, preserve, retain and replicate patriotism has hitherto remained a major problem since independence. Although previous articles have highlighted the usefulness of patriotism in the process of nation-building in the country (Anugwom, 2001; Ben, 2005; Nmah and Nwadiolor, 2010; Adetiba and Rahim, 2012), but articles on the problem of rewarding, preserving and retaining patriots, who participated actively in the process of nation-building, by the privileged and sycophants in power have never been explored in academic literature to the best of our knowledge. Hence, there is a dearth of knowledge on preserving, honouring, retaining and replicating patriotism which is largely needed to ensure national development.

The major implication of lack of reward for patriots in the past and in recent times is traceable to many Nigerians, now replacing patriotism with selfishness (Ogbeidi, 2012; Famutimi, 2014) and the conduct of state affairs with the *"not my father's business syndrome"* (Omonijo et al., 2014:975). For instance, the Chief of Defence Staff, Air Chief Marshall Alex Badeh, was alleged to have used the official helicopter of the Nigerian army to evacuate his family from Mubi, Adamawa State, shortly before Boko Haram terrorists attacked the town (Famutimi, 2014), killed over 40 persons and sent 13,000 others to exile as refugees in Cameroon (Premium Times, 2014), instead of mobilizing troops to confront the terrorists and deliver Mubi community from attack. The problem of replacing patriotism with selfishness is gradually becoming an issue of concern in academia due to the fact that it could be a major factor in retarding the nation's development. If this problem is not corrected speedily, the present generation may no longer know the meaning of patriotism and it may be passed to the next generation and likely become a sub-culture which may be difficult to eradicate in Nigeria.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Selected Patriotic Nigerians

It is evident in the literature that Nigeria has recorded great feats that were unmatched even in European countries in their early years (Gardham, 2010; Bakare, 2014). Quite unfortunate patriotic Nigerians responsible for these feats were abandoned and stripped naked of honour. This has become a tradition in Nigeria since 1960. The implication is that when manpower assets are not valued, utilized and accorded due respect, it may be a fertile ground for breeding mediocrity that may hinder the advancement of the country for long. In this section, a few of such personalities will be succinctly discussed.

Firstly, late Dr. Dora Nkem Akunyili, the former Director-General of the National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC), who made the eradication of counterfeit drugs and unsafe food, which had been responsible for the untimely death of many innocent Nigerians (Aluko, 1994; Akunyili, 2005; Olenka, 2005; Attaran et al., 2011; Akinyandenu, 2013) a top

priority. The agency under her leadership, as noted by Akinyandenu, (2013) underwent intense restructuring and reforms targeting revitalizing NAFDAC's mandate to "safeguard the health of the nation" to the detriment of her life. As a result, drugs failure rates fell to roughly 16% in 2006 from 2002 and the circulation of counterfeit drugs was reported to have been reduced by over 80% to what it was in 2001 (NAFDAC News, 2006). Dwelling on Obijiofor, (2014: 1), "Akunyili performed her job with unparalleled commitment and passion. She was no respecter of people of either high or low social status, or afraid to confront fake drugs business persons to the detriment of her life".

Secondly, there was the late Brigadier-General Benjamin Adekunle, the civil war hero, who exploited his military expertise, bluntly, in rescuing Nigeria from the brink of the precipice and ensured that the country remained one indivisible entity (Adejumo, 2014)

Thirdly, there was the late Chief Anthony Enahoro, who initiated the motion for self-government in the then Western House of Assembly, which eventually led to Nigeria's independence in October 1, 1960 (Fani-Kayode, 2010). As the Chairman of the National Democratic Coalition (NADECO), a pro-democracy group, late Chief Anthony Enahoro confronted the "discredited regime" of Ibrahim Babangida, over the annulment of June 12, 1993 Presidential election, believed to have been won by late Chief Moshood Abiola, without compromise, and also, fought the "satanic" administration of Sani Abacha to a standstill (Whiteman, 2011).

