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DARIO DI ROSA

ABSTRACT

Scholarship on the Indigenous experience of World War II has justly focused on recording accounts of direct witnesses of that period. Such a sense of urgency, at least in Papua New Guinea, has led to the neglect of areas of the country that, though not directly affected by the war, were invested in the war effort by providing labour and soldiers. Communities residing in those areas recall stories of their war heroes as key figures for the liberation of the country and, ultimately, its current adherence to 'Western values'. Through an analysis of the moral claims that those peripheral stories entail, in this article I suggest potential directions for the study of narratives of World War II that move beyond 'the era of the witness'.

Key words: Historical consciousness, social memory, Pacific War, Papua New Guinea, recognition

Pacific historians and anthropologists in the past three decades have conducted invaluable research on the local experiences of the Pacific War. The aim of such research was to recover Islanders' experiences and perceptions of the war itself, as well as to uncover the impact that World War II (hereinafter WWII) in the Pacific had on local communities in understanding their place in the wider world.¹ Recording the voices of direct witnesses of those years has been of paramount concern. Until recently, such scholarship had followed the steps of what could be termed, after the title of Annette Wieviorka's seminal work on the role of testimony in Holocaust

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¹ See the contributions in the following collections: Geoffrey M. White and Lamont Lindstrom, eds, *The Pacific Theater: Island Representations of World War II* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1989); Geoffrey M. White, ed., *Remembering the Pacific War* (Honolulu: Centre for Pacific Islands Studies, University of Hawai'i at Manōa, 1991); Lin Poyer, Suzanne Falgout, and Laurence Marshall Carucci, eds, *The Typhoon of War: Micronesian Experiences of the Pacific War* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001).

studies, ‘the era of the witness’.² I contend that the epistemic role of ‘the witness’ has been too easily taken for granted in such historiography, leading to some distortions that are consequential given the gradual disappearance, due to age, of the last direct witnesses and protagonists of the Pacific War. In Papua New Guinea (hereinafter PNG), the main geographical focus of this article, the threshold between the era of the witness and its end was marked by the deaths of Ovoro Indiki and Ben Moide, respectively, in 2013 and 2014, which according to Jonathan Ritchie ‘underlined the point that action needed to be undertaken soon to record the memories of the War generation’.³

What I set out to do in this article is to reflect on the existing literature on Islanders’ perspectives on WWII from the vantage point of my ethnographic engagement with Kerewo speakers in the Kikori area of the Gulf Province.⁴ Between 2013 and 2015 I worked closely with Kerewo speakers in what was once the Delta District, paying attention to the politics of memory and representation surrounding their colonial past, and especially the death of James Chalmers of the London Missionary Society (LMS) in 1901. What emerged forcefully from my research is that Kerewo people use their colonial past to articulate very current concerns about their place within the nation-state and the wider world in general.⁵ The narratives pertaining to WWII presented in this article are the peak of a broader narrative arc which, according to Kerewo people, has seen their progressive displacement from a central historical role to a marginal one. This is made patently evident to them by the lack of development despite their falling under the Papua New Guinea Liquefied Natural Gas Project (hereinafter PNG LNG), which has raised enormous expectations since the 2000s.⁶ As will be discussed in the latter part of this article, it is this wider context that should be kept in mind when researching stories of WWII in the post-witness era.

² Annette Wiewiorka, *The Era of the Witness* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006).

³ Jonathan Ritchie, ‘Papua New Guineans Reconstructing Their Histories: The Pacific War Revisited’, *Oceania* 87, no. 2 (2017): 130.

⁴ Although my ethnographic research was conducted with Kerewo people residing in Kikori town and the villages distributed along the Kikori River landscape, I had several opportunities to interact with their neighbours (Kairi, Kibiri, and Porome). Kairi, Kerewo, Kibiri, and Porome perceive themselves as ‘Papuan’ or ‘Kikorians’, in contrast to the ‘Highlanders’ coming mainly from the Southern Highlands region along the Moro–Kikori road (an infrastructure created for the PNG LNG’s own needs) who are increasingly part of the social space of Kikori; a demographic change not without tensions.

