Afterword

Many worlds at war: beyond the belligerents

Ashley Jackson

The imperial dimensions of the Second World War remain marginalized in general histories of the conflict. But the problem lies deeper, for the historiography, with its overbearing focus on the main belligerents, neglects not only the imperial dimensions of the conflict but also the war experience of semi-colonial regions and neutral states beyond Europe. Concluding a volume on the variegated wartime experience of the British Empire, therefore, this chapter looks forward to a historiography of the conflict that properly acknowledges the centrality of the colonial, semi-colonial, and neutral world in its prosecution. In doing so, it argues that unless four themes relating to the war in these regions are acknowledged, general histories will remain incomplete not only in terms of their failure to adequately include non-Europeans but in their assessments of how the war was won and lost. The themes are:

1. The wartime role of colonies and neutral states and why they were essential to the main protagonists.
2. The importance of colonial troops and military labour and the significance of 'sideshow' campaigns and the other wars within the world war.
3. The strategic significance of bases, supply lines, and infrastructure in colonies and neutral states.
4. The war's impact on the home front in colonial and semi-colonial regions and the reliance placed by the main belligerents on its civilian labour and other resources.

While some might cavil at the suggestion, it might well be argued that we continue to adhere to a surprisingly *colonial* view of the Second World War. It is a dated one in which non-Europeans are far less represented than their involvement – and the importance of their involvement – demands. It is a parochial view, in which the significance of overseas bases and infrastructure, food, resources, and labour is marginalized. Traditional accounts of the Second World War are seldom equipped to embrace these aspects of the war because they pursue the war stories of the major belligerents and seek to isolate the war's major tipping points in terms of battles, strategic decisions, or industrial production. They might see more than the tip of the iceberg, but they

fail to grasp the true extent of what is submerged beneath. The narratives of the war's major belligerents have come to overlay the many other histories of the war when it comes to the general accounts of the conflict most commonly encountered by the public. They often tell the same stories, channelled along predetermined highways, such as (in the British case) the Phoney War, the Battle of the Atlantic, the Desert War, the Pacific War, strategic bombing, the Eastern Front, D-Day and the fall of Hitler's Reich. Though academics have long trumpeted the role played by people all over the world in the Second World War, the story has not migrated from specialist literature into our general histories of the conflict and instead remains locked away in individual national histories and academic journals.

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The Second World War was 'an enormous, overshadowing, moving monster, far bigger than I had imagined it would be', wrote the Gurkha officer John Masters, reflecting on his experience soldiering in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. So enormous was the conflict and so profound its reverberations that even the remotest and most unlikely corners of the globe were drawn into the maelstrom. John Harris dubbed Sierra Leone 'a funny place to hold a war'. Yet because of the inescapable need to move troops and military supplies around the globe by sea and to maintain general trade, Freetown became one of the world's most important strategic locations. This brought frenetic military activity to the colony and had a deep impact upon the lives of African people that attended it.

The story of the Second World War needs to be forcefully recounted from the perspective of the millions of people whose war it was not but whose war it became by virtue of the capacity of Western war machines and imperial reach to embroil them.[1] This demands that the war be viewed from Algeria, Brazil, Indonesia, Iran, and Thailand, as well as from the usual European, American, or Japanese vantage points. The war affected people in these and many other lands in a wide variety of ways, whether they liked it or not and even if they had little understanding of what had brought it to their doorstep. Why? Because many parts of the world had been colonized and were therefore dragged into the conflict at the behest of foreign masters or by the desire of would-be imperial powers to sate their appetite for conquest. War came because of proximity to combat zones and important supply routes, and war came because of the urgent need of the Allied and Axis powers for the resources of distant lands, for the toil of their people, for their raw materials, and for their war-related infrastructure. These human and material resources were vital for sustaining global war machines and prosecuting military operations on a vast scale. Sometimes, war came because the leaders of weaker nations sought to survive the war and possibly benefit from it by joining in, supporting either of the major alliances and hoping that they had picked a winner.

