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The diplomacy of extra-territorial heritage: the Kokoda Track, Papua New Guinea

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ABSTRACT
The global interest in the memory of war in recent decades has brought challenges in managing and conserving extra-territorial war heritage: that is, sites of memory that have a greater significance for people outside the sovereign territory in which the sites physically reside. This article considers this issue in relation to the Kokoda Track in Papua New Guinea, a site of central importance in the Australian national memory of war. The successful conservation of the Track throws new light on the practice of heritage diplomacy. Working mostly outside the more commonly explored arena of global heritage governance, the Australian and New Guinean governments employed bilateral diplomacy to manage domestic stakeholder expectations, and thereby identified a convergence of interests and mutual gain by linking heritage protection with local development needs. They have also encouraged the construction of a narrative of the events of World War II that in some respects might be described as shared. Thus, heritage diplomacy is underpinned by a transnational consensus about the heritage's significance, at least at the government level, which arguably divests the Kokoda Track of its exclusively 'extra-territorial' quality.

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The explosion of war memory across the globe during the past three decades has generated a seemingly insatiable fascination with the material heritage of the two world wars: their battlefields, memorials and cemeteries. These lieux de mémoire, to use Pierre Nora's now classic term, are the destinations of 'pilgrimages' undertaken by veterans, their families and descendants. Such sites also provide the stage on which politicians perform the increasingly common phenomenon of 'memorial diplomacy': that is, carefully choreographed public ceremonies [held] on the anniversaries of historic occasions at selected sites of memory, long established or of recent invention, typically on the margins of international summits or intergovernmental forums. (Graves 2014, 170)

The material heritage of such sites poses intriguing problems of definition and management. In a symbolic and political sense they are transnational, but their control is almost always national. Their value as heritage is also asymmetrical, in that their significance is rarely equal within different national narratives of war; it may, in fact, be greater for peoples outside the sovereign territory in which the heritage sites reside. In these circumstances the heritage is 'extra-territorial', and those who value it most, and feel an emotional 'ownership' of it, have none of the controls and means of protection normally afforded by national legislation and political processes. Hence, the conservation of the heritage
depends on two factors: intergovernmental diplomacy and the construction of some elements of shared memory of the past between the host country and the external ‘owners’.

This conclusion might seem axiomatic, since heritage is known to have long played a role in international relations. However, this article argues that, within the context of extra-territorial heritage, heritage diplomacy performs a somewhat different role to that commonly analysed in the scholarship of heritage studies. In this case, heritage diplomacy is not so much the projection of soft power, particularly by the West, in an effort to promote a country’s diplomatic goals, be they neo-colonial, self-interested or more genuinely altruistic (Kersel and Luke 2015; Kindle 2778/9741). Nor is it the diplomacy of extra-territorial heritage necessarily a function of that network of international institutions and conventions established in the post-1945 world with UNESCO at its heart. This ‘arena of governance’ (Winter 2015, 998) provides a space for multilateral collaboration – and, inevitably, contestation – within the framework of a shared commitment to promoting scientific excellence, capacity building and the reified and deeply entrenched principle of the common heritage of mankind (Winter 2015, 999; Luke and Kersel 2013, Kindle 294/4636; Kersel and Luke 2015, 2797/9741).

In contrast, this article argues that, in the case of an important extra-territorial site from World War II, the Kokoda Track in Papua New Guinea, heritage diplomacy has been almost entirely a bilateral response to the pragmatic problems of heritage management – problems that arose particularly at the local level where the competing interests of Australian and Papua New Guinean stakeholders intersected. This heritage diplomacy has been successful, firstly, because it has identified a convergence of interests and mutual gain by linking heritage conservation and development aid; and secondly, because both governments have encouraged the construction of a shared narrative of the past events that created the heritage resources in question. Thus, heritage diplomacy has been increasingly underpinned by a transnational consensus about the heritage’s significance which arguably divests it of its exclusively ‘extra-territorial’ quality. Most interestingly, while this multidimensional negotiation has recently been positioned within the wider framework of global heritage management, it is not dependent upon it. Indeed the protection of the Kokoda Track has been managed largely outside this arena of governance.

The Kokoda Track and Australian commemoration

Extra-territorial war heritage is a particularly important issue for Australia since almost all of its major military deployments since federation in 1901 have been in other countries. Hence key battlefields are located overseas, as are the graves of the battle dead of the two world wars. In accordance with the post-World War I practice of the Imperial (later Commonwealth) War Graves Commission (IWGC) Australian war dead of the two world wars were buried overseas, rather than being repatriated. Moreover, since the memory of war, in the form of the so-called Anzac legend, has played central role in the national political culture since 1915 (Beaumont 2014; Holbrook 2014), overseas sites of war memory are invested with a political and emotional significance for Australians that is arguably greater than for many other peoples.