Fourthly, we also have Mallam Nuhu Ribadu, the former Chairman, Petroleum Revenue Task Force and also pioneer Executive Chairman, Nigeria's Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC). The EFCC under Ribadu's administration, charged leading bankers, former and serving government functionaries and Advance Fee Fraud ("419") gang operators. Thus, the agency issued thousands of indictments and achieved 270 convictions (Ogbodo and Mieseigha, 2013). One notable case was that of the then Inspector-General of the Nigeria Police Force, Mr. Tafa Balogun, who was convicted, jailed and made to return £150 million under a plea bargain (The News Planetario, 2009). Ribadu's achievements in the EFCC included the de-listing of Nigeria from the Financial Action Task Force on Money Laundering (FATF) List of Non-Cooperative Countries & Territories, admission into the prestigious Egmont Group, a media corporation founded and rooted in Copenhagen, Denmark and the withdrawal of the US Treasury-(The Financial Crimes Enforcement Network (FinCEN) Advisory on Nigeria (Center For Global Development, 2010). These institutions helped to make the EFCC the foremost Anti-Corruption Enforcement Agency in Africa, cementing Ribadu's reputation in the world as a respected anti-corruption crusader. On October 20 2006, the level of unpatriotism of Nigerian leaders came to the fore when Mallam Nuhu Ribadu revealed that over \$380 billion was stolen or wasted by them since independence 1960 (BBC News, 2007).

Fifthly, we have Mr. Umoren Etim, an Immigration Officer in the border town in Maiduguri who turned down a bribe of \$450, 000 and arrested Charles Taylor (Ogwuonuonu, 2014). President Charles Taylor tried to bribe Mr. Umoren Etim, "Take this money (\$450, 000. 00) and save your job; for there are people in authority who are aware of this" but Mr. Umoren Etim refused to comply. Instead, he ignored the threat, and immediately made his arrest public (Ogwuonuonu, 2014).

Apart from the above mentioned personalities, there are others across the nation, but the structure of Nigeria never permits them to exercise power (Ndujihe, 2011). Instead, they are either ridiculed or sacked or detained or jailed or retired forcefully and abandoned or killed untimely, as it happened to late Dele Giwa, one of the foremost Nigerian journalists in history. This portrays Nigeria a country where *the good is being rubbished and wickedness is being glorified* (Amalaha 2009; Omonijo and Fadugba, 2011); a country where the best president is never had (Bakare, 2014). It is on this note that this study was conceived. However, the study limits its scope to the late Brigadier-General Benjamin Adekunle, the icon of the Nigerian civil war.

This article examines his life history and also explores his unbeatable military strategies that granted Nigeria victory during the civil war. His choice becomes expedient considering the strategies he employed to win the civil war, which the secessionists regarded as inhuman. Thus, this article asks:

- Was the late Brigadier-General Benjamin Adekunle an evil person or a patriot?

Existing literature on patriotism (Adejumo, 2014;Ogwuonuonu, 2014) and on nation-building (Magstadt, (2009) will be used to examine his roles during the civil war. Moreover, most of the interviews granted by him in the course of the war will be used to examine what critics, mostly the former secessionists considered as wickedness on the basis of the above two concepts.

2.2 Examination of Research on Nation-Building

Dwelling on Deutsch (1996), nation-building means the process of constructing or structuring a national identity using the power of the state. Similarly, Mylonas (2012) believes that nation-building can be achieved through legitimate authority which is connected to popular rule otherwise known as democracy. Going by the views of these authors, the term nation-building could be regarded as engaging the resources of the state in working tirelessly towards building a strong nation and it could be achieved through the democratic process or military hegemony.

Therefore, it could be regarded as a process of passing through one challenge or the other in a nation's quest for stability. However, this could be regarded as a narrow view of the concept nation-building; a broader idea was given by James (1996) in what he terms "national formation", which he considers as a broader process through which strong nations emerge. In other words, the aim of nation-building is the unification of the people within the state so that it remains politically stable and viable in the long run (James, 2006).