Despite these indubitable facts, it is difficult to dispute the judgement that the general history of the war is loaded towards big players, big battles, and

grand strategies. To rectify this imbalance, what is required is the perspective of these little known participants and places, of battles unfamiliar and supply lines seldom charted. Such a history would explain how smaller and less well known facets of the war – campaigns in Borneo, airstrips in Iceland, and latex production in Liberia – were linked to the more familiar story of the Second World War and the strategies and actions of the main players. It would embrace the war experience of non-Westerners on *their* terms, rather than treating them as peripheral or indeed largely invisible participants in a conflict dominated by Westerners. The war strategies of Bangkok and Rio de Janeiro would be regarded on a par with those of Berlin and Washington, the war experience of people in Fiji and Libya given as much careful attention as that of people in Britain and Japan.

Future research, therefore, should adopt a distinctly non-Western approach, putting the war experience of colonies, semi-colonial zones, and neutral states beyond Europe at the centre of analysis. Such an approach would reveal how the participation of the people of scores of lands beyond the borders of the major belligerents was crucial to the prosecution of the war, just as resources drawn from those lands and their strategic assets – airstrips, harbours, railways, roads, and requisitioned buildings – were crucial in supporting the war efforts of the main Allied and Axis powers. No part of the world was left untouched by the conflict; war brought environmental transformation to remote Pacific islands, army recruitment drives in the Okavango, missions to the Antarctic in search of U-boats, and the deployment of South American troops to Europe. Neutral nations such as Afghanistan, Iran, and Thailand, meanwhile, were caught between the Scylla and Charybdis of the competing war aims of the main protagonists and the imperatives of their own foreign and domestic policies.

The tentacles of global war

It is easy to overlook the fact that much of the fighting in the Second World War, beyond Europe, occurred in colonial territories. Think Burma, Egypt, Ethiopia, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Kenya, Libya, Malaya, New Guinea, the Philippines, the Solomon Islands, and Tunisia. Bombing, rationing, and military service were not the exclusive preserve of the main belligerents; many parts of the colonial world experienced famine and brutal occupation, and neutral countries were inexorably drawn into the conflict too. Of course, the war was not all-embracing. It did not hold everyone, everywhere, in its thrall all of the time. Not everything that happened during the war years was related to the conflict, and even in the most war-wracked places, people loved, laughed, listened to music, and dreamed dreams of the future. But while this is an important cautionary note, lest we get carried away with 'the war', it is true only up to a point. The reason for this is that although in some parts of the world one might have been forgiven for asking 'War? What war?', the conflict had a habit of insinuating itself into the lives of people in numerous indirect,

as well as direct ways. One did not have to be at the eye of the storm to hear the distant thunder of a global conflict. A person might be sitting on a palm-fringed Indian Ocean atoll or in a South American city far from the din, but chances were that the food in his or her larder would change because of wartime shortages, that the price of food and essential commodities would rise, and that luxury goods would disappear from the shops. In even more tangible ways, even in these places remote from the battlefields, new job opportunities or even compulsory labour demands might arise because of war-related activity, and political and ideological debates and propaganda sallies from Allied or Axis agencies would frequent the airwaves and newspaper columns and inform local politics. The remarkable point, surely, is that we can talk of significant war experiences and contributions from the perspective of Cuba, Liberia, or the Seychelles, not that the war's impact was unevenly felt.

The point regarding the war's reach into unlikely places is illustrated by Lieutenant Colonel Charles Arden Clarke, the Resident Commissioner of the Bechuanaland Protectorate. Touring the Ngamiland district in March 1940, he noted ruefully that some people 'do not understand. They don't know what Government is and why anybody is fighting at all'. But while this testified to the relative lightness of Britain's 60-year rule in this particular part of Africa and the early stage of the war at which it was written, the fact is that, in spite of this, the war came to intimately affect the lives of the region's people. From the following year, soldiers were recruited into the British Army from Ngamiland and dispatched to Europe, the Middle East and North Africa. Their departure demanded that loved ones left behind develop new angles of vision on the world, and airmail letters, new vernacular newspapers, and radio broadcasts were employed to keep families in touch. The war also brought food shortages, inflation, profiteering, and demands for communal labour in order to sustain tribal food supplies. And if Britain had lost the war, the region's future would have been at the tender mercy of the Germans and their anti-British South African sympathizers, the Afrikaners.

