



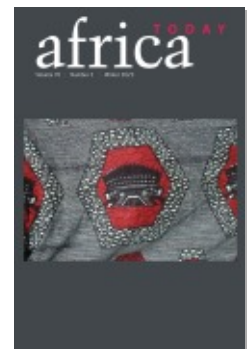
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The demand for food placed on the people of southwestern and eastern Nigeria during the war triggered food insecurity, exacerbated by the policies on food pricing. It is an example of the economic exploitation that characterized colonialism in Africa.

British Food (In)security Policies in Colonial Nigeria and Popular Reactions in the Southwestern and Southeastern Provinces, 1939–45¹

Abiodun S. Afolabi

The effects of the Second World War on food insecurity in Africa have gained scholarly attention over the past few years; however, there have been no comprehensive attempts to provide historical evidence and analyze the experience of food insecurity in the colonial territories that later transformed into Southern Nigeria. This article fills this gap in research and argues that the demands of the British colonial government for food supplies, along with other policies geared toward agricultural regulation such as the Pullen Scheme, led to such inflation of food prices in urban centers that rural producers could not meet the demand for foodstuffs. The resulting food shortage triggered reactions from indigenous peoples, particularly market women in the southern and eastern provinces of colonial Nigeria. The article supports its arguments using a combination of sources from the Nigerian National Archives, newspaper reports, and peer-reviewed journals.

Introduction

A condition of food insecurity is characterized by the inability to access adequate food for each person in a home or in a society, preventing those affected from leading an active, healthy life. Food security, its opposite, is having access to adequate food for a healthy, active life (Dessalegn 2023). It includes the certainty that appropriate foods may be obtained in socially acceptable ways (without resorting to coping mechanisms like scavenging, theft, or emergency food supplies), as well as the ready availability of foods that are safe, nutrient-adequate, and sufficient in quantity (Ayoola 2014, 63).

Different parts of Africa have experienced periods of food insecurity for various reasons over time. Before colonial rule, farmers produced a wide variety of regional food crops that allowed them to support their families, manage risks, and provide balanced diets. Any surplus would be invested in other necessities. Nigeria was not an exception. This changed during colonialism, when nations were induced to produce food for export, rather than for domestic use. During Nigeria's years under colonial rule, the socioeconomic and political history of the country was powerfully shaped. It was an era when human and material resources provided a medium through which interactions played out (Shanguyiha 2018, 43). The local human and material resources were the basis on which Nigeria's colonial economic history hinged. Colonies ultimately served as bases for economic enterprises: plantations, extractive-mining industries, cash-crop production, and dynamic peasant production (Helleiner 1966, 345–36). This characterizes the period from 1900 to 1945, during which colonial Nigeria was enmeshed in the two world wars and a period in between, when the global economic depression of 1929 had significant economic, social, and political implications for the colony (Ayoola 2014, 64).

Nigeria's role in the First and Second World Wars had important socioeconomic implications.² Many Nigerians, and Africans more generally, were mobilized in war efforts, and the economy of Nigeria was tied to the metropole as supplier of cash and food crops. Human and material resources from the colonies were mobilized for the success of the metropolitan countries. British West African colonies attained new strategic positions as suppliers of essential raw materials due to "Britain's loss of the Far Eastern colonies" (Crowder 1970, 495). Raw materials supplied by West African colonies to Britain included peanuts, palm oil, cocoa, rubber, and cotton, and tin, columbite, and other minerals (Clarke 1947, 19; Falola 2000; Killingray and Rathbone 1986, 50). Nigeria saw a considerable increase in the production of foodstuffs such as rice, potatoes, and butter, while the production of wheat was rapidly extended (NAI 1942b).

The British colonial administration made efforts to develop indigenous food production along Western lines. It established agricultural institutions across the country to help train agriculturalists in a bid to increase export and local food capacity. The Department of Agriculture, founded in 1910 in Southern Nigeria and in 1912 in Northern Nigeria, was instrumental in solving problems associated with export production. Research centers such as the one at Moore Plantation in Ibadan (1912–16)³ and a similar agricultural station in Samaru, near Zaria (1934) in Northern Nigeria, were established to identify problems of cash-crop production.

These institutions "promoted agricultural production, not only by conducting research and training agricultural officers, but also by introducing new crops and improving existing ones" (Onyekpe 1982, 17) and by disseminating new ideas and techniques through practical experimentation and demonstrations that were organized by official technical assistants. (NAI 1939, 1940a). Up to the eve of World War II, the Department of Agriculture concentrated on agricultural development programs for export

crops, especially cocoa, cotton, palm oil, and peanuts, rather than on the distribution of food crops for domestic consumption. It placed less emphasis on broadening subsistence agricultural initiatives that could have improved the availability of foodstuffs in local communities (NAI 1939, 1940a). These decisions ultimately led to food insecurity everywhere in the country.

Socioeconomic violence accompanied European colonialism of Africa, but the topic of food has rarely been considered as one of its aspects, even as the political, military, and economic changes imposed on colonized people have received great emphasis (Kobuthi 2020). Colonization has always depended heavily on food. In fact, it cannot be understood fully without considering food and eating. This has been recognized to some extent, yet the entire colonial period is usually treated monolithically as a time of widespread food challenges in Africa, and the period of the Second World War has received little scholarly attention (Owino 2018, 358).