⁵ Dario Di Rosa, ‘Frustrated Modernity: Kerewo Histories and Historical Consciousness, Gulf Province, Papua New Guinea’ (PhD thesis, Australian National University, 2018).

⁶ In this article I use the term ‘modernity’ in the sense of an ideal generally associated with Europeans, a socially productive myth rather than an historically well-defined set of traits; James Ferguson, *Expectations of Modernity: Myths and Meanings of Urban Life on the Zambian Copperbelt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 1–6, 13–15; Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 113–14, 119–48.

THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF 'THE WITNESS'

In Western consciousness 'the witness' has come to hold a particular public moral function in the aftermath of WWII.⁷ As Wieviorka writes, 'the memory of the Holocaust has become, for better or worse, the definitive model for memory construction'⁸ and, as such, witnesses have acquired epistemic prominence as sources for historical work. Yet, the very history of the social production of 'the witness' poses problems directly relevant to the argument I put forward in this article; the ramifications of which pertain to the use of oral sources more generally. Wieviorka has shown how, following an initial period in which Jews in the Polish ghettos documented, in written form, events as they were happening as an act of intra-community transmission of memory,⁹ 'the witness' emerged as key to historical reconstruction of the Holocaust with the 1960 Eichmann trial. A televised event, the trial was an attempt by the Israeli state to consolidate international recognition as well as create internal cohesion in a population for the most part directly tied to the experience of persecution.¹⁰ From the 1970s onwards, the witness as bearer of history intersected with, in the United States and elsewhere, a culture increasingly focused on the individual, which in turn prompted an accumulation of records of survivors' experiences, turning them into living documents but also straightjacketing them in such a role.¹¹ It is the problematic equivalence of survivors' testimonies with documents that has tainted the historiographical reflection on the Holocaust. As Verónica Tozzi writes, one point we need to recognize is that 'The authority of testimony depends not upon the past experience of suffering but on the social purpose of communicating'.¹² Holocaust survivors' testimonies are not, however, simply used to reconstruct matter-of-factly what happened inside the concentration camps, nor to provide a perspective 'from below' as happens with Pacific Islanders' testimonies of their experiences. If 'an entanglement exists between the purpose of obtaining knowledge of some event or experience and the moral message that could be

⁷ An excellent summary is Michal Givoni, *The Care of the Witness: A Contemporary History of Testimony in Crises* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

⁸ Wieviorka, *The Era of the Witness*, xvi. Though this is not the place to elaborate the relationship between the Holocaust and colonial genocides, for an interesting articulation of how the Holocaust as 'the definite model for memory construction' has worked in a Pacific context, I point the reader to David B. MacDonald, 'Daring to Compare: The Debate about a Maori "Holocaust" in New Zealand', *Journal of Genocide Research* 5, no. 3 (2003): 383–403.

⁹ As signified by the use of Yiddish that ultimately confined such knowledge to a local dimension amid the rubble of the Yiddish communities of Eastern Europe. See Wieviorka, *The Era of the Witness*, 24–40.

¹⁰ Wieviorka, *The Era of the Witness*, 57–9.

¹¹ See Wieviorka, *The Era of the Witness*, 126–32 especially.

¹² Verónica Tozzi, 'The Epistemic and Moral Role of Testimony', *History and Theory* 51, no. 1 (2012): 12, my emphasis.

extracted from the revealed knowledge’,¹³ then, as I argue below, it is our informants’ intended moral message that we need to take into account when writing about the past.