One further example of war's impact in remote regions: on 3 March 1942, Captain Alfred North-Coombes heard what sounded like humming emanating from Oyster Bay on the island of Rodrigues. It was caused by people praying aloud, 'even those that had never prayed before, that they would be saved from the Japanese'. Men and women cut rosaries into pieces and shared them with neighbours wrote North-Coombes from this speck in the Indian Ocean, miles away from any battlefield but not immune to the effects of war. Even here, people had heard tales of the notorious brutality of Japanese forces, which had percolated out of China for some years. The cause of the people's panic was gunfire from a Japanese ship attempting to put the island's cable and wireless station out of action in order to disrupt British communications with Australia, a task it succeeded in accomplishing.

Before the arrival of the raider and its shells, Rodrigues and the other islands of the Mascarenes had been reconnoitred by Japanese seaplanes launched from submarines surfacing off the coral reef. Captain North-Coombes, a white

Mauritian, was in command of C Company of the Mauritius Territorial Force, comprised of creoles and Indians. Together with half a company of British and Mauritian artillerymen and 215 men of the Rodrigues Volunteer Force, the unit was responsible for protecting the island from enemy attack. To aid them in their task, a six-inch gun battery was erected at Crève Coeur and a 55-millimetre anti-submarine weapon installed on Point Venus to protect the cable and wireless station. Like other remote outposts, Rodrigues warranted defence because it was a link in a global communications chain dependent upon underwater telegraph cables and because, if it was not held by the British, it might well be held by the Germans or the Japanese and used to rest, repair, and resupply their warships and submarines as they hunted for Allied and neutral vessels in the world's third largest ocean.

War came to Rodrigues in other ways, too. From a total population of about 12,000, over 300 Rodriguans joined the British Army and served in the Middle East, and hundreds of men donned the uniform of the volunteer defence force. With hundreds of Mauritian soldiers and a smattering of Britons garrisoning the island, the military footprint – and association with distant theatres of conflict through the service of friends and relatives – became significant. This in turn had an impact on the economy as military spending and remittances from serving soldiers greatly increased the cash flow. The benefits of this, however, were mitigated by the food situation pertaining in the Indian Ocean; the loss of Burmese rice and shipping shortages meant that basic consumer items simply disappeared, leading to rationing and a rising cost of living.

So, many people's worlds were touched by the tentacles of global conflict in an imperial and industrial age – many in a much more violent and direct way than was the case in these examples. The Second World War was the war that touched the lives and locations that other conflicts could not reach. As Franklin Roosevelt told the American people during a radio broadcast in February 1942, it was 'a new kind of war. It is warfare in terms of every continent, every island, every sea, every air lane, in the world'. Although the war may have looked different to people in Botswana, Fiji, or the Virgin Islands than it did to those in Britain, Canada, or Japan, its impacts were nevertheless visible and often of great moment for the lives of ordinary people.

Why does any of this matter, beyond simply showcasing the war experience of smaller nations and colonial peoples? It matters because without understanding the extent and significance of their role in the war, our picture is incomplete and unbalanced. This is because of the clear connections between the experiences and resources of colonial and neutral lands and the war's major events and outcomes. Military operations in location X, for example, could not take place without control of region Y; African troops were used to 'dilute' British anti-aircraft regiments in the Middle East in order to release British troops for the D-Day landings in Europe; the graft of millions of Indian men and women was required to affect the infrastructural developments that allowed the Allies to fight in Burma and supply China by air over the Himalayas; food drawn from East Africa was required to satisfy the ration demands

of the large British military establishment based in Egypt and its environs; and only by requisitioning the Iranian road and rail network could the Allies funnel mountains of supplies to Russia via the Caspian Sea.

To paraphrase the song *Dem Bones*, the thigh bone was connected to the backbone and the backbone was connected to the shoulder bone: all the way from head to toe, prosecuting national strategies through military operations and running war economies meant relying on people, places, and resources at a great distance from home, as well as the sea lanes and overland supply routes, and the shipyards and airbases, that connected them. The capacity to mobilize these people and the resources of their lands determined winners and losers as much as aircraft carriers and munitions factories back in America or Japan. And one of the reasons why the Allies beat the Axis was because they utilized these resources much more effectively.