The Impact of WWII on Food Insecurity in Nigeria: The Current Study in the Context of the Scholarly Literature

Literature on historical activities that took place during the Second World War has mainly focused on the recruitment of indigenous West African people, the activities of ex-servicemen, political developments, the decolonization process, and other topics (Korieh 2020a, 10). Although it broadens the discourse on the political economy of World War II as it affected Nigeria, as well as on its agriculture and commerce during the war years, an understanding of the effects of World War II on Nigerian agriculture and food security, as well as the dynamics of the relationship between the colonial power and the colonized people during this period, are necessary for a fuller understanding of the war as a multidimensional phenomenon and its implications for the economic prospects of the country.

Some scholars have narrated the wartime food crisis in colonial communities that later became part of the Nigerian state. However, there have been few analyses of the food insecurity that developed and how it was exacerbated by British policies during that era. Toyin Falola has provided an extensive analysis of developments in Nigerian agriculture and commerce during the Second World War, affirming that the war had far-reaching economic consequences (Falola 1989, 355–72). Although limited to the challenges related to the availability and accessibility of cassava starch, his research illustrates that the basic food needs of people were difficult to meet during the war. His study on salt scarcity corroborated the effects that wartime demands on food had on the availability of basic items, such as salt, which had reportedly been an abundant export item during the era of the trans-Saharan trade (Falola 1992, 412–36).

Ayo Olukaju's work on the import and export trade sector in colonial Nigeria during and after the war confirms the shift in production that led to the food crisis. He demonstrates the existence of a focus on the exportation of cocoa, groundnuts, and palm kernels, the sales of which were geared toward

expanding the colonial government's financial portfolio (2002, 363) and providing raw materials for the industrial production then taking place in many parts of Europe (2002, 366). He provides evidence that by focusing more on the exports of cash crops than on the improvement of local initiatives to diversify and expand local products, the British colonial administrators left a vacuum that led to food insecurity because more efforts were concentrated on producing and marketing cash crops for export, to the detriment of food crops for subsistence.

These studies provide valuable information on basic issues related to food insecurity in colonial Nigeria during the Second World War. This article seeks to fill gaps that have not been covered thus far. It critically examines Britain's World War II economic policies that led to food insecurity in colonial southwestern and southeastern Nigeria, their effects, and popular reactions to the crisis that developed. The primary data for the study consist of intelligence reports from the Nigerian National Archives in the Ibadan and Enugu zonal offices. It is complemented by newspaper reports and articles in peer-reviewed journals, consulted in the Kenneth Dike Library of the University of Ibadan, and in other libraries.⁴

The analysis is divided into three parts. The first part details the measures implemented in support of the war, the place of agriculture in the war effort, and the factors that brought about food scarcity. The second part elucidates the British colonial government's wartime policies to deal with the rising prices of foodstuffs in the face of food scarcity and the implementation of price controls on local and imported food stuffs and their ineffectiveness in dealing with rising prices. The third part discusses indigenous people's reactions to British policies, with a focus on the role played by women in challenging them.

This study draws on insights from James Scott (1985) and Steven Feierman (1990). Scott developed a connection between resistance and transcripts and established patterns of speaking and acting that are appropriate for specific actors in specific social contexts, whether dominant or oppressed. His perspective on petitions as a setting for conflict, self-expression, communication, negotiation, and contradiction is pertinent to an understanding of petitions as an expression of opposition to wartime price-control policies. Feierman analyzes the resistance and intellectual reactions to colonial authorities in expressing discontent with wartime suffering and hardship.

The analysis presented here shows that the demand for food placed on the people of southwestern and eastern Nigeria during the war triggered food insecurity, exacerbated by the policies on food pricing. It is an example of the economic exploitation that characterized colonialism in Africa. The argument here largely aligns with the position of authors who debunk the notion that World War II was primarily a European conflict, with no tangible contribution from Africans, and contend instead that ordinary citizens in Africa made contributions of global import to the war effort, as evidenced by the provision of human and material resources, including food exports (Korieh 2020b, 45).

War Mobilization: Policies, People, and Purses

Officially, the Second World War began on September 1, 1939, when Germany invaded Poland. The Allied powers declared war against Germany on September 3, 1939, after Germany refused to heed their ultimatum to withdraw from Poland (Owino 2018, 67). Since colonies were designed to serve the interests of the colonialists, the British government embarked on propaganda measures to secure the loyalty and commitment of its colonies. In Nigeria, the propaganda goals were designed to enlighten the populace about the consequences, real or imagined, of the enemy's victory (Njoku 1981, 11–27). This propaganda was welcomed by the Nigerian elite, who perceived it as a quest to preserve humanity from the forces of destruction.⁵

Colonial governments put measures in place to secure the financial support of the colonies. In Nigeria, as in other British West African colonies, there was the drive to generate money through the establishment of war funds, including the buying of Nigerian Savings Certificates in the Win-the-War Fund (Njoku 1981, 70). By September 1942, Nigerians had purchased certificates worth 289,539 pounds and 15 shillings; by October 1942, the Win-the-War Fund had risen to 296,000 pounds (Comet 1942a). The fund received major commitments from individuals and groups from within the country.⁶

Table 1. Win-the-War Fund Contributions. August 1940 (Mordi 2017; *Nigerian Daily Times* 1940a, 1940b, 1941).