In the Australian hierarchy of overseas sites of memory the Kokoda Track ranks second only to Gallipoli (Stephens and Peter 1981, 56). This track (or more accurately tracks) stretches some 96 km over the rugged Owen Stanley Range, from Owers’ Corner in Central Province, 50 km east of Port Moresby, to the village of Kokoda in Oro Province. This was the forbidding terrain on which Australian infantry battled Japanese forces from July to November 1942. The Japanese had landed unopposed on the north coast of Papua in July, and then advanced towards Port Moresby on the southern coast. Had they captured this strategic town, they would have controlled the sea lines of communication to Australia and dominated the northern parts of the continent. Hence, the halting of the Japanese advance and their subsequent retreat, though due in part to the US-led battle for nearby Guadalcanal, has been enshrined in Australian popular memory as the battle that ‘saved Australia’ (James 2009, 3). ‘Kokoda’ has also become coded for not just the fighting on the Kokoda Track but for the battles in early 1943 on the beaches of northern Papua, Buna, Gona and Sanananda. In total, some 12,000 Japanese, 2165 Australians, 671 Americans and an unknown number of local villagers, carriers and
soldiers died in these 6 months: for Australians, these are the statistics of a major battle in World War II (Nelson 1997, 154).

Australian interest in commemorating the Kokoda Track dated from World War II itself. In 1943 Australian war graves units began to search for bodies which were later interred in an IWGC cemetery at Bomana, north–east of Port Moresby. Private memorialisation also began in 1943 with the installation by one of the units which fought on the Track, the 7th Australian Infantry Brigade, of a cairn at Sogeri, near the Port Moresby end of the Track. Then, when the war ended, some 17 historical markers, including one at Kokoda, were installed in Papua and New Guinea as part of a scheme, championed by the Australian wartime Commander-in-Chief, General Thomas Blamey, for installing battle exploits memorials. In the decades that followed private individuals and veterans’ organisations continued to mark the Track: for example, in 1959 a memorial in honour of the wartime native carriers, popularly known as ‘Fuzzy Wuzzy Angels’, was installed at Kokoda by a planter H.T. (Bert) Kienzle who had been responsible for managing the carriers during World War II. A memorial to the 39th Australian Infantry Battalion, was also erected at Owers’ Corner in 1966 by the son of a local plantation owner, while a group of veterans who returned in November 1967 to mark the 25th anniversary of the retaking of the village installed yet another memorial at Kokoda (James 2009, 84).

This commemoration was possible because the land through which the Kokoda Track runs was then under Australian administration. Papua was administered as an external territory by Australia from 1906 onwards, while New Guinea, the north–eastern section of the island, was a League of Nations mandate after World War I with Australia as the mandatory power. In 1949 New Guinea was put under United Nations International Trusteeship, and Australian again acted as the administering power until independence in 1975. Hence, Australians were in the position not only to manage physical access to the Track and impose their commemorative practices upon it, but also to affirm its importance as heritage. As Morag Kersel and Christina Luke have put it, ‘What gets preserved depends to a significant degree on who has the power to define the past that matters, and by implication, which pasts do not’ (2015, 3206–7/9741, citing R. Berneck and S. Pollock).

When Papua New Guinea gained independence in 1975, the Track naturally came under the new nation’s sovereign control, but in some respects the relationship with Australia remained a neo-colonial one, with Australia being a major aid donor to this developing nation and its aid becoming ‘a permanent feature’ of PNG’s budget (Denoon 2005, 187, 197; Howes nd, 15). Hence, individual Australians continued their private commemorative efforts along the Track, while Anzac Day, the key event on Australia’s national commemorative calendar, remained a public holiday marked – as it was in Australia – with dawn services and a march. This was despite the fact that, according to a leading historian of PNG, Nelson, ‘many Papua New Guineans were uneasy with a day so closely identified with Australia and events unrelated to the history of Papua New Guinea’ (1997, 149).

In the 1990s, the commemorative significance of the Track to Australians increased, as did their sense that this was important extra-territorial heritage. Around this time Australia, like many other countries across the globe, experienced a ‘turn to the past’, and with this, came a renewed focus on war memory at the national and individual level. A defining event was the officially-funded pilgrimage to Gallipoli in 1990, the seventieth anniversary of the 1915 landing, led by Labour Prime Minister Bob Hawke (1983–1991). Under Hawke’s successor, Paul Keating (1991–1996), official war commemoration escalated, but its focus shifted to remembering World War II in the Pacific. This was a theatre of war that accorded with Keating’s vision of an Australian nationalism that was freed from any associations with British imperialism (Holbrook 2014, 175–83). On Anzac Day 1992 therefore Keating visited PNG and, when laying wreaths at the Kokoda memorial – he was the first Australian prime minister to do so – fell to his knees and kissed the ground. Kokoda, he said, ‘was the place where I believe the depth and soul of the Australian nation was confirmed’ (Cleary 2012). As Hawkins (2013, 5) has put it, ‘If it were possible to identify the defining moment at which the Kokoda Track re-entered the Australian consciousness, it would surely be [this].’