Neutrals, lesser allies, and other nations' colonies

Colonies, neutral states, and lesser allies were important because of the vast distances involved in the war; the need to traverse thousands of miles by air, land, and sea in order to strike at one's foe meant that they were essential, as were their resources. The Second World War was visited upon distant people and places because most of the earth's land surface was ruled by a handful of colonial powers and because major belligerents fought either to extend empires or to defend them or, as in the case of the United States of America, assumed an imperial mantle as war transformed the international system. The Axis powers fought to gain the spoils of empire – prestige, living space, land, markets, resources, and control of sea lines of communication. Germany sought to conquer and dominate the European continent. Italy had ambitions in Southern Europe and Africa and sought to supplant Britain and France in the Mediterranean. Japan had long targeted the Chinese mainland as an outlet for its expansionist proclivities and from 1941 took aim at the colonies of America and Europe stretched enticingly across the Central Pacific, the East Indies, and Southeast Asia. Other belligerent powers, meanwhile, fought to protect the fruits of empire that they already enjoyed in a war of colonial 'haves' versus 'have nots', though they might simultaneously, as in the case of Britain and Russia, seek to extend their own imperium or shore up its foundations in key regions. Despite all of this, the literature often overlooks or downplays the war's striking colonial dimensions.

It wasn't just colonies and neutrals that were put upon by the great powers and dragged into the conflict. Some independent nation states not directly involved in the conflict chose for a variety of reasons to join in (Brazil, Cuba), while other independent nations, heavily influenced by external powers or closely affected by virtue of geographical location, also became involved (Afghanistan, Iran, Nepal, Thailand). The Afghan Government sought to court German friendship in order to resist the demands of its overbearing British and Russian neighbours and attempted to use the war as an opportunity

to rearm and augment its capacity to defend its independence. Thailand sought to cooperate with Japan in order to prevent a full-scale invasion and to profit from France's tribulation by gaining French colonial territory. There were then independent states that were independent in name only and therefore obliged to participate (Egypt, Iraq). Finally, the colonies of defeated or neutral powers were also affected by the war (the Azores, the Congo, Greenland, Iceland).

The Brazilian economy boomed because of wartime demand, and its transport infrastructure underwent significant modernization. New port, rail, and road infrastructure, steel and agricultural exports, and the deployment of a Brazilian Expeditionary Force to fight with the Allies in the Mediterranean resulted in a surge in confidence and set the nation on course for its emergence on the global stage. It was from Brazilian airbases that thousands of aircraft began the flight across the Atlantic to Africa along the South Atlantic Air Ferry Route. Elsewhere in Latin America, over 4,000 Argentinians served in the British military, and the country was affected by the war because of its large German immigrant community, German sympathies, Anglophobia, and continuing trade ties with Britain. This brought pressure from the Allies to sever diplomatic relations with the Axis – including American plans to support a Brazilian attack on Buenos Aires. The war also led to economic development in Argentina as import substitution industries flourished, a process that trailed rural–urban migration in its wake. Cuba, meanwhile, helped the American war effort and benefited from Lend-Lease aid as a consequence. It declared war on Japan on 8 December 1941 and on Germany three days later. The Cuban Government granted America base facilities for aircraft operating against German submarines in the Caribbean and the use of Havana's important port facilities. In return, America provided modern equipment to the Cuban military, and Cuban forces participated in the defence of the Caribbean, including the escort of Allied merchant shipping.

Other wars, other troops, other campaigns

There were different wars taking place during the Second World War, other than the one being fought between the Allied and Axis powers. Mongolians battled with Japanese invaders, Ethiopians fought to eject the Italians, and Thai troops clashed with Frenchmen as Bangkok sought territorial aggrandisement at the expense of a prostrate Vichy empire. Ethnic Burmese communities fought each other, as well as the British and the Japanese. As Axis forces invaded other people's lands, new resistance movements emerged, leading to civil war as well as subterfuge against the occupiers, often mounted with support from American or British covert forces. Iranians resisted Britain and Russia's takeover of their country, and Indonesian and Vietnamese nationalists resisted the reimposition of colonial rule at the war's end. Struggles relating to land, anti-colonial resistance, and ethnic tension found new avenues for pursuit during the war in places such as Algeria, India, and Iraq. Often these prepared the ground for postwar battles, such as Britain's fight against Chinese

communities in Malaya, France and America's fight against 'communist' Vietnamese, Indonesian resistance to Dutch rule, the emergence of Mau Mau in Kenya, and Jewish resistance to British policy in Palestine. In Korea, the war brought old struggles against colonizers to a head, while opening a new chapter in its history of foreign intervention that would soon lead to the outbreak of the (still inconclusive) Korean War.