However, a comprehensive version of nation-building was presented by Magstadt (2009:299). According to him, it is: *The process which all the inhabitants of a given territory, regardless of individual ethnic, tribal, religious or linguistic differences, come to identify with the symbols and institutions of the state and share a common sense of destiny.*

Given the above, nation-building is a process that involves everyone in a given society. A process connotes the element of continuity in generating the forces necessary for nation building. This phenomenon necessitates that all the component elements of the nation must, in their mutual interest, come to identify with the symbols and institutions of the state (Odoemelam & Aisien 2013).

Identification with the symbols and institutions of the state according to the above scholars enables the composing elements to share a common sense of belonging. It is this common sense of belonging, therefore that propels members of a country to act in the best interest of their political system. Nevertheless, this view is far from reality in Nigeria, where many Nigerians identify with the nation's national anthem, the pledge, the national flag, the national coat of arms and the constitution in lip service and not in symbols of national unity.

Several articles have featured prominently on nation-building in Nigeria, but studies on patriotic Nigerians, who have been deeply involved in the nation-building has been hitherto ignored in the literature. However, this paper focuses on the late Brigadier-General Benjamin Adekunle, who confronted the disintegration of Nigeria decisively. The choice of **The Black Scorpion** is very germane because most of the secessionists considered him as a war criminal instead of a national hero.

Nation-building entails *all efforts* in keeping a nation's indivisible entity (Magstadt 2009) while patriotism hinges on individuals placing the interests of the nation above their personal, group and ethnic interests (Adejumo, 2014;Ogwuonuonu, 2014). It is on this ground that the subject of pity in battle becomes irrelevant. In the context of this article, however, noting the capitulation of South-South, Mid-West and Ore (West), by the secessionists, with determination to conquer Lagos and the entire Nigeria, **The Black Scorpion** employed the *all efforts strategy* to stop the secessionists. This is indicated in the interview granted him by Randolph Baumann of (Stern Magazine 1968:2): **STERN: Do you sometimes feel sympathy for the Ibos? ADEKUNLE: I have learned a word from the British, which is "sorry"! That's how I want to respond to your question. I did not want this war but I want to win this war. Therefore I have to kill the Ibos**

To win the civil war, there must be casualties among the opposition. The underlined statement was uttered in the context of war in order to come out victoriously. This brings to the fore the main reason why **The Black Scorpion** confronted the secessionists with his life. Also, it prompted him to jeopardize the interest of children and women for the corporate existence of Nigeria by blindly

enforcing the application of food blockage to Eastern Nigeria, the strong base of the warring Biafran (Stern Magazine, 1968).

In the context of war, which Akinyoso (2014) considers a bloody affair and an arena where survival of the fittest prevails; the action of **The Black Scorpion** should not be regarded as wickedness but a necessity to end a war in order to ensure the continuity of a nation on the verge of disintegration. The same way in which the secessionists jeopardized the interest of children and women for the nation-building of the state of Biafra that eventually failed was the same way in which **The Black Scorpion** jeopardized the interest of children and women, mainly the Igbos for the corporate existence of Nigeria as an indivisible entity as indicated in the interview below:

ADEKUNLE: *In the section of the front that I rule—and that is the whole south front from Lagos to the border of Kamerun—I do not want to see the Red Cross, Caritas Aid, World Church delegation, Pope, Missionary, or UN delegation.*

STERN: *Does that mean that the many thousands of tons of food that are stored in Lagos will never get to the refugee camps in your section of the country?*

ADEKUNLE: *You are a sharp one, my friend. That's exactly what I am saying.*

STERN: *But you said yourself that most of the refugees in the part you captured are not Ibos.*

ADEKUNLE: *But there could be Ibos among them. I want to avoid feeding a single Ibo as long as this whole people have not given up yet* (The New York Times, 1968)

The statement above is not to wicked the Igbos but to bring the battle to an end. At this point, Biafran army would have surrendered and that would have averted the three-year huge effects on children and women.

