

## Nigeria and World War II

Britain's declaration of war on Germany on September 3, 1939, made Nigeria, like many other African societies, an active participant in the war against the Axis Powers. Leading to large-scale mobilization of human and material resources, it transformed lives and societies in irrevocable ways. Of the 90,000 West African soldiers deployed to Southeast Asia after 1943, more than half came from Nigeria.

In this important, revisionist history, Chima J. Korieh examines how the lives of Nigerian producers, workers, merchants, men, women, and children from across society were affected. Korieh recounts the extraordinary and often neglected story of the Nigerian people who were drawn into a global war, the enormous demands it made on their resources, and the way it would change both their lives and the societies in which they lived. By placing the role that African societies played in the war within the contextual and theoretical frameworks of colonialism, race, gender, identity, labor, intellectual, and social history, Korieh challenges the dominant perception that World War II was primarily a European conflict and reveals the global impact of ordinary Nigerians on the war effort.

Chima J. Korieh is a professor of history and the director of Africana Studies at Marquette University, Milwaukee, where his research focuses on West African economic and social history in the colonial period. He is the author of *“Life Not Worth Living”: Nigerian Petitions Reflecting an African Society’s Experiences during World War II* (2014). He was formerly a British Academy Fellow at the University of Oxford.

# Nigeria and World War II

## *Colonialism, Empire, and Global Conflict*

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Chima J. Korieh

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CAMBRIDGE  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press & Assessment  
978-1-108-44427-9 — Nigeria and World War II: Colonialism, Empire, and Global Conflict  
Chima J. Korieh  
Frontmatter  
[More Information](#)



Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge CB2 8EA, United Kingdom  
One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA  
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia  
314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre, New Delhi – 110025, India  
103 Penang Road, #05–06/07, Visioncrest Commercial, Singapore 238467

Cambridge University Press is part of Cambridge University Press & Assessment, a department of the University of Cambridge.

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Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9781108444279](http://www.cambridge.org/9781108444279)

DOI: 10.1017/9781108579650

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First published 2020

First paperback edition 2024

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library*

*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication data*

Names: Korieh, Chima J. (Chima Jacob), 1962– author.

Title: Nigeria and World War II : colonialism, empire, and global conflict / Chima J. Korieh, Marquette University, Wisconsin.

Description: Cambridge, United Kingdom ; New York : Cambridge University Press, 2020. | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2019037672 (print) | LCCN 2019037673 (ebook) | ISBN 9781108425803 (hardback) | ISBN 9781108579650 (epub)

Subjects: LCSH: World War, 1939–1945 – Nigeria. | World War, 1939–1945 – Participation, Nigerian. | World War, 1939–1945 – Economic aspects – Nigeria.

| Nigeria – Colonial influence. | Nigeria – Politics and government – To 1960.

Classification: LCC D766.99.N6 K67 2020 (print) | LCC D766.99.N6 (ebook) | DDC 940.53/669–dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2019037672>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2019037673>

ISBN 978-1-108-42580-3 Hardback

ISBN 978-1-108-44427-9 Paperback

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## Acknowledgments

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The idea for writing this book emerged after I had published a collection of petitions written by Nigerians during the Second World War. The letters were a reaction to several regulations and measures implemented by the British colonial authorities during World War II to channel colonial resources toward the war effort. The role that African soldiers played has become emblematic of colonial contributions to the war effort. However, these petitions and supplications were unprecedented in placing the civilian population in Nigeria at the intersection of colonial overrule, wartime economics, and management of wartime crisis. This book attempts to tell these other stories: of farmers, who produced the goods that supported the war; of market men and women, whose activities and roles were of no lesser value; and of many others, who labored at home and in the mines in the name of the empire. The stories of the rising cost of living that became more pronounced as the war raged on, labor shortages, the policies implemented to ameliorate these conditions, and their impact on those who experienced these conditions as colonial subjects helps to capture the complex histories of the era. Thus, if World War II is to be understood in its global context, it is important to understand different historical actors, regional experiences, and the concomitant effect of the global capitalist system on African colonial societies and economies. For the African men and women who participated in this global conflict as soldiers and those who engaged in a different array of work at home, their stories of heroism, suffering, stress, and growing dissatisfaction with the colonial order redefined imperial relations.