The war featured numerous battles, campaigns, and military deployments that have earned the rather demeaning appellation 'sideshows'. Though often overlooked in the historical record, these actions were considered of sufficient operational or strategic significance at the time. Sideshows or not, such campaigns and actions were deadly serious for the men who risked their lives in order to undertake them, and Fallujah or the Java Sea were not worse or better places to die than Alamein or Midway. British, Dutch, and Indian troops fought side by side in Borneo and Sarawak against the Japanese, scores of thousands of British imperial troops deployed to form a new Persia and Iraq Command lest the Germans defeat Russia and strike through the Caucasus, American servicemen were sent to the Gobi desert to establish weather stations, Australians fought in Syria, and forces were deployed to Greenland and Iceland. All such actions and deployments were directly linked to more well known campaigns and strategic plans.

As well as other wars and campaigns, the Second World War featured other troops and military workers, though we still talk of 'the British' or 'the Japanese' and give insufficient attention to the extraordinary multi-ethnic composition of the forces hidden behind these general labels. As Martin Thomas writes regarding the 'French' war effort, 'Villages in Morocco, Mali, and Algeria, not Brittany, the Ardèche, or the Pas-de-Calais, mourned the largest numbers of soldiers killed in French uniform after June 1940'. The significance of these forces went far beyond their combat utility, though this, of course, was vital. Britain wielded colonial military formations numbering over three million men and women, mostly drawn from Africa and South Asia. While British fighting power in East and North Africa depended on front-line divisions from the old 'white' dominions and colonies such as Kenya and Nigeria, its position east of Suez rested largely upon the Indian Army. Many colonial formations were employed during the war, though few are remembered today: the Arab Legion, the Fiji Volunteer Force, the Hong Kong and Singapore Garrison Artillery, the Iraq Levies, the Northern Rhodesia Regiment, and the Transjordan Frontier Force, to name but a few. The French had their valued colonial soldiers, particularly from North and West Africa, and the Allies also employed units drawn from places such as the Congo and Ethiopia and recruited thousands into labour corps in the Pacific. Beyond this, crucial non-front-line military tasks were the preserve of colonial troops and civilians recruited into military labour formations. Without them, Britain could not have fought the war that it did. As an example, by 1945 the Royal Pioneer Corps – a skilled British Army labour force – had been served by 166,782 British and 277,809 non-European soldiers and a staggering 1,074,932

civilian labourers drawn from colonies and countries in which the British were fighting.

All of the belligerents had an insatiable demand for labourers and soldiers. Japan employed thousands of Koreans and Taiwanese as soldiers and military labourers. Both Germany and Japan employed large numbers of troops drawn from the lands that they conquered and depended upon civilian as well as prisoners of war labour for strategic developments such as the Burma-Thailand railway. Tens of thousands of people joined Free Thai forces intent upon ejecting the Japanese, sometimes supported by covert Allied operations. Brazilians fought in Italy, thousands of Nepalese fought under Allied command in Burma, Puerto Ricans served in France and Morocco, and the hunters recruited to form Greenland's Northeast Sledge Patrol tracked German agents and meteorologists across the ice-bound landscapes of Eskimonæs and Scoresby Sund.

To illustrate the centrality of colonial peoples to major wartime episodes and the formations that took part in them, the 'British' Eighth Army serves as a good example. While it is often celebrated as a force composed of troops drawn from across the British Empire – Australians, Britons, Canadians, Indians, New Zealanders, and South Africans – what is seldom remembered is that its combat performance was predicated upon a large 'rear echelon' army of soldiers and civilian labourers manning the logistics chains and performing a diverse range of tasks essential to the army's fighting power, such as collecting the remains of shot-down aircraft from the desert, guarding supply dumps, and generating coastal smoke screens to cover Allied landings in Italy. The demand for these colonial troops could be very specific: black South African miners were recruited for their tunnelling skills as military railways were extended in the region, and Basotho muleteers were drafted so that their skills could be employed in delivering munitions to front-line troops in the Apennine Mountains and evacuating casualties on their descent. On the eve of the Battle of Alamein, Middle East Command and its 'teeth' formations were supported by a 'tail' that included 36,000 men from Botswana, Lesotho, and Swaziland, 18,400 from West Africa, 30,000 from East Africa, 5,600 from Cyprus, 4,500 from Palestine and over 5,000 from Mauritius, Rodrigues, and the Seychelles. Seventy-five companies of Italian prisoners of war were also put to work, and the British created an Arab Labour Corps that came to number 30,000 men. Recruited from among the populations of Egypt and Libya, the scale of military activity – and the outriders of conflict such as inflation and shortages – had a profound effect upon the peoples of the Maghreb, though few accounts of the Second World War tarry to consider them.