THE SPATIAL DISTRIBUTION OF NARRATIVES

Returning to the case of the Pacific War in PNG, the focus on direct witnesses has, understandably, led to privileging places that were ‘hot-spots’ of the conflict, whether battlegrounds or proximate to important strategic sites. The Kokoda Track and the Buna–Gona beachheads are two of these ‘hot’ locations, which hold a particular place in the historiography of the Pacific War as constitutive of Papua New Guinean and Australian entangled national histories.¹⁴ For a long time at the centre of Australian and American military history, these sites are also the research ground for the quite recent ‘PNG in World War II’ project, coordinated by Jonathan Ritchie with the assistance of the Papua New Guinea National Museum and Art Gallery and co-sponsored by the Australian government.¹⁵ The context in which those memories are recorded is steeped in the politico-economic stakes involved in the complex entanglement of Australia’s national(ist) history and the ongoing process of making the Kokoda Track, and the Owen Stanley Ranges which it traverses, a World Heritage site.¹⁶

The wealth of coordinated research in the Central and Oro provinces, which to the best of my knowledge has no equivalent elsewhere in the country,¹⁷ reinforces some of the divisions inherited by the separate administration of the Territory of Papua and the Mandated Territory of New Guinea. But the north–south divide is

¹³ Tozzi, ‘The Epistemic and Moral Role of Testimony’, 6, my emphasis.

¹⁴ Hank Nelson, ‘Gallipoli, Kokoda and the Making of National Identity’, *Journal of Australian Studies* 21, no. 53 (1997): 157–69; Hank Nelson, ‘Kokoda: The Track from History to Politics’, *Journal of Pacific History* (hereinafter *JPH*) 38, no. 1 (2003): 109–27; Hank Nelson, ‘Kokoda: And Two National Histories’, *JPH* 42, no. 1 (2007): 73–88; Robert J. Foster, ‘Introduction: The Work of Nation Making’, in *Nation Making: Emergent Identities in Postcolonial Melanesia*, ed. Robert J. Foster (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 9–13; Ritchie, ‘Papua New Guineans Reconstructing Their Histories’.

¹⁵ See Ritchie, ‘Papua New Guineans Reconstructing Their Histories’.

¹⁶ On the UNESCO website it is currently listed under the ‘World Heritage List Nominations’, <https://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/5061/> (accessed 28 Feb. 2020). These observations in no way should be taken as criticism of the impressive effort at recording oral histories of World War II in Papua New Guinea that the project’s participants have undertaken since 2014.

¹⁷ This does not mean that a literature does not exist about other areas of the country. Moreover, the existing gap has been recently addressed through the ‘PNG Voices from the War’ project, supported by the Australian government in partnership with the PNG National Museum and Art Gallery and the provincial governments concerned, and the systematic recording of stories from Central, Milne Bay, Morobe, and New Ireland provinces. See <https://pngvoices.deakin.edu.au/> (accessed 6 Sep. 2021).

not the only existing line of fracture. In fact, the present-day Gulf and Western provinces, though not directly affected by the war, did supply soldiers, carriers, and labourers whose voices are less likely to be heard and recorded if geography is the implicit predominant criterion for collecting oral narratives.¹⁸ In the remainder of this article I will show how the uneven distribution of narratives pertaining to the war, for Kerewo speakers of the Kikori area, echoes the uneven opportunities to access development and socio-economic improvement.

Scholarship on the local experiences of WWII suggests that landscapes are often a good indicator of the 'hotness' of certain locations. For example, David Counts depicts the Lusi-Kaliai's landscape in West New Britain as littered with 'slowly decaying remainders of all the wealth used and left behind in the effort to dislodge Japanese forces'.¹⁹ The contrast with the Kikori landscape is stark. The wartime reports written about the Kikori area do not contain any of the scenes of devastation, fear, displacement, and misery of other areas touched directly by the conflict.²⁰ The armed conflict intervened in unusual and marginal forms within the Kikori landscape. In August 1943, work began on the construction of an airfield at Kikori, partly to replace 'emergency landing grounds ... available all along the coast as far as Goaribari Island', which were 'only available at low tide'.²¹ Quite ironically, in that same month an American P38 fighter aircraft was reported to have crashed near Ai'idio, a Kerewo village on the opposite bank of the western portion of Goaribari Island. On further inquiry it seemed that shortage of fuel caused the incident, as confirmed by the pilot when he was taken to Kikori Station.²² During our numerous trips up and down the Kikori's intricate riverine system, my interlocutors pointed out the location where this plane had come down. In 1945, further war debris emerged, this time not from the sky but from the sea, as two mines of unknown provenance showed up, once again, in the proximity of Ai'idio village. According to official records, other explosives cost the lives of five Goare villagers 'when they opened