Contributors	Amount Contributed		
	pounds	shillings	pence
Abeokuta Committee Win-the-War Fund (2nd Contribution)	1,021	3	4
Ilesha Native Authority and People (1st Contribution)	178	9	4
Benue Province: Europeans	63	19	6
Benin: European Club	50	19	6
Port-Harcourt Club: proceeds of Mrs. W. MacDonald's Nightly Raffle	36	4	0
Benue Province: Africans	25	7	0
African Staff: British West African	18	0	0
Timber Co. Ltd.			
Nigerian Union of Teachers	6	5	0
Royal Hotel Dances (4th Contribution)	8	0	0
Alhaji: Lagos	1	17	6
Sokoto Emirate	5,216	11	1
Gwandu Emirate	885	7	1
Yauri Emirate	40	0	0

(Continued)

Table 1: Continued

Illo District	33	8	1
Sokoto Province	9,610	3	7
Emir, Chiefs, and Peoples of Zaria Province	1,674	3	7
Chiefs and People of Bauchi Province (Further Contribution)	294	0	0
Buea, Proceeds of Dance at Residency	140	1	5
Benue Province, including £100 from Anonymous Benue No. 2.	125	0	0
The Hitler Club (1st installment)	100	0	0
Total Subscriptions to the Fund	19, 523	116	47

Similar measures were taken in agriculture since the colonial government desperately wanted to protect food security to feed the local population and the metropolis, and food was essential for the troops (Byfield 2007, 77–97). In the British West Africa colonies, a grow-more-food campaign was inaugurated by the government and implemented by the Department of Agriculture, placing greater emphasis on local production of foodstuffs (NAI 1942b). The war duties of the department were summarized as follows (Korieh 2020b, 163–205):

- a. To assist the imperial government through the production of such crops as may be required.
- b. To ensure that Nigeria was, as far as possible, self-supporting in foodstuffs, including those that were normally imported from elsewhere.
- c. To do all that was possible to make the entire West African colonies self-supporting.

In September 1939, a new agricultural policy of the department focused on local food production in addition to the export crops that would support the war effort (NAE 1940). The Nigeria General Defense Regulation of 1941 was promulgated to accommodate wartime developments. Section 140 of it empowered relevant and competent authorities, including the courts, to regulate available food (NAE 1941). The law empowered colonial authorities to regulate or prohibit the production, treatment, storage, movement, transportation, distribution, sale, purchase, and use or consumption of “articles of food in any description and, in particular, controlling prices at which such articles may be sold” (Emezue 1990, 22).

Despite the expansion in the Nigerian agricultural sector under colonial rule, the goal of self-sufficiency that the Department of Agriculture set out to ensure was not realized, and food in the colonies did not become more available. The focus was primarily on cash crops to meet the raw material requirements of the metropolitan centers and potential capital-accumulation capabilities.⁷ Between 1940 and 1944, Nigeria exported 102,379 tons of

cocoa, 9,913 tons of cotton, and 181,901 tons of groundnuts (Federal Republic of Nigeria 1946). The focus on exporting cash crops is responsible for the spate of food insecurity witnessed in wartime Nigeria—a problem that the colonialists had to grapple with. Food insecurity was harshly felt in colonial urban centers such as Ibadan, Lagos, Benin, Warri, Onitsha, Owerri, Kano, Kaduna, and Jos, because they were not food-producing centers. The agricultural policy in place did not take into consideration a balance between export of cash crops and the availability of food at home in the colonies.

Several factors affected the decline in food production that led to food insecurity. The colonial government's policies related to food production steered rural farmers toward cash-crop production, putting food production at risk. The decrease in the number of food producers and the high number of consumers resulted in the inflation of foodstuff prices as well as in scarcity (Oyemakinde 1973, 416). The increased earnings that farmers experienced as a result of their participation in cash-crop exportation entailed the utilization of many arable farmlands for cash-crop plantations. Consequently, there was a decline in the involvement of farmers in food production for domestic distribution. The colonialists promoted an agricultural policy that favored an increase in export quantities and values of cash crops, while the output in the food sector declined progressively (Korieh 2001, 117–23).

There was, indeed, the suspicion that food price control, by and large, reduced the volume of supplies by discouraging farmers from further production. Since export crops were in great demand because of their potential capital-accumulation capacity, it is possible that some farmers might have decided in frustration to place more emphasis on cultivation of cash crops while neglecting the cultivation of food crops. Commercial firms equally denied farmers the benefits of their labor (Onyekpe 2017, 109). Food insecurity did not manifest itself immediately in 1939. The Department of Agriculture and its regional Ministry of Supply and Licensed Firms upheld the production of foodstuffs up to 1942.

Another constraint in the development of agriculture and particularly food production was the colonial government's failure to assist local farmers with modern farming implements, as compared with farmers who contributed toward the export of cash crops. This constraint left the domestic food producers with "crude technology, limited land use knowledge[,] and [the] associated problem of drudgery" (Onyekpe 2017, 110). Rural–urban migration had major implications for food production, as it deprived the hinterland of the workforce necessary to meet the demand for foodstuffs. One manifestation of it was the mobility of labor from the rural–urban areas due to the search for greener pastures on the part of the active young population (Oyededeji 1972, chap. 2). This was especially evident as thousands of young men left the farms to join the army and become part of the anti-German propaganda media (Oyemakinde 1973, 416). Rural–urban migration affected the food security of the rural communities because it reduced the workforce available to produce an adequate amount of food for the population of local consumers, thus leading to a rise in the cost of foodstuffs.