Bases and supply routes

Ports, roads, railways, and airstrips throughout the non-European world were crucial to the Allied war effort. In African, Asian, and Pacific ports and cities, dry docks, supply dumps, headquarters establishments, intelligence-gathering

facilities, wireless stations, camps and recreational and training facilities supported the war effort. Bases, military facilities, and supply routes located in colonial zones and neutral countries were an essential feature of the global conflict, and all attracted non-European labourers and fostered urbanization. They were instrumental in the wartime operations and strategies of the main belligerents and often warranted military actions in their own right in order to acquire or secure them. In order to effectively shuttle military resources from North America to Europe, Africa, and Asia, extensive base facilities were required in places such as Ascension Island, the Azores, Brazil, and Iceland, as well as in African countries such as Eritrea, Ghana, Kenya, and Sudan. Sudan's road and rail network conveyed 80,000 imperial troops and 5,000 military vehicles during the course of the war, and its airfields refuelled nearly 15,000 aircraft transiting across Africa. The closure of the Mediterranean to Allied shipping as a result of Axis submarine activity meant that supplies vital to the activities of the Eighth Army in the Western Desert had to be delivered via the Cape route, rounding Africa's southernmost tip and then proceeding along the East African coast to the Red Sea. This route, therefore, needed to be defended and cleared of the enemy. This was why the British wrested control of Madagascar and the Comoros Islands from the Vichy authorities, why Cape Town and Durban gained new prominence, and why British and Italian spy rings wrestled with each other in places such as Lourenço Marques, capital of Mozambique. Further north along this vital supply line, the Americans helped renovate the Eritrean and Somali ports of Kismayu, Massawa, and Mogadishu once the Italians had been ejected. Ports such as Colombo, Massawa, and Port Sudan became remarkably important strategic and operational hubs.

The loss of Singapore meant that the naval bases of Ceylon and Mombasa assumed great strategic significance for the protection of Indian Ocean sea routes, and a secret base was established in the Maldives, leading to the arrival of thousands of troops. To protect shipping from enemy submarines and surface raiders and to guard against Japanese raids, garrisons, naval guns, and aircraft appeared in the islands of the Chagos Archipelago and the Seychelles – as well as the island of Rodrigues. New airbases were established in places such as the Cocos-Keeling Islands, where elephants were imported to manoeuvre aircraft around newly laid steel runways, in order to attack Japanese-occupied territories on the Indian Ocean rim. In this manner, 'outposts' gained strategic significance, and the war was physically brought home to more and more people around the world. The 1940 Anglo-American Destroyers for Bases Agreement gave America access to land in Newfoundland and numerous British islands in the Caribbean in exchange for 50 destroyers for use as convoy escorts in the Atlantic. This deal signalled a huge expansion of America's military footprint and extended the defensive facilities of what was termed the 'Caribbean Sea Frontier'. This expansion was deemed necessary because of the U-boat campaign in the region. In 1944, America purchased Water Island in the Virgin Islands from Denmark to protect the submarine base on nearby Saint Thomas, and the US Army's Chemical Warfare Department used it for test purposes. AuQ3

Facilities in Canada, South Africa, and Southern Rhodesia enabled the RAF to prepare over 100,000 pilots and aircrew as part of the British Commonwealth Air Training Scheme, essential training that was impossible to conduct in Britain's war-torn skies. From a base near Kandy in central Ceylon, Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten led over a million Allied servicemen and women as Supreme Allied Commander South East Asia Command, and north-west Africa became a major Allied nerve centre and home to another major Allied command structure. Radio stations, weather stations, ports, supply bases, artillery positions, and search-and-rescue facilities were developed in Greenland as it became a stop-off for sea traffic between Europe and the Americas. Thousands of American service personnel were stationed there, and they interacted with the local population, bringing entertainment, news, commodities, and aid, developing the territory's infrastructure in the process.