From here on, official Australian intervention in Kokoda became more formalised. Keating proposed in 1992 that there be a new memorial in Papua New Guinea, but the project stalled, seemingly
owing to a cash flow crisis in PNG. However, when Keating made a return visit to Kokoda on Anzac Day 1994, he was joined by the PNG Prime Minister Paias Wingti (1992–1994). For the first time the two governments agreed on joint diplomatic action, in which Australia’s claims on the Track were linked explicitly with the development needs of PNG. In the Kokoda Trail Development Project the Australian government agreed to contribute funds on a dollar-for-dollar basis to develop not just a memorial museum at Kokoda but also infrastructure, such as a hospital and an airstrip at Kokoda which would benefit some of the villagers still living along the Track. Responsibility for implementing some of these projects was delegated to the non-for-profit organisation, Rotary, which was already operating along the Track, providing aid posts and schools for outlying villages (Heggen 1995). In this way, as Tim Winter has noted, heritage diplomacy was ‘opened out’ beyond government departments, embassies and ambassadors to include actors such as NGOs and IGOs’ (Winter 2015, 1006).

On this basis, the Track’s place in Australian national commemoration continued to grow in the mid to late 1990s. The Australia Remembers campaign of 1995, a year-long Australian government-sponsored commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the end of World War II, included a huge pilgrimage to PNG of 117 veterans and four war widows. Keating and the new PNG Prime Minister Julius Chan (1994–1997) opened the refurbished museum at Kokoda, a site which Keating now claimed was ‘one of our most hallowed places… Everything that is valuable to us in Australia today, sovereignty, democracy, family, our livelihood – was at stake when the 39th Battalion first met the Japanese at Kokoda’. Meanwhile, in Australia the 1995 VP (Victory in the Pacific) celebrations at Townsville, Queensland, invited a large PNG contingent, including Raphael Oembari who had been immortalised as the quintessential Fuzzy Wuzzy Angel in a famous 1942 photo by George Silk. Significantly, although this was one of the first official attempts to incorporate Papua New Guineans into a shared memory of World War II, Oembari used this public occasion more pragmatically: to position the former native carriers as entitled to compensation for their wartime service (Reed 2004, 141–143).

The defeat of the Labor Keating government in 1996 did little to slow official commemoration in PNG. Although the Liberal (conservative) Prime Minister John Howard (1996-2007) shifted the focus of national memory back to World War I and to a more traditional embrace of the past Anglo–Australian strategic relationship, another officially-funded pilgrimage of veterans visited PNG in 1998, accompanied by the Minister for Defence Industry, Science and Personnel, Bronwyn Bishop. Moreover, the Howard government approved the building of a major new memorial at Isurava, the point of the Kokoda Track where Australian infantry delayed the Japanese advance in late August 1942 and where an Australian private, Bruce Kingsbury, had won a posthumous Victoria Cross.

The planning for the Isurava memorial was not confined to the level of government. It owed much to the agency of domestic stakeholders that the Australian government had to accommodate when managing its emerging heritage diplomacy. As was the case with the commemorative development of Hellfire Pass on the Thai–Burma railway in the 1980s and 1990s (Beaumont 2012) and the discovery of the missing of the 1916 Battle of Fromelles on the Western Front (Lindsay 2008), much of the drive to protect the Track’s heritage came ‘from below’: veterans’ associations, volunteer organisations and tourist operators. Among them was Ross Bastiaan, a periodontist from Melbourne who from the early 1990s took upon himself the role of planting bronze plaques on battlefields of significance to Australians around the world. In the mid-1990s he installed a Kokoda Memorial Arch at Owers’ Corner, and a series of plaques at Milne Bay and along the Track (Australian Bronze Commemorative Plaques 2015).