Transportation was sometimes unreliable and often expensive. The controlled prices of certain commodities in the north and other provincial centers did not take into consideration expenses incurred for transport (NAI, n.d.c, 14). Railway service in Nigeria during this period was virtually collapsing from overexertion while the colony faced the crisis of infrastructural development to meet the demand of the time. Despite the role that Nigeria Railways played in support of British interests during the war, they were poorly maintained and ill-equipped.

Many incidents of railway engine failures occurred during the war—which increased the prewar average of each engine failing after traveling 24,000 miles to just 17,707 miles in wartime (Nigerian Government 1946). At the peak of the war, the situation worsened even further, as some locomotives had to be completely withdrawn from service so that major disasters such as derailments or accidents could be averted. By the end of the war, the percentage of locomotive engines awaiting repairs in the Nigeria Railway workshop was about 30 percent of its holding stock. Pyramids of groundnuts and loads of palm oil and cocoa piled up awaiting haulage to the coast by trains that did not, or could not, run. Food supplies to Lagos were in serious jeopardy. In the Western Province, towns like Oyo, Ilesha, and Ijebu also faced transportation challenges (*Daily Service* 1943).

The role of British firms during the war contributed to food insecurity as they established the West African Produce Control Board, which monopolized the purchase of all export crops from the British West African colonies. The board was established to eliminate competition among the firms and ensure a steady supply of raw materials to the British industries. It was charged with the responsibility of stabilizing prices for indigenous producers, which was the primary link between the producer and the metropolitan economy as it bought all the crops produced by the indigenous farmers and sold them to the Ministry of Food in Britain—an advantage that enabled the British to appropriate the farmers' surplus. For instance, the board paid Nigerian farmers sixteen pounds and fifteen shillings for a ton of palm oil in 1946 while the ministry sold the same measure for ninety-five pounds to the manufacturers at home (Rodney 1972, 185). Similarly, the board offered fifteen pounds per ton of groundnuts to the local producers and sold the same to the Ministry of Food for 110 pounds. The monopolization of agricultural produce by the board thus led to the plunder of the farmers' surplus. This situation equally affected food security because the disincentive to local farmers reduced their capacity to respond to the consumption needs of their communities.

Beyond the challenges identified, trade restrictions contributed to the general food insecurity—a situation that was later worsened by the British colonial government's attempt at food-price control. Indeed, the dwindling food supplies and the rising cost of living in the cities were not so much a crisis of production as a crisis of distribution (Korieh 2003, 127–52). Although the production and availability of food in Nigeria had gradually escalated starting in about 1939, government policies from 1941 to 1945 exacerbated the scarcity of even basic food items, disrupted the local distributive system,

and reduced the incomes of many local traders, artisans, and farmers when the market prices for food crops would have led to increased income for farmers and less reliance on income from cash crops. Wartime developments led to inflation and scarcity to the extent that market traders reacted by establishing black markets for foodstuffs by 1943. Farmers in Oyo Province, for instance, complained bitterly about trade restrictions. They experienced poor sales during the 1943 yam harvest since they were forbidden to export to places like Ibadan, Lagos, and other urban centers; however, the appointed agents were unable to purchase all the harvests, and farmers had a surplus that they could not dispose of legally in their holding (NAI 1940b).

Government Responses to the Wartime Food Crisis

The Nigeria General Defense Regulation of 1941 conferred on colonial departments the authority to deal with wartime developments such as crises in the colonies and the protection of British interests (NAI 1941). The colonial government responded to the food crisis by requisitioning supplies through the native authorities to meet the needs of the army and urban centers (NAI, n.d.a; Onyekpe 1982, 34–41). Curbing the rising cost of living, managing scarce resources, and facilitating the management of the wartime economy served British wartime interests and negatively affected the economic earnings of local farmers and traders. The government responded to the rising food insecurity by importing foodstuffs to ameliorate the scarcity issue and adopted the application of food-price regulations called the Price Control Scheme.

A general rise in the prices of commodities characterized the local economy. Inflation rose abnormally without any corresponding increase in wages or profit margins for colonial government workers, market traders, artisans, and farmers. The demand for local food and the low level of production created scarcity while the soaring prices of foodstuffs reflected severe inflation. The indigenous population was affected mostly by the rising cost of basic food items. In 1938, a bag of local rice from Abeokuta, which sold for forty-five shillings, had risen to fifty shillings by 1940, and it was selling for seventy shillings by 1944. Similarly, a bag of yam flour, which sold for twenty-five shillings in 1940, was selling for forty-five shillings in 1946 (NAI 1946, 88). In eastern Nigeria, the price of a ninety-pound bag of *garri* (farina) rose from four shillings at the beginning of July 1943 to seven shillings by the end of the month (NAE 1943).

Food prices increased in Ilorin Province as the war progressed, as shown by the prices of two staples recorded at Ilorin market: yam tubers increased from two pounds and ten shillings in January 1940 to five pounds and seven shillings in January 1941, and yam flour increased from two pounds and ten shillings to five pounds between January 1940 and January 1941. Increments occurred in the prices of threshed corn and *garri* in the same period (NAI, n.d.c, 43).

As a result of increasing commodity prices, immense difficulties and hardship were experienced by many, particularly low-income earners. For instance, the profit margin on a bag of local rice from Abeokuta, which was four shillings in 1935, had fallen by 1938 to two shillings, dropping further to a shilling in 1940. By 1944, the profit margin on a bag of local rice had dropped to six pence (NAI, n.d.c, 43).