It was the same the world over, the demand for base facilities or possession of strategically located places bringing servicemen and -women flooding into lands that had little choice in the matter. The arrival of foreign troops in many parts of the world represented a profound transformation for indigenous societies, their most exotic experience to date. Never mind the archetypal American servicemen in Britain, 'oversexed, overpaid, and over here'; around the world, non-European societies were just as deeply affected by the sudden appearance in their midst of these aliens, at once powerful, frightening, fascinating, and glamourous. Buildings were requisitioned, and new barracks, camps, and office complexes, along with pillboxes and aerodromes rose up. The Japanese took over the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank's main building in Statue Square Hong Kong for their headquarters, the British requisitioned the Gordon Memorial College on the banks of the Blue Nile in Sudan, and in Ceylon, the National Museum and all its collections were evicted by the army, and large swatches of jungle and coastline declared 'no go' areas so that the army could undertake jungle training and the navy could conduct live fire exercises. Communal spaces and even verdant private tennis courts and golf courses were sacrificed to the cultivation of crops, and African chiefs called out their people to create 'war lands' for the common good as food became scarce. Anti-locust sweeps and DDT campaigns were conducted by Allied servicemen in places as diverse as Iraq, Mauritius, and the islands of Melanesia and Polynesia, and everywhere the military transformed the landscape, flattening trees to build runways and creating mosquito breeding grounds in the bomb craters and tyre ruts that their activity left behind. Food gardens existed alongside the air raid shelters and cemeteries that attended war on the home front even far away from the front line.

Home fronts: occupation, migration, civilian labour, and resources

The concept of the 'home front', a reified cultural presence in countries like Britain, can be extended across the world. It helps us understand the often

profound impact that the war had upon people in neutral countries and the scores of colonies that characterized the international landscape at the time. More benign than the occupation of the Axis powers, the arrival of large numbers of Allied troops nevertheless constituted an occupation in many parts of the world, one that could have a transformative impact upon local societies and economies. In Vanuatu, the presence of American servicemen led to the spread of nationalism and the growth of cargo cults. In Colombo, houses were demolished in order to make firebreaks in case of enemy bombing, inventive vernacular versions of 'careless talk costs lives' and 'dig for victory' posters appeared in public places across the island, and local people joined Air Raid Precaution teams and made wooden beds (*charpoys*) and wooden defensive spikes (*panjiies*) for the thousands of Australian and Indian soldiers pouring into the island. African troops sent to bolster its defences frightened the locals, and many fled villages near their camps for fear that they would eat their children. When the Japanese did attack Ceylon in April 1942, thousands of Sri Lankans fled inland, and at least one Buddhist monk, mistaken for a downed Japanese pilot, was murdered. Across the Bay of Bengal, bombers caused extensive damage and thousands of deaths in Rangoon and other Burmese towns, a violent prelude to three years of harrowing occupation. The Japanese occupation of the nearby Andaman and Nicobar Islands, meanwhile, led to hundreds of deaths through execution, starvation, and torture. Terror, migration, shortages, inflation, blackouts, air raids, massacres, famine, forced labour, urbanization, environmental damage, occupation, resistance, collaboration, and the devastation of combat: these were key themes in the war experience beyond the main belligerents.

Alien soldiers and the paraphernalia of war disrupted lives and landscapes in many parts of the world. Thousands of Americans ended up in the strangest of places, such as Eritrea, the Gambia, Ghana, Greenland, India, Iran, Liberia, and the islands of the Caribbean and Pacific. British imperial troops choked the streets of Cairo and appeared in more and more remote towns and villages across the globe. The war witnessed the transformative rise of American power in other parts of the world where, although it did not gain new colonies, its burgeoning political, military, and economic presence carved out new patron–client relationships, spheres of influence, and regional hegemonies. The war brought American military forces, Lend-Lease aid, and – as a result – American political influence to regions where before the war America had been either unrepresented or of less significance than other external powers, usually the old colonial nations. The 1940 Destroyers for Bases Agreement with Britain gave America the right to build military bases and station troops in Newfoundland numerous British West Indian islands including Antigua, the Bahamas, Jamaica, and Trinidad. American troops, including African Americans, found their way to Australia and Fiji. In partnership with Britain, American troops took over important supply lines and air routes in the Gold Coast and Iran, and American military power in the China-Burma-India theatre went hand in hand with a growing American voice in Indian politics, not

welcomed by the British but indicative of how the coming superpower sought to influence the colonial policies of the European empires as it fashioned a new, American-shaped world order and broke down the closed colonial economies of the prewar era.