In a war-free scenario, the above expressions could be largely regarded as wickedness. Nevertheless, **The Black Scorpion** behaved differently “During the July 1966 coup and subsequent massacres targeted at Eastern Nigerians, the then Major Adekunle nearly lost his life for, among other things, protecting Eastern Nigerian military personnel from their rampaging Northern Nigerian comrades” (Onyeama, 2014). Further evidence in support of the above can be found in the book titled “The Northern Counter-coup of 1966” by Siollun, (2010) and ‘Operation Aure: The Northern Military Counter-Rebellion of July 1966’ (By Omoigui, 2000)

2.3 The Life History of Late Brigadier-General Benjamin Adekunle

Figure 1: Late Brigadier-General Benjamin Adekunle



2.3.1 His Early Life

Late Benjamin AdesanyaMajaAdekunle was born in June 26 1936, in Kaduna. His father was a native of Ogbomosho in Oyo State of Nigeria, while his mother was a member of the Bachama tribe, Adamawa State. He attended Government College, Okene, Kogi State, where he obtained his School Certificate.

2.3.2 His Military Career

He enlisted in the Nigerian Army in 1958 shortly after completing his School Certificate Examinations. He passed the army selection examinations and therefore was dispatched to the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst in the United Kingdom, which served as the British Army's initial officer entry academy (Famoriyo, 2014).

Benjamin Adekunle was commissioned 2nd Lieutenant on December 15, 1960. As a platoon commander, he served in Kasai Province of Congo with the 1st Battalion in the UN Peace Keeping Agenda. In 1962, Lt. Adekunle became Aide-de-Camp to the governor of the then Eastern Region-Sir Akanu Ibiam. A year later, as a Captain, he was posted back to Congo as a Staff Captain (A) to the Nigerian Brigade Headquarters at Luluabourg-under Brigadier B. Ogundipe (Famoriyo, 2014). In 1964, Major Adekunle attended the Defence Services Staff College at Wellington, in India.

Upon his return to Nigeria, he was briefly appointed Adjutant General at the Army Headquarters in May 1965 and thereby replaced Lt. Col. Yakubu Gowon, who was on a course outside the country. However, he later handed over the position to Lt. Col. James Pam and was posted back to his old Battalion (1st Battalion) in Enugu as a Company Commander.

2.3.3 His Roles During the Nigerian Civil War

Adekunle later assumed command of the Lagos Garrison as a substantive Lt. Colonel. When the Nigerian Civil War erupted in July 1967, Adekunle was tasked to lead elements which included two new battalions (7th and 8th) - to conduct the historic sea borne assault on Bonny in the Bight of Benin on July 26, 1968. This happened after the federal government gained confidence of most South-Western ethnic groups as a direct result of Biafran push to Mid-west State and probe into Western region. Adekunle was promoted to Colonel after the Bonny landing (Famoriyo, 2014).

The 6th Battalion under Major Jalo and 8th battalion under Major Ochefu of the Lagos Garrison subsequently took part in operations to liberate the Midwest following the Biafran invasion of August 1967. The 7th Battalions under Major Abubakar, stayed behind to hold Bonny. Because Major Jalo's Unit was seconded to Lt. Col. Murtala Mohammed's 2nd Division, General Adekunle was left with only the 8th Battalion at Escravos. He, therefore, protested to Army HQ and got the Lagos garrison upgraded to Brigade status through the creation of the 31 and 32 Battalions, under Majors Aliyu and Hamman, respectively. This formation, combined with elements of the Lagos garrison along the eastern seaboard, was officially designated the 3 Infantry Division (Adekunle, 2004).

However, Colonel Adekunle did not think the name "3 Infantry Division" was sensational enough nor did it project the nature of the unique terrain in which his men had to fight. Therefore, without formal approval from Army Headquarters, he renamed it the "3 Marine Commando (3MCDO)."