Other stakeholders, in the case of the Isurava Memorial, were the 2/14th Australian Infantry and 39th Australian Militia Associations. Veterans from these units visited Isurava in 1998 and 2000, with a message for the local villagers that mirrored their government’s mix of heritage conservation and development: the villagers needed ‘to become more aware of the relevance of the events of 1942’ to Australians and recognise that local ‘custodianship of the site’ could create ‘sustainable tourism for themselves and future generations’. The veterans’ efforts were facilitated by an ex-patriot Australian living in PNG, who had developed ‘a strong relationship’ with the Biage people who occupy villages along the northern section of Track from Templeton’s Crossing to Kokoda.
When finally completed in 2002, the Isurava memorial was positioned dramatically overlooking the approaches to the village. It took the form of four Australian black granite pillars inscribed with the words 'courage', 'endurance', 'mateship', and 'sacrifice'. These words were selected initially by employees of the Department of Veterans’ Affairs, but they are now embedded in contemporary national discourse as representing the qualities of 'Anzacs', not just at Kokoda but in many other battles and peacekeeping operations. The same nationalistic impulse was evident in John Howard’s speech at the memorial’s unveiling, when he expressed the hope that Isurava would ‘become a magnet for young Australians, like Gallipoli’ (Hawkins 2013, 5–6). The PNG Prime Minister Michael Somare (2002–2011), however, presented an alternative transnational conception of the memorial, arguing that the battle of Kokoda ‘has forged a special bond between Australia and Papua New Guinea’. In effect, he was imagining the Kokoda Track as a ‘bridge between nations, whereby connections from the past are signalled as the basis for future cooperation’ (Winter 2015, 1010).

Managing war tourism

After the unveiling of the Isurava memorial, the focus of heritage diplomacy shifted from memorialisation to managing the huge growth in war tourism that the Australian interest in the Track was generating. In 2001 some 76 trekkers walked the Track; by 2005 this had risen to 2374, and by 2007 to 5117 (KTA 2008). The trekkers were overwhelmingly Australian and came from diverse cohorts: military enthusiasts and others inspired by a plethora of popular publications on Kokoda (including Brune 1991, 2003; Ham 2004; Lindsay 2002); sporting teams intent on proving their physical prowess and generating *esprit de corps* by conquering the challenging heights of the Track, sometimes as a marathon; and tours of school children being socialised to remember that ‘We are here today, because they were here before us’ (Kokoda School Treks 2015).

This growth of trekking generated a plethora of heritage management issues. Firstly, it exposed the expectation on the part of many Australian stakeholders that the Track be preserved in its entirety. The nature of the trekking experience – with its emphasis on reliving the hardship, endurance and mateship of World War II soldiers – demanded that not just key battle sites, such as Kokoda, Isurava, Eora Creek, Brigade Hill, Imita Ridge and Owers’ Corner, be retained as sites of memory. Rather, a whole corridor of land, through which the multiple tracks used by soldiers and carriers during the war had passed, acquired the status of the semi-sacred. This corridor, then, became a cultural route with ‘a worth over and above the sum of its elements, together with a dynamic quality through which it [gained] its cultural significance’ (ICOMOS 2015). However, Australian expectations of this cultural route were far greater than of many comparable sites overseas. The Australian Western Front Remembrance Trail, for example, developed for the centenary of World War I, lists only twelve sites (Australians on the Western Front, 2015), while commemoration of Australian prisoners of war who died on the 415-kilometre Thai–Burma railway in 1943–1945 has focused on two locations in Thailand, a dramatic cutting known as Hellfire Pass and the IWGC cemetery at Kanchanaburi (Beaumont 2013).

This expansive – even excessive – definition of heritage on the Kokoda Track made clashes with the local landowners almost inevitable. As with sites, like Angkor, Cambodia, that are covered by World Heritage legislation, Australians were prioritising the ‘traditional’ and ‘a landscape aesthetic which carefully monitors and defines the validity of any “modern” intrusion’ (Winter 2007, 12–13). Yet, the local village communities along the Track, in a country which is ‘one of the poorest countries in Asia and indeed the world’ and where rural poverty is estimated to be 41.3% (UNDP 2015), naturally wanted and needed social and economic development. For them, the Track’s importance lay not in its military heritage values but in its commercial potential. On a number of occasions when they deemed the commercial returns to be insufficient, they exercised such power as they had by closing the Track (Fox 2009a; Gridneff 2009): in effect exploiting it as a heritage ‘pawn’ (Kersel and Luke 2015, 2873 and 2949/9741).

Finally, increased trekking brought, as war tourism does everywhere, problems of environmental and heritage degradation. Among these were the disposal of trekker’s waste along the Track, the
defacing and decay of memorials and – perhaps even more serious – the souveniring of such war relics as remained in the dense and largely unpopulated jungle.

These management issues demanded a coordinated response and a recognition on the part of the two governments that ‘heritage policy that neglects the local has a high likelihood of failure’ (Kersel and Luke 2015, 2947/9741). In 2003 the Kokoda Track Authority (KTA) was created, a statutory body based in the capital Port Moresby but with representation from local governments along the Track. Its role was to manage access to the Track by trekking companies and to ensure that the benefits of trekking were fed back into local communities through the charging of trekking fees. However, without a budget allocation for recurrent expenses from the national government, or the promised funds being provided the Oro and Central Province governments, the KTA resorted to funding its recurrent expenses from trekking fees. In 2007 some 50% of such fees were thus expended. Inevitably, this became ‘a sore point’ with the landowners along the Track (KTA 2008; Nelson 2008, 3). In addition, there were serious issues with corruption and ‘excessive allowance and claims paid to certain management committee members and their associates’ within the KTA (Gridneff 2008; Ogilvie 2009).