The world was full of military migrants and other migrants too. There were desperate retreats and death marches involving soldiers and civilians, refugees attempting to flee Burma, Java, Malaya, Singapore, and Sumatra before the Japanese arrived, and the forced migration of civilians from strategic areas, including the removal of virtually the entire population of Gibraltar, decanted to Britain, the Caribbean, North Africa, and Madeira. Tens of thousands of Poles moved into Iran after being released from Russian labour camps, and West Indian service personnel and civilian labourers crossed the Atlantic to work in Britain and Europe. Berths were found in colonial territories such as South Africa for scores of thousands of prisoners of war. Internees included Americans and Canadians of Japanese descent, European Jews interned in a Mauritian gaol having been refused entry into Palestine, and thousands of 'Axis' civilians from South America interned in the Texan desert by the American Government. Chinese, Filipinos, Koreans, and Taiwanese people were shunted around by their Japanese masters, taken to the home islands as labourers and to the war zones as soldiers and workers. Perhaps as many as 200,000 women from these lands were forcibly deployed as sex slaves.

The home front in colonies and neutral countries was also deeply affected by the global demand for resources; indeed, in many cases it was their resources that the major powers were fighting to acquire or protect. America latched on to Congolese uranium, and this, in turn, fed the Manhattan Project; Britain clung with a vice-like grip to its treasure trove of strategic raw materials, though the colonial plums of Southeast Asia were wrested from its grasp, Japan setting its expansionist compass according to the raw materials it coveted in American, Australian, British, Dutch, and French territories. Irreplaceable oil drawn from Iran and Iraq caused Britain to invade both countries, and in many instances demand for raw materials was met with supplies from colonies and neutral states. The loss of traditional sources of supply due to enemy action brought new suppliers into play: Japanese conquests in Southeast Asia and the East Indies meant, for example, that Ceylon and Liberia's rubber assumed a new importance for the Allies, as did Tanzania's sisal and pyrethrum and Nigeria's tin. Often, these resources were extracted by compulsory labour. The labour of the people who lived in these colonies and neutral lands was crucial for the war effort of countries such as America and Britain, as were the resources of their lands, including the physical infrastructure. This was because the war was a clash of empires, of powers expanding their regional and global reach in order to pursue their strategies, a war of industrial nations utilizing the people and resources of distant lands in order to gain advantage.

Conclusion

The war's presence lingers throughout the non-European world, just as it does in Britain and Germany: an elegant memorial to tens of thousands of Singaporeans killed by the Japanese raises its pinnacle opposite Raffles Hotel, the tragedy of the Bengal famine shadows India's modern history, and the wrecks of sunken ships and downed aircraft still lie off Africa's coastline. The literature needs robust publications that forge the links required to unite the war's disparate pieces in order to better explain how the war 'worked'. The war stories of the 'big wheels' are told and told again, but the war of the 'small wheels' and the cogs that enabled them to rotate are seldom understood in relation to the machine as a whole.

By 1945, America had replaced Britain as the most important external power in the Mediterranean and had supplanted Britain as the guarantor of Australian and New Zealand security. By the end of the war and for long after, American forces were based all over the world, occupying and to a large extent administering the vanquished nations of Austria, Germany, Italy, and Japan and bankrolling exhausted allies such as Britain, becoming the guarantor of their security too. The war brought the Americans and Russians face to face in Iran, setting the scene for Cold War stand-off. The war established the conditions for postwar insurgency in Kenya and Malaya and for the nationalist struggles of the Algerian, Indonesian, and Vietnamese people. It transformed the situation in Palestine. As in so many European countries, the devastation of war dominated the postwar period throughout the colonial and semi-colonial world. The ruination of Burma's colonial economy hampered its postwar progress. British scorched earth had seen the oil refineries torched, 95 per cent of the 500-strong steamer fleet of the Irrawaddy Company scuttled, 1,200 of 1,250 rail cars and 200 of 250 locomotives wrecked, and bridges destroyed. During the course of the war, two-thirds of the colony's cattle had been commandeered, decimating agricultural output, and 80 per cent of Rangoon had to be rebuilt. The breathtaking extent of wartime activity in the non-European world, as well as the importance of the war effort of its people, needs to take the centre stage role that history, so far, has denied it.

Note

1 In this context, 'Western' includes Japan.