

BOOK REVIEW

Alfred Tembo. *War and Society in Colonial Zambia, 1939–1953*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2021. xvi + 247 pp. Map. Bibliography. Index. \$34.95. Paper. ISBN: 978-0821425107.

The Arakan Barracks, located opposite State House in Lusaka, is not named after any location or person in Zambia, nor is it named for anything associated with the former colonial power Britain. Arakan is a region in Myanmar and, as Alfred Tembo notes in *War and Society in Colonial Zambia, 1939–1953*, the country's nine barracks are still named after Second World War battles and campaigns in Southeast Asia and the Horn of Africa.

The stamp of the Second World War on Zambia's military is thus obvious. While there was no fighting that took place within Zambia, fifteen thousand African men, along with around eight hundred whites, fought with the Northern Rhodesia Regiment in various parts of the world. This book is mostly not about the fighting, however. Tembo adopts a wider "war and society" perspective, considering the social, economic, and political ramifications of the conflict and a wider chronology, ending his analysis in 1953. Tembo emphasizes the importance of understanding the lived experience of Africans during the war, though to this he could have added the lived experience of Polish refugees, as the book contains an excellent chapter on the refugees who were hosted in Zambia.

The ways in which the war impacted Zambia have usually been studied separately, and one real strength of this book lies in bringing these factors together while at the same time adding new information. Topics covered in the text include army recruitment, forced labor, government propaganda, food shortages, resistance to wartime measures, refugees, copper production, and demobilization. The most obvious impact was economic, as is detailed in Chapters Two, Three, and Five. Copper from Zambia was critical for Britain's war effort, and the British state effectively took control of the colony's copper industry at the outbreak of the war. Tembo links this demand for copper with wider changes, particularly in agriculture, as demand for food from the enlarged mining workforce boosted agriculture and prompted the colonial state to re-introduce forced labor on settler

farms. His assessment of the copper companies is perhaps a little too positive. He claims the companies “devoted all their energies to satisfying Allied demand for copper” (118), but they also devoted much energy to complaining about wartime taxation.

Tembo is attentive to how different phases of the conflict shaped colonial Zambia. In Chapter Two, he connects the Allied defeat in Southeast Asia (with the consequent loss of sources of tin and rubber) with the intensified economic exploitation of Britain’s African colonies, the general outline of which is well known. Much less well known are the “ephemeral... somewhat romantic” (63) attempts to revive rural industries to produce a wide variety of commodities that were in short supply, including rubber, beeswax, and string, and the spread of artisanal iron mining. In this manner, Tembo not only brings new information to light but convincingly shows how many rural areas were drawn into the war economy.

The political consequences of the war are less obvious. Tembo argues that momentous socioeconomic changes during wartime set Zambia on the path to independence, but some of the evidence he presents arguably counters this claim. In Chapter Six, Tembo explains the puzzling lack of political action by returned servicemen. There were certainly grounds for action on their part, as well as anger. African servicemen, some of whom arrived back only in late 1946, were a low priority for demobilization, returning in some cases to only a few pounds of deferred pay and virtually no assistance in securing civilian employment. The contrast between this treatment and the vague promises of rewards after the war led to bitter disappointment. In many parts of the continent, these frustrations produced political action and have often been connected to the upsurge of anti-colonial nationalism. Yet, as Tembo explains, the servicemen who returned to Zambia played little role in the nascent nationalist movement. Most were preoccupied with their own survival in a rapidly changing colony.

The book ends in 1953, looking forward toward independence. There is here, I think, a missed opportunity for a kind of retrospective on how the conflict has been remembered as the number of people who directly experienced it steadily diminishes. Successive independent governments have not altered the central position of the cenotaph in the country’s capital, but my own impression is that observation of Remembrance Day is limited to the country’s diplomatic community and government officials. The great impact of the Second World War on Zambia is made clear in the book but, apart from this book, is it actually remembered?

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