Benjamin Adekunle's brave soldiers presented in **figure 2** below (from left, Lt.-Col. Godwin Alabi-Isama, Lt.-Col. Alani Akinrinade, Major Yemi Alabi, and Major Alimi Ogunkanmi) and others such as E. A. Etuk, Pius Eromobor, Ted Hamman et al. in the Midwest fought gallantly and seized Escravos, Burutu, Urhonigbe, Owa and Aladima. They also captured Bomadi and Patani, Youngtown, Koko, Sapele, Ajagbodudu, Warri, Ughelli, Orerokpe, Umutu and Itagba" (Akintude et al., 2014)

Figure 2: Benjamin Adekunle in the Middle of His Top Military Officers

Adapted from Famoriyo (2014).

By the deft General Adekunle succeeded in blockading Bonny Town, the entrance to Port Harcourt from the Atlantic Ocean through the Gulf of Guinea and the Bight of Benin. **The Black Scorpion** intrepidly led his military personnel through the Bonny Bar to Abonema and Port Harcourt, thereby cutting off any external approach to Biafra. By this action, the ability of Biafra to obtain any sea-borne assistance was completely paralysed and that brought an end to the Nigerian civil war (Famoriyo, 2014).

2.3.4 His Activities after Civil War

After the Civil War, Benjamin Adekunle was promoted to Brigadier in 1972 and put in charge of decongesting the Lagos port that was having the chronic problem of clearing imported goods. He held this position until being compulsorily retired on August 20, 1974.

When he was in charge of decongesting Lagos Port, **The Black Scorpion** employed his patriotic motive and the spirit of nation-building to sanitize the Port Authority, not minding whose horse was gored. Hence, *he was said to have stepped on the toes of some of those who claimed to be the "owners of Nigeria" who also had unfettered access to Dodan Barracks* (Chima, 2014:1). Thus, the then Head of State, Yakubu Gowon, being *a stooge of the northern oligarchy*, yielded to the instruction of his godfathers from the north and retired **The Black Scorpion** forcefully. The fear of Gowon that Benjamin Adekunle might topple his regime finally sealed the conspiracy against the war legend (Chima, 2014).

After his retirement, however, he refused to be involved in dirty politics and shady contract business so rampant in present-day Nigeria and which had produced multi-millionaires out of the military and political class (George et al., 2012). Unlike the late General Odumegwu Ojukwu, Olusegun Obasanjo, Olabode George, Olagunsoye Oyinlola, David Mark and other ex-military personnel who ventured into politics and compounded the contemporary political problems in Nigeria, **The Black Scorpion** *maintained a dignified silence ever since, and vehemently refused to be dragged into the murky waters of Nigeria's high-wire politics and economic rat race*, which is very rare among the elites in the continent of Africa. Hence, *only a man of monumental dignity would suffer in golden silence the way Adekunle did, more so that the united Nigeria he so much believed in and strenuously fought for prospered greatly thereafter, thus enabling upcoming generations of the military brass, such as Ibrahim Babangida, Sani Abacha, and their civilian lackey to develop pot bellies through mindboggling treasury looting* (Owolabi, 2014)

2.3.4 His Sickness and Death

The Black Scorpion became ill in 2009. At that crucial time, the Nigerian government whom he gave his very best abandoned him, bringing to the fore the view of Omonijo and Fadugba, (2011) on Nigeria

being a country where the good is being rubbished and brilliance is being scorned; a place where liars, thieves and murderers are being applauded and rewarded (Ukuekue, 1999). Eventually, he died on September 14, 2014. The death of **The Black Scorpion** was touching, but the late military officer spent his last days relaxed and joking with his family. He died quietly in his bedroom (Kanu et al., 2014).

Remarkably and quite uncommon among elites, both military and civilian, in sub-Saharan Africa, **The Black Scorpion**, being a man of valour, died nobly, without having to cry out at the tail end of his life over his weak finances and failing health; never asking to be flown abroad at government expense. He stoically refused to blow off the roof (Owolabi, 2014:1)

Figure 3: The casket of the Black Scorpion adorned with military paraphernalia



Adapted from Joseph (2014).