¹⁸ It should be noted, parenthetically, that the Gulf and Western provinces are also the least ethnographically explored; see Bruce M. Knauft, *South Coast New Guinea Cultures: History, Comparison, Dialectic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 3–41, *passim*.

¹⁹ David Counts, 'Shadows of War: Changing Remembrance through Twenty Years in New Britain', in *The Pacific Theater: Island Representations of World War II*, ed. Geoffrey M. White and Lamont Lindstrom (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1989), 189.

²⁰ For an account of the diverse war experiences of people living in the Toaripi area, Hanuabada, and Butiban, see Neville K. Robinson, *Villagers at War: Some Papua New Guinean Experiences in World War II* (Canberra: Australian National University, 1981).

²¹ J.R. Foldi, Kikori Patrol Reports, Patrol no. 2 of 1943/44, 26 Aug. 1943, Gulf District vol. 26, Kikori Station, National Archives and Public Record Services of Papua New Guinea – Port Moresby (hereinafter National Archives of PNG), Accession 496. In this article I use the Patrol Reports digitized by the University of California San Diego Library available at: <https://library.ucsd.edu/dc/collection/bb30391860>.

²² This incident is reported in K.H. Ryan, Kikori Patrol Report no. 5 of 1943/44, 11 Aug. 1943; Kikori Patrol Report no. 6 of 1943/44, Sept. 1943; and the 'Intelligence Report' in Kikori Patrol Report no. 10 of 1943/44; all in Gulf District vol. 26, Kikori Station, National Archives of PNG, Accession 496.

and tampered with a box of grenades that were found on the shore', along with the fingers of a man who I met at Goare village on my very first visit to the Kikori area.²³ From a geographical point of view the Kikori River area is a highly decentred place for the military history of the Pacific War in Papua New Guinea, but its people are locally held as central to the war effort.

During my ethnographic research many Kikorians proudly spoke of Sergeant Samai (a Kairi man from Kopi village) and Sergeant Katue (a Kerewo) as their national war heroes. Both men were among the first to enlist in the Papuan Infantry Battalion (PIB): Samai with the serial number PN1 (Figure 1), and Katue registered as PN4 (Figure 2). Both acted as instructors for training PIB cadets.²⁴ Katue was later awarded the Military Medal, a point of pride for many Kerewo and a material sign of acknowledgement of their contribution to the war effort.²⁵ Moreover, many other Kikorians were working at the time in the plantations near Kerema and Port Moresby or were part of the Royal Papuan Constabulary.²⁶ If the Kikori landscape was geographically distant from the battlefields, some of its people were at the centre of the stage, and it is this tension between centre and periphery that the stories I collected during my fieldwork pushed to the forefront. In the next section I sketch the figure of Katue and his place in Kerewo historical consciousness.

KATUE AS NATIONAL HERO

Little is known from the colonial records about Katue Marowa of the Davadai *gu* (clan) of Goro village before he joined the colonial police force as an armed constable in the early 1930s.²⁷ Katue would have spent between six months and one year

²³ Ian A. Holmes, Kikori Patrol Reports, Report no. 5 of 1946/47, 20 Jan. 1947, Gulf District vol. 28, Kikori Station, National Archives of PNG, Accession 496; it should be noted that the previous records make no mention of a case of grenades, and this information was collected during a hearing for war compensation claims.

²⁴ Lahui Ako, *The Ben Moide Story: Nameless Warriors* (Port Moresby: University of Papua New Guinea Press, 2012), 40–42, 51.