By 2007 the KTA had to be placed under Australian administration, a neo-colonial solution that ran in difficulties when death threats and demands for money forced the chief executive, Annette Dean, to resign after only five months in the role (Lonergan 2009). Under her successor, Rod Hillman, a process of major reform was initiated. Advertising itself as ‘Managing the Track with Trust, Respect and Pride’, the KTA returned some trekking fees to local communities along the Track, the first time this had happened. It also introduced a code of conduct and a system of licencing for commercial tour operators (Garrett 2009; KTA, nd). Meanwhile professional development for local staff prepared the ground for the transfer of senior leadership of the KTA back to Papua New Guineans in 2011.

**Development vs. heritage**

However, if the KTA eventually succeeded in managing tourism more effectively, a new threat to the Track’s heritage emerged in the form of potential resource exploitation. An Australian mining company, Frontier Resources sought a renewal of its licence to explore for gold and copper at Mt Kodu, east of the Track and south of Menari. For Australian trekkers this posed a serious, if as yet only potential, threat to the Track’s physical heritage. Even if, as were suggested, the main Track was protected from the impact of mining by an exclusion zone some 2–3 km wide (KTA 2008), mining could well leave scars on the vistas seen from the Track. Even worse, mining exploration might disturb some remains of World War II soldiers.

For the local landowners, however, mining offered the prospect of significant royalties: estimates in the press (possibly exaggerated) were as high as $100 million over 10 years. This promised to be far more than could ever be gained by supporting trekkers, or even by Australian development aid (Gridneff 2009). As a spokesman for a local land group at Kodu said, ‘Everybody is for it and we think it is the only opportunity to change our lifestyle’ (Le May 2008). Hence, when negotiations about renewing the Frontier Resources’ licence dragged on, the landowners in the Mount Kodu area closed the Track to trekkers in February 2008. Protesting villagers carried placards stating that ‘Rudd wants Fuzzy Wuzzy Angels to live in perpetual poverty’. The managing director of Frontier Resources, meanwhile, declared that to stop mining was to keep the Koiari in ‘a cultural zoo’. They did not want to be ‘bag carriers’ for foreign trekkers for the rest of their lives (Nelson 2008, 2–3).

Like a more famous instance of heritage protection, the building of the Aswan Dam in Egypt, this was a clear instance of ‘the uneasy relationship between heritage protection and what was considered to be the needs of development’ (Kersel and Luke 2015, 4916/9741). In the event, the exploration licence for Frontier Resources was not renewed. However, this was not so much due to the lobbying on the part of the Australian government about protecting the Track’s military heritage values. Instead, it was attributable to the PNG government having its own interest in protecting the natural environment of the Track. Rain falling in the Owen Stanley Range drains into the Brown River, which the PNG government has identified as a source of future power and drinking water for Port Moresby, a city which
has rainfall for only seven to eight months of the year. Given the environmental catastrophe resulting from the Ok Tedi gold and copper mine in Western PNG – a project which profoundly polluted a river system on which numerous villages depended – the PNG government had every reason to consider the security of the Brown River water supply as a national priority which transcended any putative developments from mining in the vicinity of the Track.

There was thus that convergence of interests between the PNG and Australian governments which is essential to effective heritage diplomacy. However, the local PNG landowners obviously needed compensation for the loss of mining royalties, if they were not to block access to Australian trekkers in the future. Hence, in April 2008 the two governments signed a more ambitious bilateral agreement than the earlier Kokoda Trail Development Programme. Under this Joint Understanding (Australian Government 2008) they committed themselves: to preserve the values (historic, natural and environmental) of the Kokoda Track; to 'maintain the integrity of the Track and the special qualities of the trekking experience which has become an important rite of passage for many Australians'; to work cooperatively to improve the livelihoods of the local landowners and communities; to protect the water catchment in the Owen Stanley Range as a future power and water supply for Port Moresby; to maximise the potential forest carbon benefits; and to seek international recognition for the cultural and biodiversity values of the Owen Stanley Range. Under the resulting Kokoda Initiative, the Australian government committed $14.9 million to development projects for villages along the Track and to improved maintenance of the Track. Over the next few years multiple aid projects were initiated: including the creation of microbusinesses and the improvement of basic services such as water, sanitation, health, education and transport in the villages along the Kokoda Track corridor. Joint planning for a Master Plan for the Brown River Catchment was also begun; while schemes for volunteers to work on local development projects, such as ongoing track maintenance and conservation, were initiated (KTA 2009). After 2 years the Joint Understanding was renewed in 2010, for the next 5 years (Australian Government 2015a).