Figure 4: The casket of Late Black Scorpion during the lying in state



Adapted from Joseph, (2014).

2.4 His Unbeatable War Strategies Responsible for the Victory of Nigeria over Biafra

History, according to Onabule, (2014) is replete with war heroes such as the German Chancellor- Otto Von Bismark, America's President-Dwight Eisenhower, France's General Charles De Gaulle, Italy's

Garibaldi (and the thousand), Britain's Lord Montgomery as well as non-combatant Winston Churchill, Israel's Moshe Dayan and Ariel Sharon and Spain's General Franco.

History seems to have placed Benjamin Adekunle in the rank of the above powerful personalities. His name will continue to resonate as a great son of Africa forever for the role he played in the contemporary history of Nigeria, feats that are lacking in the Nigerian Army today, a rare gem that is sorely needed (Onabule, 2014) to confront the menace of Boko Haram in the North-East, the kidnapping saga in the South-East and the Niger-Delta crisis, but he is no longer available.

Success in the warfront largely depends on wisdom that results in devised strategies to outwit the opposition for total victory. Thus, the late Brigadier-General Benjamin Adekunle's first strategy to rescue Nigeria from disintegration manifested at the peak of the war, when he became the unrepentant key champion of the food blockade to Biafra. According to the New York Times, (1968), **The Black Scorpion** with his spirit of patriotism said *In the section of the front that I rule—and that is the whole south front from Lagos to the border of Kamerun—I do not want to see the Red Cross, Caritas Aid, World Church delegation, Pope, Missionary, or UN delegation.* Given this, Adekunle's 3rd Marine Commando, more than any other command, spearheaded the end of the three-year civil war as it oversaw the blocking of Biafra's access to the sea, making it impossible for imported weapons, ammunition, food and other supplies to get into Biafra, and this led to the capitulation of Biafra (Chima, 2014) and the return of peace to Nigeria.

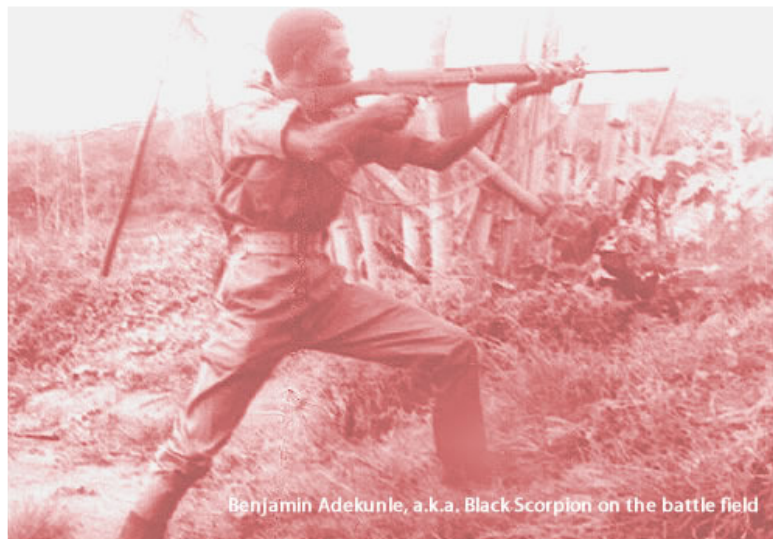
Food and weapons of war are very essential at the battle front, without them victory is not in view. On this issue of food, Marxists assert:

“the economic structure of society is the real foundation, which raises a legal and political structure that corresponds with definite forms of social consciousness..” Marx and Engels, (1969:69)

This gives credence to Benjamin Adekunle's strategy of food blockage. In agreement with scholars of Marxist extraction, economic priority served as a strong factor in determining the social life reality of an end to the 30 months civil war. The war would have lasted longer if the warring Biafrans were able to access food, arms and ammunition and the effects would have been more costly for the nation.