²⁵ James Sinclair, *To Find a Path: The Life and Times of the Royal Pacific Islands Regiment, vol. 1, Yesterday's Heroes, 1885–1950* (Brisbane: Boolarong Publications, 1990), 298, 300. On the Papuan Infantry Battalion, see Don Barrett, 'The Pacific Islands Regiment', in *The History of Melanesia (Second Waigani Seminar)*, ed. Ken Inglis (Canberra: ANU; Boroko: University of Papua New Guinea, 1969), 493–502; Hank Nelson, 'As Bilong Soldia: The Raising of the Papuan Infantry Battalion in 1940', *Yagl-Ambu* 7, no. 1 (1980): 19–27.

²⁶ The impact of internal labour migration on the spatial distribution of the memories of war, if hard to assess, is seldom acknowledged.

²⁷ See August Kituai's account of Katue's career in *My Gun, My Brother: The World of the Papua New Guinea Colonial Police, 1920–1960* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1998), 194–5; note that Kituai gives Iokea village as Katue's place of origin, a name I have not encountered during my fieldwork. On the native police force's role in social change see August Kituai, 'Innovation and Intrusion: Villagers and Policemen in Papua New Guinea', *JPH* 23, no. 2 (1988): 156–66.



FIGURE 1: Bisiatabu, New Guinea 1944-05-23. Native troops of the Papuan Infantry Battalion participating in a training exercise on the Owen gun. Identified personnel are (left to right): 549 Private Inamere; 534 Avi-Havi; 381 Corporal Evaharia; Private Uhai; Private Etete; Sergeant Samai. Australian War Memorial, Canberra, Accession n. 073369. Reproduced with permission.

training in Port Moresby, shaping his physique for long patrols, learning English and Police Motu, and refining his aim with the issued .303 rifle, as part of his training.²⁸ In his capacity as an armed constable (AC), he was then selected for several patrols that took him across Papua. Katue distinguished himself during the famous Bamu–Purari patrol of 1936, led by Patrol Officer Ivan Champion. During this patrol the party's path was blocked by the Hegigio River; here

²⁸ For a detailed description of the recruits' training see Kituai, *My Gun, My Brother*, 85–109.