The consequence of all this was that many traders were subjected to “unbearable economic hardship” as a result of the British colonial government’s “price control scheme and monopolization of trade by the authorized firms” (Ajayi 2014, 16–21). Most of the affected farmers and traders resorted to smuggling the restricted goods. By and large, the colonial government attempted to regulate inflation by setting the prices at which farm produce and other commodities were to be sold in the markets (2014, 15–25).

The Food Price Control Scheme began in 1941 under the direction of Captain A. P. Pullenm (NAI, n.d.c, 43). Regulating prices for foodstuff orders, the price-regulation scheme took effect on February 18, 1941, and directed smaller retail units to conform rigidly to the price limits per standard measure, called *Oloruka* by the market women and their customers (Public Notice 1941). A newspaper presented the reasons for the British colonial government’s introduction of the scheme thus:

We are pleased to note that the government has at last found it expedient to fix the prices of local food products in view of exorbitant prices which have obtained in the Lagos market. As no fixed price previously existed, the market women were, for most part, compelled to fix their retail prices in accordance with the demand of the producers or wholesalers. . . . We have for a considerable time been familiar with this food condition[,] but being aware of the many other war difficulties of Nigerian government, we refrained from adding to its many onerous burdens. (*Comet* 1941a)

The colonial government placed foodstuffs such as *garri*, yams, maize, salt, and cassava under the scheme. Similarly, only the government-licensed firms and indigenous contractors were to serve as middlemen, through which food and cash crops could be exported from producing centers by the recognized government agents. Special permits were issued by the district offices to recipients including the United Africa Company, military contractors, and agents of the Association of West African Merchants. Only European firms and a few local companies, such as Messrs. Odotola and Brothers, could purchase *garri* in Ijebu-Ode and transport it to Ibadan in 1940 (NAI 1940b). The application of food-price controls was in constant flux, as instabilities were often experienced in different provinces.⁸

Under the Lagos Price Control Scheme of 1941, peppers were regulated at forty-six shillings and eight pence per hundredweight wholesale

and fifty-three shillings and four pence retail, coarse-grade *garri* at three shillings and four pence, wholesale coarse-grade *garri* at three shillings and eight pence, retail fine-grade *garri* at three shillings and ten pence, wholesale fine-grade *garri* at four shillings and four pence, retail white beans from Northern Nigeria at eight shillings and nine pence, wholesale white beans from Northern Nigeria at ten shillings, retail local beans at seven shillings and six pence, and wholesale local beans at eight shillings and six pence retail. At Oloruka, commodity prices were regulated as follows: peppers at one shilling and three pence, coarse-grade *garri* at two shillings, fine grade *garri* at four pence, white beans from Northern Nigeria at seven pence, and local beans at six pence. Also at Ibadan, foodstuffs were regulated as follows: *egusi* (melon) when shelled at sixteen shillings per hundredweight wholesale, *egusi* when shelled at twenty shillings retail, local rice at two pence per pound weight retail, beef at six pence retail, mutton (back legs) at nine pence retail, mutton (other parts) at seven pence retail, pork (back legs) at ten pence retail, and pork (other parts) at eight pence retail (Public Notice 1941).

Apart from the above primary foods, other foodstuffs were brought under the price-control scheme, which, however, had little or no chance of success, since it tried to peg prices in Lagos without paying equal attention to what was prevalent in communities outside of Lagos, particularly in southwestern Nigeria. To this end, similar regulations were issued to arrest rising prices in other areas, including Ibadan and Abeokuta in January 1944 (Oyemakinde 1973, 418). In Ibadan, the controlled price for a bag of maize was six shillings and six pence while retail price was a penny per pound. The controlled price for a bag of beans was twenty-six shillings while the retail price was one penny and two farthings per pound. A bag of *garri* was ten shillings and eight pence, while the retail price was seven shillings, ten pence per pound. A tin of palm oil was seven shillings while the retail price was four pence and two farthings per pint bottle (NAI 1944, 140). In Jos Division, L. H. Goble, the food controller, fixed the price of potatoes, other than graded potatoes, at two pence and two farthings per pound, while the export of up to fifty-six pounds from Jos Division was free on rail, and the price of lots over fifty-six pounds was fixed at eleven shillings, eight pence. The same was applicable to price-control operations in Abeokuta, Ibadan, and Abakaliki in 1942 (NAI, n.d.c, 171). The financial implication of food retailing contributed to the food insecurity experienced during World War II and foodstuffs had to be imported, some of which became staples in the local diet.

During this period, imported foodstuffs were brought under the price-control mechanism. By May 2, 1941, vegetables, consumed mainly by Europeans resident in Lagos, came under the scheme. Price fixtures by regulation were not expected to remain static over seasons but were to be revised by Captain Pullen and his team of officials at intervals. To them, such a review was necessary, either for seasonal variations in food supply, or for reasons of irregularities in effective demand (NAI 1944, 191).