With the Joint Understanding, the Australian government also offered PNG technical assistance for a feasibility study into a World Heritage nomination for the Owen Stanleys. In 2006 the PNG government had submitted a tentative World Heritage listing, based largely on biodiversity, for the Owen Stanleys, the Kokoda Track, and six other sites (Garrett 2008). However, as has been shown, to this point discussions about the Tracks’ heritage had been conducted with little reference to international heritage conventions. Now, in a significant widening of the heritage potential of the Track, the world heritage framework became, if only to a limited degree, ‘a mechanism for bilateral relations’ (Winter 2015, 1010).

The Joint Understanding signalled a recognition by Australia that extra-territorial heritage could be managed only if all hints of neo-imperialism and hubris were replaced with a genuine transnational partnership with the host country – a lesson which it had also learned in relation to Gallipoli. After some clumsy attempts by the Howard government to list Gallipoli on Australia’s National List – a proposal which the Turkish government naturally saw as an infringement of its sovereignty (Sydney Morning Herald 2005) – the Australian Government had created in 2007 a rather peculiar List of Overseas Places of Significance to Australia (LOPSA 2015). This listed not just Gallipoli but the Kokoda Track and the Oxford laboratory of the Australian who shared the Nobel Prize for the discovery of penicillin, Howard Florey. This was seen as a way of giving overseas sites symbolic recognition ‘in a way that is respectful of the rights and sovereignty of other nations’ (LOPSA 2015); but it was clear that the rhetoric of LOPSA could never replace respectful diplomacy as a means of providing protection for Kokoda and other extra-territorial heritage.

For PNG, meanwhile, the Joint Initiative reflected both a gain in development aid and a new willingness to reimagine ‘ownership’ of the Track. Affirming this, the 2009 PNG Minister Charles Abel walked the Track in 2009, the first PNG minister to do so: ‘this attitude of neglect is going to change’, he said. ‘This is our track and we must take ownership of [it]’ (KTA 2009).

Ironically, no sooner this new framework of transnational cooperation been put in place, than the trekking industry whose interests it had been devised to protect went into decline. This owed something
to the fact that in 2009 four trekkers died, two in the same week in April and another two, some eight days apart in September and October. In addition, in August 2009 a plane carrying nine Australian tourists crashed north of Isurava. The Australian government, which had already been collaborating with PNG and tour operators on a Kokoda Transport Study, responded by committing funding to a Kokoda Track Safety Package, which included upgrading of the airstrips along the track and improved radio communications (Garrett and Abel 2009, 2010).

Still, the illusion of many aspiring Australian ‘pilgrims’ that the Kokoda Track was a slightly more rigorous version of the Camino de Santiago were shattered. The trekking industry continued to decline (Curtin University 2012, 4), with, by one estimate, the numbers of Australians trekking in 2011 being 48% below 2008 (Lynn 2012). The popular impression of PNG being a place of violence and corruption was then reinforced in 2013 when a brutal attack was made on the porters of an Australian party trekking on another walking trail, the Black Cat Track (Fox 2013).

Shared memories

The Kokoda Initiative is now billed as the ‘a powerful symbol of the goodwill and enduring relationship between the two Countries’ (Australian Government 2015b). It was renewed for a further term in September 2015, a year in which PNG became the largest recipient of Australian development aid (some $477.4 million in 2015–2016) (Lowy Institute 2015). However, if the Kokoda Track continues to be protected via this agreement, the consensus underpinning this heritage diplomacy is perhaps more fragile than it seems. For one thing, like all diplomacy, it is an agreement between governments, not between sub-state domestic stakeholders who have some power to contest the decisions of their leaders. Lobby groups in Australia, for example, are prone to assume the role of self-appointed guardians of Australia’s war heritage, protesting whenever the integrity of the Kokoda Track seems threatened.13 The PNG landowners, meanwhile, who have inalienable rights to their land, can still disrupt access to trekkers, should they choose. It is possible that they may conclude in the future that the benefits of war tourism and Australian development aid do not compensate them adequately for the loss of potential mining royalties or revenue from logging.