Shooting without missing targets, which the Yorubas, in the South-West geo-political zone of Nigeria called *“atamatase”* is another strategy devised through his bravery to win the civil war. He exploited his military expertise in shooting down his opponents in battle with accuracy. Quoted by the New York Times, (1968), **The Black Scorpion** said *“We shoot at everything, even things that don't move.”* Failure to shoot at things that move could spell doom for soldiers in battle. What they failed to shoot down might eventually capture them and destroy them.

Figure 5: The Black Scorpion on the Battle Field Displaying His Bravery for Shooting



Adapted from Awolaja (2014)

This strategy made him a dreaded warrior that earned him the nickname “*The Black Scorpion*”

Figure 6: Black Scorpion: A name ascribed to Late General Benjamin Adekunle



Adapted from Igbinijesu, (2014)

Literally, the scorpion is a poisonous insect that kills. If a single bite from the insect is not properly treated or managed in time, it may result in the death of the affected person. Most of the strategies that Brigadier-General Benjamin Adekunle employed to win the Nigerian civil war could be considered as scorpion bites, which must have been responsible for him being regarded as the *most controversial, celebrated and mythologized figure in the war of attrition that laid the foundations for Nigeria's contemporary crisis; and threw a wedge into the national fabric* (Premium Times, 2014:1)

The late Brigadier-General Benjamin Adekunle's power of will (strong determination) is another remarkable strategy responsible for the victory over the Biafra. According to the New York Times (1968), the veteran warrior said patriotically: “*I did not want this war but I want to win this war*”. Famoriyo, (2014:1) considers this determination as Adekunle's heroism which could be summed up by the saying: *where there is a will, there will be a way*. Success in life, more often than not, has been largely associated with strong determination and it must have been responsible for his ability to *takeover an army command largely made up of volunteers who had no prior military training and turned them, within months, into brave soldiers with the most humane records*. It is on this basis that Famoriyo (2014:2) describes **The Black Scorpion** as a good manager of men and resources. This could be regarded as another wonderful strategy which seems to have prompted his commitment to the prosecution of the Nigerian civil war. It further manifests in his leading the 3rd Marine Commando through the sea to rapidly capture the city of Port-Harcourt and the total liberation of the parts of eastern Nigeria that are now known as River, Cross Rivers and Akwa-Ibom States (Famoriyo, 2014).

2.5 Critique

Dwelling on Akinyosoye (2014), war is a bloody business and it is uncommon to link great warriors with great acts of human kindness. This author supports his view with the activities of great warriors in the history of humanity, which include: Attila the Hun, one of the most feared enemies of the Western and Eastern Roman Empires (Peterson, 1907); Hannibal Bacar (247-182 BCE), the man who for fifteen years could hold his ground in a hostile country against several powerful armies. He is generally regarded as one of the greatest military strategists in history (Theodore, 1995); Napoleon Bonaparte (15 August 1769 –

5 May 1821), who was regarded by the influential military theorist Carl von Clausewitz as a genius in the operational art of war, and also ranked as a great military commander and greatest general "In this age, in past ages, in any age" Shy, (1986); Montgomery, a veteran 1st World War hero, who also fought during the Irish Civil War. Montgomery wrote to Colonel Arthur Percival of the Essex Regiment:

Personally, my whole attention was given to defeating the rebels but it never bothered me a bit how many houses were burnt. I think I regarded all civilians as 'Shinners' and I never had any dealings with any of them. My own view is that to win a war of this sort, you must be ruthless (Sheehan, 2005:2).

The Black Scorpion is categorized along with the above great warriors by his critics on the ground of lack of human feeling. As nobody is free from error, this paper does not consider the late Brigadier-General Benjamin Adekunle as a man of no flaws. It was obvious that many officers 'had unpleasant memories of the brave but brash Adekunle who openly flouted orders, resorted to unorthodox measures and challenged superiors just to get the best for his men in the field and achieve his goals' (Onyeama, 2014:1), but his motive was not self-centered. It was for his men and to get a good result for the nation. Other criticisms levied against him seem to have been borne out of sentiments, grudges and bitterness. They are largely rooted in conspiracy for designing strategies that led to the failure of Biafra during the war. In this section, this study examines some of these criticisms, using the existing literature on patriotism and nation building.