Popular Reactions to the Food Crisis and British Price Control Policy

Beginning on February 19, 1941, a program to manage food prices was put into place, and Captain Pullen was put in charge of it. As the first stage of the system, a control pricing list for well-known items was prepared and distributed to retailers, including market people. *Garri*, peppers, and beans were the first controlled foods; beef, pork, and *egusi* were added to the list shortly after. The price-control strategies instantly sparked resentment among the people of Lagos. The market women were fiercely opposed to it under the aegis of the Lagos Market Women's Association because they believed they were being priced out of a living. When efforts were made to impose the new prices in the marketplace, the so-called Pullen Scheme began to take effect. Anyone found selling above the control prices would be subject to arrest, a legal proceeding, and possibly jail. Several scapegoats were identified, and they were given harsh prison terms. According to the Lagos market women, the Pullen endeavor posed an existential threat to them and the foundation of Lagos market culture. Fish vendor Alimotu Pelewura, the Iyaloja ("Mother of the Market") and Captain Pullen soon got into a one-on-one battle of attrition. Pelewura once disrupted an Agege Town Council meeting with her supporters; they published a petition bearing thumbprints of 1,317 of their friends (Afolabi 2016, 102–18).

The populations of colonial Nigeria could not match the British colonial government in military strength and power, but there continued to be reactions to the price-control mechanisms through other means, which included protests, civil disobedience, and hoarding. Significantly, people's reactions to the crises surrounding food-control regulations were expressed in petitions that vehemently rejected some wartime procedures that negatively affected their social and economic livelihoods. Between 1941 and 1945, local reactions and criticism filled the pages of newspapers and became the subject of debate, with a series of reactions on the gross implications of the scheme.⁹ The Pullen Scheme was rejected by women and retail traders, who traditionally controlled the prices of foodstuffs and consequently felt no need to yield to alien impositions (Oyemakinde 1973, 423).

A significant development during the war was the proliferation of associations, particularly the Market Women's movement, which developed and fragmented into a formidable opposition campaign that opposed perceived or imagined colonial impositions (Ajayi 2014, 22). Before these developments, the activities of market associations were limited; however, the Pullen Scheme threatened traders' economic power and undermined the market women's economic position. This led to the formation of formidable trade and foodstuff associations, and these gathered momentum between 1939 and 1945 (Ajayi 2014, 23).

The British wartime innovations in fact threatened the economic stability of different communities throughout colonial Nigeria. In January 1941, a ton of maize was sold at Ilaro at one pound and sixteen shillings,

which was six pence per petrol ton of 32–34 pounds net. The people of Ilaro therefore protested the new price differential and were unwilling to sell at the Abeokuta prices because buyers from Lagos offered higher prices at the price fixed by the Lagos Assistant Food Controller (NAI, n.d.c, 29). Farmers in Abeokuta Province, particularly Ilaro, protested the Pullen Scheme. In a letter dated May 6, 1941, the Abeokuta Food Committee lamented the application of the Lagos Food Control Price to food-producing areas since Lagos could hardly be described as a food-producing area. In 1942, the maize sellers' association was established in Ibadan as a response to the control price (NAI 1946). In the Eastern Region, the Aba Community League, in Aba Township, forwarded petitions to J. V. Dewhurst, the District Officer, on the policy on *garri* control. Similarly, the Oyingbo Market Women in Lagos petitioned the colonial government on the cost of foodstuffs. The Market Women's Association, in a memorandum of May 21, 1942, addressed to the food controller, condemned price controls in Lagos and tagged them as a useless scheme, which should be scrapped (NAI 1942a; Oyemakinde 1973, 422). The Oyingbo and stall holders argued that seasonal variations in supplies determined price fluctuations and the price structure operating in Lagos reflected the cost at the producing areas, which government had not dared influence. They noted:

Since the prices have been fixed for some of the articles, they [market women and stall holders] find it difficult to sell at exact prices fixed by the government and that the underestimated articles[,] namely—*Garri*, Corn, Yam, Rice, Egusi, beans and oil[—]are goods which they humbly say could not be controlled[,] as there are no definite prices given in their cases because their prices may be higher or lower during the dry and rainy seasons. (NAI 1942a, 182–84)

Resistance was most profound in Lagos. Market women protested stridently, led by Pelewura (Johnson-Odim 2009, 51–59). She objected to the tariffs and price controls because she thought they would have a detrimental impact on women's capacity to support themselves. Led by her, the Lagos Market Women's Association petitioned the commissioner on November 24, 1943, on twenty-six points involving about 1,390 signatories, who signed on behalf of eight thousand market women. The women's agitations focused on the implication of price controls on their earnings since they were petty traders who had to eke out a living to augment the earnings of their men, who lacked employment (Afolabi 2016, 102–18). The government's attempt to impose taxes on them when they had to pay for their children's education and help their husbands and unemployed sons pay their taxes was ill timed (NAI, n.d.b). They put it succinctly:

We . . . Market Women humbly . . . beseech your Excellency not to approve the Pullen Scheme[,] which is about to deprive

us all of our hitherto exclusive trading rights[,] through which we earn our honest livelihood, support our families, educate our children[,] and pay our lawful township and water rates. (*West African Pilot* 1943)

Riots broke out in places like Ibibio Land, including Nto Edino, Ikot Abia, Odoro Ikot, and Mbuso (NAE 1943). In Ibadan, market traders refused to cooperate with the scheme, which they considered to be jeopardizing their economic interests. They petitioned Captain J. Wann, the district officer, thus:

The present controlled price for a bag of maize needs an amendment. We had gone to different towns and villages where bags of maize are brought to Ibadan. At Gbede, Ilorin Road, they sell one bag of maize for 17 shillings, [*sic*] the drivers are transporting a bag for 4 shillings to Ibadan, [*sic*] to reckon expenses of labourers with cost, the price of one bag of maize is equal to 22 shillings. The same thing obtained in Gambari, Iseyin Road[,] and Lanlate towns. We solicit on behalf of all other foodstuffs sellers in Ibadan to help us suggest and bring out any suitable controlled price for a bag of maize and other foodstuffs. (NAI 1944)

Apart from local reactions to the crises arising from the regulation of foodstuff prices, the price instability and ineffectiveness in using fixed prices to protect traders' profits without consideration for the addition of transportation and handling was a point of criticism. Controlled pricing of local and imported products had economic consequences for indigenous market-women traders and farmers alike: while it protected consumers' interests, it did not always safeguard the profits of traders who employed their capital and energy and were equally entitled to a livelihood (*Daily Service* 1945). This was why local market traders complained bitterly about changes in prices. In a newspaper report of 1942, bean traders in Lagos raised a petition:

At present, a bag of beans costs eight shillings in the North while the freight to Lagos is seven shillings and threepence and an empty bag costs from one shilling and threepence to one shilling and six pence. Let the controller add this to the handling and other charges and see how a bag could be sold profitably for anything less than a pound. (NAI, n.d.c, 123)

Similarly, the importation of *garri* from Aba, Eastern Region, to the North received criticism.¹⁰ In Aba, the price of *garri* per bag was six shillings in 1941. The freight from Aba to Kano was about seven shillings and sixpence per bag, while each empty bag was bought at one shilling and six pence; transportation costs to the railway station took another three pence, while handling charges, which may be placed at a minimum of one shilling to

the bag, were already in place by 1941. Now, the price at Kano was fixed at sixteen shillings—a situation that prevented sellers in the north from making a profit.

Despite the market traders' petitions and reactions to the price scheme, the colonial government pretended not to have heard them and ignored their pleas. Since they could not afford to sustain long-term losses, many of them began to take the law into their own hands—a situation that culminated in the emergence of black markets in the domestic economy. In a petition directed to the deputy food controller at Marina Lagos, dated December 30, 1941, Adio Olawale reported on the rise in the cost of potatoes: a 168-pound basket, which should have been selling at the controlled price of thirty-eight shillings and nine pence, was being sold for fifty shillings. Also, the Marine Department ship handler was supplying potatoes at four pence per pound instead of the controlled price of two pence and three farthings (NAI, n.d.c, 123).

Rural market traders were equally involved in black-market trading since they had no other means of protecting their interests and profits. Black markets emerged for assorted goods everywhere in the colony. The prices of foodstuffs were higher than the controlled prices—which showed that the price controls were ineffective and unhealthy for trade. For instance, a bag of yam flour was being sold in the black market for twenty-six shillings in 1944 while the controlled price was fifteen shillings; a bag of *garri* was selling for twenty shillings in the black market while the controlled price was ten shillings and eight pence; a bag of local beans was selling for thirty-five shillings while the controlled price was twenty-six shillings (NAI 1944, 191).

Black markets flourished because people ignored price controls and patronized illegal traders. As long as they had money to pay, they went to the traders to obtain foodstuffs where they were not subjected to waiting in long queues, as they had to do in the official market. The producers in the provinces hid much of their foodstuffs from government agents who offered lower than equilibrium prices, and they made secret sales to local merchants, who paid more. By selling quietly in the black market, many women evaded price-control wardens. Since the parties to secret deals stood to gain from it, no one reported the other, so that foodstuffs poured into the secret stores of women who operated the black market (Oyemakinde 1973, 423).

The colonial government insisted that violators of the price-control schemes be punished. The price inspector made several pronouncements against those who violated the price-control scheme (*Comet* 1941b). In 1942, one Abigail Idowu living at 13 Epe Street, Lagos, was charged with the offense of selling ten ounces of tomatoes for two pence and two farthings instead of the controlled price; the court ruled that she had to submit to a month of imprisonment or pay an indemnity of ten pounds. Another petty trader, Wulemotu Agbeke of 109 Docemo Street, was charged with selling eight ounces of tomatoes for two pence and two farthings instead of the controlled price; she faced a choice of one month in prison with hard labor or payment of an indemnity of fifteen pounds (*Comet* 1943).

Companies found guilty of violating the price-control scheme were also sentenced. For instance, in 1942, Conception et Fabrication Assistée par Ordinateur, a French multinational company with its head office at Marina Lagos, was found guilty of failing to keep records necessary to enable the checking of entries on ration cards. It was charged a fine of ten pounds (*Comet* 1943). Certain individuals, too, were found culpable for violating the price-control scheme. One Daniel Shumolohun of 129 Bamgbose Street, Lagos, was found guilty of selling a small tin of Ovaltine for one shilling and six pence instead of one shilling and five pence. One Paulinus Mabadeje of 35 Bamgbose Street, Lagos, was found guilty of refusing to sell sugar. Both individuals were sentenced to two months imprisonment or a fine of five pounds (*Comet* 1943).