This is particularly the case since the economic benefits to the landowners accruing from tourism on the Kokoda Track are modest. In 2011 the Total Direct Economic Value (TDEV) of trekking on the Track was estimated to be A$15.275 million. But only 36% of this accrued to PNG, of which some 12% (or A$1.83 million) went to the villagers along the Track (for porters and other goods). Another third of the TDEV was retained by travel operators in Australia, and a further third by international airlines such as Qantas and Air PNG (Curtin University 2012, 10). The potential for revenue to increase by means of, say, a growth in the trekking industry, is not great, given that this experience is restricted to tourists who are very physically fit and have the capacity to cover the considerable expenses and devote up to nine days to the trek. Hence, the Kokoda Track might be seen, in Kersel and Luke words (2015, 3007/9741), as a heritage contact zone, which forms ‘a lopsided space where the periphery comes to win some small monetary and strategic advantage, but where the center ultimately gains, both in power and influence’. That said, the landowners along the Track do get some benefits from aid projects under the Kokoda Initiative, although the political value of this is diminished by the fact that some 75% of them now live in Port Moresby. They do not actually enjoy the improvements in education and health resulting from the Kokoda Initiative.14

It has become clear to both governments, therefore, that, if the intergovernmental commitment to the Track is to be durable, the PNG landowners need to value the Track’s heritage for more than its commercial benefit. It needs to become part of their own local history, speaking to a memory of the past that Papuan New Guineans, in some ways, share with Australian trekkers. A number of strategies have been put in place to facilitate this change. One is what might called the ‘reinvention’ of the Fuzzy Wuzzy Angel as a contemporary identity. This moniker was bestowed on local porters and carriers during World War II, and became part of an enduring myth in Australia which depicted Papuans and New Guineans as willing and loyal supporters of the Australian war effort. In reality, many carriers
were coerced into providing their services during the war; some deserted and others suffered harsh punishment and physical abuse. In the 1990s some carriers raised the issue of financial compensation for their service, but the Australian government argued that carriers had been paid during the war and that compensation was not normally paid to civilians.\textsuperscript{15}

However, in 2009 the Australian government offered symbolic compensation through a new Fuzzy Wuzzy Angel commemorative medallion, which it has bestowed on surviving carriers and their descendants. From a cynical perspective this might be seen as a perpetuation of neo-imperialism, a superimposition on PNG memory of ‘a colonialist construct’ (Rogerson 2012). However, it seems clear that the Fuzzy Wuzzy Angel narrative is now also part of a process of national identity formation within PNG. For country that struggles with profound divisions between its multiple tribal groups, and has a weak sense of the nation, wartime service can be constructed as an occasion on which people from across the land – the majority of the wartime carriers did not come from the region of the Track (Nelson 2008, 5) – worked together on a common project.\textsuperscript{16} Just as the shared suffering of different ethnic groups under the Japanese occupation has been evoked in the construction of modern Singaporean identity, so the Fuzzy Wuzzy Angel offers a unifying narrative of ‘an embryonic, multiracial, nation-in-waiting’ (Blackburn and Hack 2012, 9). The modern PNG Army, meanwhile, can claim, without undue contrivance, a foundational narrative in the wartime record of the Papuan Infantry Battalion, founded in 1940, and the 3850 PNG soldiers who served during the Pacific war. Of these some 928 died (Our Spirit, 2014). In Kersel and Luke’s words, then, the PNG government can appropriate the colonial past as ‘part of the nation’s history, and so the heritage created during that period stands as testament to the combined works of native and coloniser groups’ (2015, 5123/9741).

As a result the PNG government now celebrates Fuzzy Wuzzy Angel Day on 3 November, the day the Australian flag was raised again over Kokoda in 1942. Although the first commemoration, in 2009, was cancelled for lack of funds (Fox 2009b), later years have seen gatherings of up to two thousand people at Kokoda, with sports teams, singing groups, choirs and band and Australian trekkers celebrating the day (KTA 2015). Meanwhile, according to one (admittedly Australian) informant, the people of PNG view being a Fuzzy Wuzzy Angel as ‘a badge of pride’.\textsuperscript{17}

This place of World War II in local PNG memory is also being affirmed by an oral history project launched in 2013 as part of the bilateral Kokoda Initiative (Australian Government 2015c). Entitled \textit{Voices from the War: Papua New Guinean stories of the Kokoda Campaign} (Kokoda Initiative 2016), its first 70 interviews were with men and women of the Kokoda Track region. The voices captured spoke mainly of personal, family and local memories, but there was one who identified a lineage between the Fuzzy Wuzzy Angels of the war years and today’s carriers for tourists along the Track. For another informant, World War II formed part of a narrative of the protection of his own environment: ‘My grandfather was one of them who … help the Australian Army and the Americans to protect our land. Especially our land so that we could live safe now … my grandfather was one of them who defended our resources from World War Two so as to be secure, from others who would come and will destroy the environment or something like that’ (Kokoda Initiative 2016, 38).

The second stage of this oral history will incorporate Papua New Guineans from across the country, the message being that it is not just the Kokoda Track and memories of 1942 that are part of the nation’s history, but also the experiences of villagers in other regions of the country, and their memories of later years of the war, 1943–1945 (personal communication, Mark Nizette, Port Moresby).