Dwelling on (Amadi, 2007; Ejiogu, 2011; Chima, 2014; Ejinkeonye, 2014; Okeke, 2014; John, 2014) **The Black Scorpion** is found wanting for being a ruthless officer, an enemy of most Igbos and a war criminal (Ade-Adeleye, 2014). Most of his critics hail from the South-East Geo-political Zone of Nigeria, which belongs to the secessionists that he confronted during the war. Therefore, their criticism is expected. It is generally believed that **The Black Scorpion** was the reason why the secessionists lost the war. According to Bioreports, (2014), Adekunle was instrumental to the defeat of the breakaway Republic of Biafra and its subsequent return to Nigeria.

Patriotism implies individuals placing the interests of the nation above their personal and group interests (Adejumo, 2014). **The Black Scorpion** acted in line with this view during the war when he *avoided feeding a single Ibo before their capitulation* (New York Times, 1968). In the interest of one Nigeria, Biafran army must surrender. To enforce that, it was very germane to block food and ammunitions from flowing to the East. **The Black Scorpion** ensured this without any compromise. Although children and women were negatively affected but the interest of the nation must supersede. That is not wickedness but patriotism. The leader of Biafra should have considered the plight of children and women before declaring secession or he should have surrendered when **The Black Scorpion** began to enforce food blockage strategy (New York Times, 1968)

3. Summary/Conclusion

This article concludes that the late Brigadier-General Benjamin Adekunle was not a wicked personality or an enemy of Igbos, but a patriot par excellence and unrepentant strategist who confronted the disintegration of Nigeria with the spirit of undiluted patriotism. The fact that his military strategies during the war did not favour children and women should not be a yardstick to condemn him and justify his neglect by the sycophants in power, who are reaping from his labour. The fact remains that dishonouring heroes and the inability to retain and replicate patriots has been a menace in Nigeria since independence (Adegboyega, 2014; Ogwuonu, 2014). Hence, critics and mockers of **The Black Scorpion** should realise that this is a general problem in Nigeria that should be addressed once and for all, if the country is going to develop. According to Onyeama, (2014:1),

indeed, there are many like him, on both the Nigerian and Biafran sides, whose sacrifices mean nothing to those who are reaping from their labour. This scholar proceeds that if Nigeria fails to give these veterans their rewards Nigeria's woes will only escalate because blood is powerful.

In confirmation of the above perspective, Nigeria's woes are escalating Odeh and Umoh, (2015) due to her inability to replicate the likes of the late Brigadier-General Benjamin Adekunle to confront many problems challenging her corporate existence, such as the Boko Haram Insurgency. Regrettably, the Nigerian army that produced the likes of **The Black Scorpion** in 1960s, but has failed to produce another, with a strong spirit of patriotism, in recent times, to confront Abubakar Shekau and send his terrorist set and Islamic jihadists into extinction, and rescue Nigeria from imminent calamity. Probably because the sycophants in power have destroyed the spirit of patriotism and paved the way for people like Shekau to thrive, giving way to the escalation of contemporary Nigeria's crises.

Whether the critics like it or not, Awolaja, (2014:2) remarked: "*the name of Benjamin Adekunle will continue to resonate as a great son of Africa forever for the role he played in the contemporary history of Nigeria, feats that are lacking in the Nigerian Army today, a rare willpower that is sorely needed*" to address insecurity problem in the present day Nigeria, but with no replacement in view. Hence, Benjamin Adekunle remains *one of the rarest soldiers ever produced in the continent of Africa. "In character, thoughts and visions he stood like a colossus. A Napoleon who did more than Napoleon"* (Olagunju, 2014:2)

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