Nigeria and World War II: Colonialism, Empire, and Global Conflict, by Chima J. Korieh. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020. 298 pp. £29.99 (hardback). ISBN 9781108425803.

World War II has long been seen as a great turning point in Nigerian – and African – history. Back in 1973, G.O. Olusanya argued that the war years in Nigeria saw a 'great political awakening'.[1] Chima J. Korieh's new book endorses and extends this argument. Korieh offers an unprecedentedly broad vision of Nigerians' involvement in the war, that ranges from a Calabar baby show that raised money for the Nigerian War Relief Fund, to the notorious Jos tin mines, and the rainforests of Burma, where many Nigerian soldiers fought. Korieh's book indisputably demonstrates that the war played an important part in Nigerian history, but also that Nigeria played an important part in the history of the war.

The particular strength of Korieh's book is its focus on under-explored aspects of Nigeria's wartime experience. This is possible thanks to Korieh's use as source material of Nigerians' petitions to colonial authorities, an approach that will be familiar to readers of his pioneering earlier work. Korieh aptly describes these petitions as 'an ideal vehicle for channeling the counterhegemonic discourse of colonial subjects' (p. 177). His sustained use of petitions as evidence allows the book to explore in new ways how Nigerians framed their place in the global conflict, and how it affected their everyday lives.

The book persuasively argues that Nigerians redefined their relationships with the British empire during the war years. Many Nigerians supported the war against Nazism, but also creatively appropriated concepts like liberty from British wartime propaganda to articulate a new status, as citizens with rights. As Korieh notes, these arguments left the British government 'in a very awkward position: how could it explain racial discrimination against its colonial subjects of color that flew in the face of its fight against Nazism?' (p. 121) Nigerians' intellectual work in highlighting these contradictions helped to forge the post-war world.

Korieh's use of petitions offers new insights into the Nigerian 'home front'. He shows how British colonial authorities adopted an increasingly statist approach to governing Nigeria during the war. The colonial state sought to mobilise labour and regulate the economy through proliferating institutions and regulations. Korieh explores these measures with a sharp eye for their gendered impact, and for the gendered strategies Nigerians used to narrate their situations to colonial officials.

In places, the book's argument seemed to me a little ambiguous. For example, how 'negotiated' was colonial power during the war? The book argues that studying petitions suggests 'a surprisingly flexible power dynamic within colonial societies' (p. 26), allowing a focus on African perspectives 'to transcend the myth of colonial hegemony' (p. 28). Later, though, we learn that during the war 'imperial control became more hegemonic' (p. 173). These statements are not necessarily contradictory, but it would have been useful to hear more about Korieh's conceptualisation of Nigerians' changing relationship with colonial power during the war. The book could also have done more to explore the broader imperial contexts that affected Nigeria. How did Nigerians' experience of the war compare with

[1] G.O. Olusanya, *The Second World War and Politics in Nigeria 1939-1953* (Evans Brothers, London, 1973), p. 159.

colonised people elsewhere in the British empire, for example? Or with people in Britain itself?

Few would disagree with Korieh's assessment of the war's significance. His book raises questions, though, about whether the historiographical focus on the war has overshadowed the global Depression's significance in Nigerian history. Moses E. Ochonu has argued that Depression-era retrenchment curtailed the reach of the colonial state in northern Nigeria and germinated anti-colonial thinking that only fully blossomed after the war. Much of the most perspicacious work on British colonial development policy, by scholars including Frederick Cooper and Joseph M. Hodge, has stressed that larger, more intrusive colonial states started to emerge in response to the Depression, and before the outbreak of war. Planning for British colonial development schemes, and an influx of British colonial officials to Nigeria, were underway before 1939.

It would have been useful to hear more from Korieh about how the war years relate to the Depression decade. Given the significance of the Depression in Nigerian history, do we need to see the war as half of a *binary* turning point? While the war unleashed important new dynamics, it also intensified and entrenched historical forces unleashed by the Depression. Like a binary star in astrophysics, two stars that orbit around a shared central point, the Depression and the war perhaps need to be seen as distinct, but also as closely related in their impact on Nigerian and African history.

It is a testament to the success of Korieh's book that it tells us so much that is new about Nigeria's experience of World War II, while also stimulating further questions. The book makes very significant contributions to the historiographies of Nigeria, Africa, and the global history of World War II.

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