The price-control scheme also faced issues of impersonation: some concerned individuals went as far as to impersonate an inspector of prices to annoy traders. On December 17, 1942, the inspector announced:

Complaints have been received that there are certain people masquerading in the town and local markets as Assistant Inspector[s] of Prices[,] and these people are causing annoyance to traders who are carrying on their business in a peaceful and law-abiding manner. Should you be approached by any person who purports to be an inspector, it is quite a simple matter to satisfy yourself of his or her honesty by requesting him or her to produce the authority with which each official inspector is provided. (*Comet* 1942b)

Officialdom itself agreed in 1944 that despite all efforts to paralyze the black marketers, about two-thirds of the people of Lagos received their supplies from them, while only about a third were fed by the control pool (Oyemakinde 1973, 423). The futility of trying to remove the price system as the determinant of resource allocation thus became apparent, but the price-control scheme remained in place until 1947. The inspector of prices lamented the danger posed by the black market and embarked on a propaganda campaign against it. He announced:

These black markets are very harmful[,] and those who use them are "pests." They are depriving you of your rightful share of commodities that are in short supply. Are you willing to stand by and lets [*sic*] others have their fill whilst you and your families have to go starve? It is not only in your own interest, but it is your duty as a citizen to bring to the notice of the authority. . . . in case you can prove where these rouses [*sic*] are hiding themselves. (*Comet* 1943)

The effects that the price-control scheme had on the economic livelihood of people in colonial Nigeria during World War II cannot be overemphasized:

the colonial government made frantic efforts to bring black-marketing activities into disrepute through aggressive propaganda and excessive use of judicial power; however, these efforts failed, as local market women and traders remained on top of the situation until after the war. In fact, in 1945, the Ladies Club, Abeokuta, cooperated with the Nigeria Union of Traders by aiding women traders whose rice produce had been confiscated by the government (*Daily Service* 1945).

Conclusion

This article focuses on the implications of British agricultural policies leading to food insecurity in the areas that now make up modern Nigeria, specifically the Southwest and Southeast, during the Second World War (1939–45). It demonstrates that regular, affordable, and adequate access to sufficiently nutritious food did not obtain in the colonial territories of what is now Nigeria. By promoting the cultivation and exportation of cash crops from the colonies, British policy contributed in no small measure to the predicament of food insecurity. Price-control measures on foodstuffs, such as the Pullen Scheme, upset the conventional pattern of food production and distribution, and local economic systems generally, further compounding food insecurity.

The findings presented reinforce the argument that food insecurity in Nigeria during the war reflected the broader politics of austerity that characterized colonial domination of Africa. The colonialists established commercial networks around a trading system based on cash crops, connecting regional economic output to the requirements of the metropolises. Instead of foodstuffs that Africans needed for an adequate and nutritious daily diet, the products and cash crops promoted by the colonialists benefited the Europeans' export trade and industrial needs.

Not only did the demands for food supplies placed on the people of southern and eastern Nigeria during the war exacerbate food insecurity, agricultural policies and the wartime control measures on food pricing largely reflected the economic exploitation that characterized colonialism in Africa. More broadly, the findings of this article align with the arguments of leading authors on the study of the effects of the war on Africa, particularly Chima Korieh—that the war was not exclusively restricted to European soil, but witnessed substantial contributions from people who are often forgotten in historical narratives. The role played by farmers in supplying food for the war effort, and the exhaustion of labor capacity in the production of cash crops for export at the expense of food crops for subsistence in the colonies, constitute a watershed in the trajectory of food insecurity in Nigeria. The agricultural policy initiated by the British in Nigeria during the war exemplifies the international politics of making the colonies serve the interest of the metropolises within the framework of economic imperialism.

1. This article was accepted for publication on September 7, 2023.
2. For a discussion of African mobilization and deployments in the First and Second World Wars, see Fogarty and Killingray 2015 and Owino 2018.
3. The Moore Plantations at Ibadan were founded by the British Cotton Growing Association in 1902 as an experimental farm for growing cotton.
4. Distance, time, and resource constraints made it impossible to conduct research in the National Archives, Kaduna; however, it is likely that evidence from Kaduna would not significantly alter the key conclusions based on the available data in Ibadan and Enugu.
5. The Nigerian elite supported the British cause by promoting propaganda in the media (radio, newspapers, debates in the Legislative Council, public lectures, and so forth). They affirmed their support for the course of the British Empire and the allies. Hebert Macaulay, nationalist and erstwhile critic of British colonial administration in Nigeria, exhorted his countrymen to “rally round the Union Jack” in a number of radio broadcasts, for he believed that victory for democracy and the freedom of humankind depended on “our determination and loyalty” (Njoku 1981; Onyekpe 1996, chap. 5).
6. Ibadan National Archives newspapers show that the British colonial government used newspapers to garner support for the Win-the-War Fund and the Nigerian Savings Certificates. See the *Comet* 1941a, 1941b, 1942b, 1943. For a criticism of Win-the-War-Fund, see Mordi 2017.
7. For a discussion of other West African colonies, see Crowder 1970, 492; Lenin 1983, 72–83; Woolf 1921.
8. The National Archive, Ibadan, has several public notices signed by A. P. Pullen between 1942 and 1945 giving different market prices in variation to the situation of food markets, as well as the implication of the war on the colonies.
9. See, for instance, *Nigerian Eastern Mail* 1943; *Legislative Council Debates* 1945, 179–87; *West African Pilot* 1941.
10. The demand for *garri* and other food items created opportunities for traders, some of whom entered the foodstuff-retaining trade, especially in Northern Nigeria. For instance, in Aba Division, *garri* export to the North increased from 4,011 tons in 1938 to 5,199.16 tons in 1941 and 21,000 tons in 1942. See NAE 1929.

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