\textbf{Conclusion}

The protection of the heritage of the Kokoda Track in the past two decades is a testament to the efficacy of bilateral diplomacy as a means of managing extra-territorial heritage. The competing interests of Australian and Papua New Guinea stakeholders have been managed and contained through the identification by the two governments of common interests, and the linking of heritage conservation with the developments needs of the host country. Perhaps, it could be argued that this success is possible only because the relationship between the two states is imbalanced, asymmetrical, and in
some residual senses, neo-colonial. Yet, although PNG has a continuing dependence on Australian development aid, and its independence has been described as ‘a work in progress’ (Denoon 2005, 197), the evidence of the public record, and private communications, indicates that Australian politicians and officials are acutely aware of the need to avoid hubris in their negotiations over the Track. On the contrary, there has been a 20-year commitment to capacity building, via the Kokoda Track Authority and the training of villagers in providing services along the Track. The Kokoda Track, therefore, is better seen as a case in which we can ‘read the power relations of collaboration in terms of mutual gain and self-interest’ (Winter 2015, 998).

Moreover, it seems that although the Kokoda Track continues to have more significance for many Australians than it does for Papua New Guineans, recent efforts to construct a shared memory of World War II mean that it is no longer a simple case of the imposition of Australian memory on its former colony. Memories of World War II will always remain asymmetrical, and Australians have a reverence towards the Track that few, if any local people express, but there is now a stronger sense of shared ‘ownership’ at the local and national levels in PNG. The extra-territorial heritage of Australia is acquiring something of the character of a Papua New Guinean heritage; and there are no signs that the memories of the Kokoda Track have reached a point where they will ‘be allowed to fade and memorialization end’ (Logan and Reeves 2009, 4).

Significantly for our understanding of heritage diplomacy, almost all of these developments have occurred within the framework of bilateral diplomacy. If the bid for World Heritage listing of the Owen Stanley Range progresses, it may be that the world heritage legislative framework will play a greater role in shaping the bilateral negotiations and national conservation practices. But even if this bid were to be successful, it is unlikely that it will be the primary instrument through which the military values of the Track are guaranteed: for the simple reason that the Track cuts across the Owen Stanley Range rather than following its spine. Hence, portions of the cultural route so valued by Australians will fall outside any zone that might be protected by World Heritage inscription. Moreover, as the wanton destruction of heritage of global significance in recent years has shown, ‘Local voices and aspirations unfortunately do not frequently coincide with the interests of global heritage discourses.’ (Ndoro and Wijesuriya 2015, 5276/9741). Hence, although a World Heritage listing of the Owen Stanleys would strengthen the hand of the PNG government in managing any expectations on the part of local landowners about commercial exploitation of the region, for the foreseeable future, the protection of the Kokoda Track’s heritage will continue to rely on heritage diplomacy at the bilateral level.

Notes

1. There has been an ongoing, and energetic, debate about which is the preferred term: Kokoda Track or Kokoda Trail. I have followed James (2009) in using Track.
2. H.C. Dowsett, Military History Section, Albert Park, to Secretary, Commonwealth War Graves Commission, 8 July 1960, AWM 113 16/1/1, Australian War Memorial (AWM). For further details see 3DRL 6643, Series 2, wallet 68/141; AWM54 485/2/4 and 485/2/9, AWM.
3. Port Moresby Mission to Canberra, 30 January 1995, Department of Veterans’ Affairs (DVA), file 95058. This and later cited DVA files were viewed under a Special Access application.
6. Quoted in DVA file 951014.
7. ‘Commemorating the Kokoda Tradition: A Proposal for the Establishment of a Sustainable Memorial to the Sacrifices made in the Defence of Australia During 1942’, supplied privately to author by John Rennie, Port Moresby.
8. The ex-patriot was John Rennie, a former Victorian Police Inspector and adviser to the Royal Papua New Guinea Constabulary Fraud Squad, who walked the Track on multiple occasions.
9. In addition to the main memorial, ten information panels (including two in the Tok Pisin language) have been installed.
11. Rod Hillman, personal communication, 25 June 2010. According to Hillman, some 25% of the fees in 2009 were distributed to fourteen wards along the Track.
12. The original Kokoda Initiative document is no longer readily accessible on the web. A copy was provided to the author at a Kokoda Initiative stakeholders’ forum conduct by the Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts.
13. One of the most prominent is Charlie Lynn, who established a tour company Adventure Kokoda in 1991 and has led 65 expeditions since then (Adventure Kokoda http://www.kokodatreks.com/aboutus/index.cfm). Lynn was also a Member of the NSW Legislative Council, 1995–2015.
15. The issue of compensation was raised during Keating’s 1992 visit and at the 1994 PNG – Australian ministerial forum: Grant Thompson, Australian High Commission, Port Moresby to Minister DVA, 8 June 1995, DVA file 951014.
16. I owe this insight to Mark Nizette, Port Moresby.

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