I have incurred debts from so many individuals and institutions in the process of writing this book. I am grateful to a number of institutions that provided me the logistical and financial support for this project. Marquette University provided me a number of funds that supported my fieldwork and writing. I am particularly grateful to Marquette University's Department of History, Office of Research and Sponsored Projects, Klingler College of Arts and Sciences, and the Office of the Provost for these crucial supports. Jim Marten, the chair and head of the



## x Acknowledgments

Department of History at Marquette, has been an exceptional colleague and a fine administrator. His support has been most generous. My colleagues at the Department of History, Marquette University, provide the kind of collegiality that is rare. I thank them for their friendship. I thank the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, for providing me the time and space to work on this project. I thank the staff of the National Archive in Enugu, Calabar, Kaduna, and Ibadan for their help. The same goes for the Rhodes Library at the University of Oxford, where I had collected materials that proved very useful in this project.

I am indebted to my Nigerian colleagues, Reginald Okeke and Cajetan Nnaocha, for offering me research assistance at the National Archive, Ibadan, and the National Archive, Kaduna. My friends, Raph Njoku, Saheed Adeirnto, Cajetan Iheka, Elizabeth Onogwu, Oliver Coates, and Okwuchi Nwauwa, I remain grateful for your friendship and stimulating intellectual discussions as we try to address old and new challenges in presenting African voices in the historiography of African colonial experience. Elizabeth Dillenburg, Cory Haala, Jeremy Alt, and Kelly Smale, you deserve special thanks for your generosity and for comments on early drafts. I am grateful to Sylvester Ogbechie for permission to reproduce the photograph of his family member who served in the Second World War.

Ijeoma Nwajiaku opened her home to me whenever I was in Enugu. I am very grateful for the hospitality she and her family graciously offered me. I am grateful to Uncle Toba and his wife, Kate, and to Chris and his wife, Ada, for being a pillar of support during my many research trips to Nigeria. I salute Isac Iwuh, my homeboy, who shared the stories of his father, an ex-soldier of World War II, with me. Our discussion provided me information one could not find in the archives; for that I remain grateful. Many thanks to my mentor, Matty Klein, who continues to be a pillar of support more than a decade after he shepherded me through the doctoral program at the University of Toronto. He bid me farewell with the expectation that I was to be “a fine historian.” Thank you for all you did for me and other African students at the University of Toronto.

Cambridge University Press gave me the opportunity to bring to life the hidden voices of Nigerians who labored in the name of the empire. Maria Marsh, my commissioning editor; Dan Brown, my editor; Stephanie Taylor, Atifa Jiwa, Sunantha Ramamoorthy, Ami Naramor, and other members of the editorial and production team are the best in what they do. Their professionalism is unmatched. It has been a privilege working with you all on this project.

## Acknowledgments

xi

I cannot thank my family enough for what they have endured and contributed to the success of this project. Akunna (*Nnem*), you have taught me to look forward. I have learned so much from you and I cherish your unconditional love and generosity of heart. Ezenwa, I remain eternally indebted to you for all the time, holidays, and celebrations I have missed as a result of separation. You epitomize resilience. Mom (*Amara-ahia-ugwu*) and the rest of the Onyegbule Osueke Korieh clan have been a pillar of support. I can't trade you for anything. Dad, this is another one in your memory.

## Abbreviations

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CO	Colonial Office
IWM	Imperial War Museum, London
NA	National Archives, London
NAC	National Archives of Nigeria, Calabar
NAE	National Archives of Nigeria, Enugu
NAI	National Archives of Nigeria, Ibadan
NAK	National Archives of Nigeria, Kaduna
RH	Rhodes House