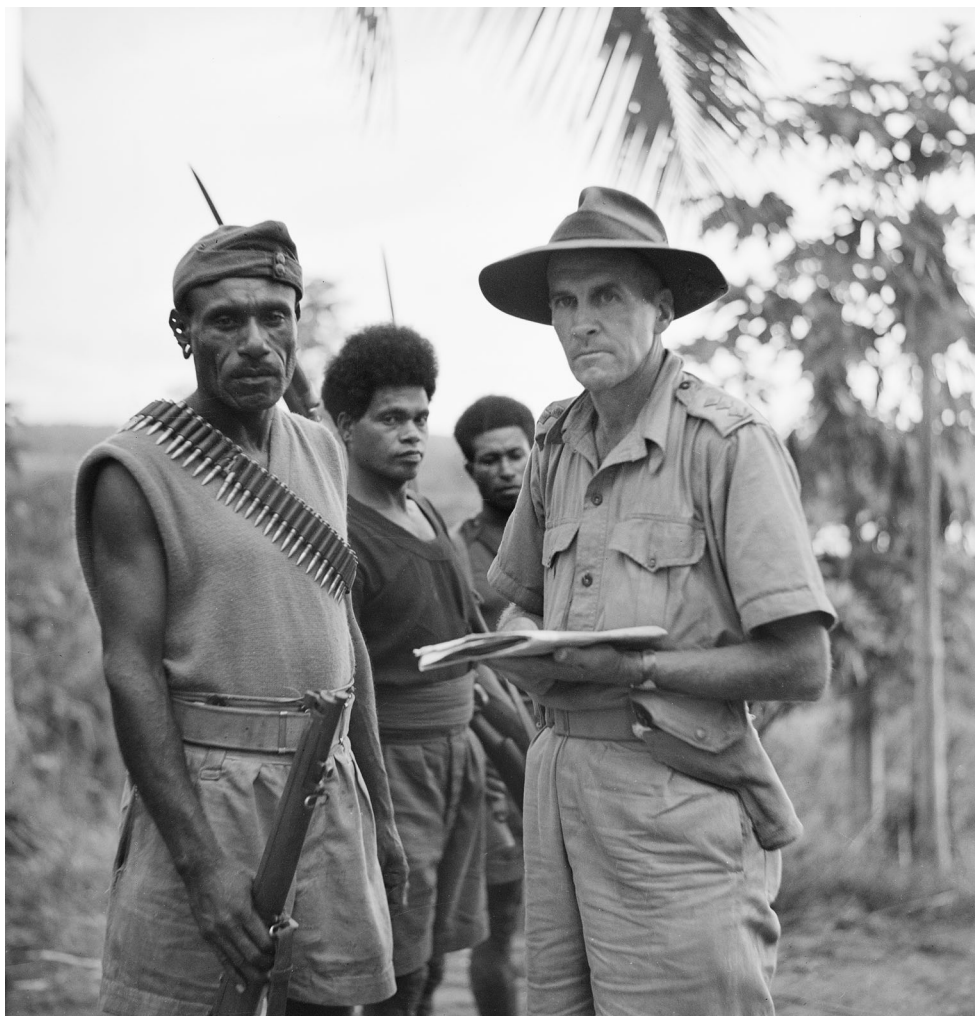


FIGURE 2: Thomas Fisher, photograph 'Waiwai, New Guinea. 1942-10. Captain T. Grahamslaw, ANGAU, briefing Sergeant-Major Katue of the Papuan Infantry Battalion and Native Police of the Royal Papuan Constabulary prior to their departure on a patrol'. Australian War Memorial, Canberra, Accession n. 127566. Reproduced with permission.

A.C. Katue tried to swim across with a line. He almost succeeded, but he was swept away in the roaring current at fifteen miles per hour and we gave him up for dead. But he got ashore unaided. It was a magnificent effort.²⁹

Katue's physical strength impressed Champion. George Johnston, a war correspondent for the Australian press during the Pacific War, later reported that Katue 'swam

²⁹ The Commonwealth of Australia, *Territory of Papua: Annual Report for the Year 1936-1937* (Canberra: Commonwealth Government Printer, 1937-38), 21; microfilm *Pacific Manuscript Bureau*, DOC 313, Reel 3.

a flooded river with a rope tied around his waist to save 3 white officers from certain death', winning him 'a Papua-wide reputation for valour as a police boy'.³⁰ Johnston's later version varies from Champion's more laconic account for *The Geographical Journal*: 'An attempt by AC Katue on the following day to swim across it was unsuccessful'.³¹ Yet, whether or not Katue had saved the lives of white officers is less important than noting how he became invested with an aura of heroism.

Not all reports about Katue depict him in a positive light. For instance, in late February 1942 Lieutenant B. W. Faithorn went on patrol in the Rigo subdistrict (in contemporary Central Province) to reassure villagers that, despite the war, there was a government in charge. In his remarks he considered this patrol timely as 'The natives were showing signs of restlessness and were under the impression that there was no Government', thus threatening the maintenance of law and order. Faithorn assured the people that 'There is a Government. A strong Government. An army Government'.³² During this patrol, Faithorn discovered that Sergeant Katue, while at Hula village (about 120 km east of Port Moresby) had illegally issued the local village constable with an order to shoot a village pig, and had also 'held "Court" and given a decision on a Civil "case"'.³³ Faithorn did not find Katue, who 'was out at KALO evidently rounding up plantation labourers', and so he reported the Kerewo man to the PIB Sergeant Major, adding in his report that he was of the opinion 'that Sgt. Katue is a menace and exercising a bad influence on natives when acting away from European supervision'.³⁴ Faithorn did find large quantities of rice and flour at Hula; he suspected that this food had been obtained illegally but – as he could not confirm his suspicion – took the villagers' word that they had paid for it.

Just a few months later in October 1942, the Australian press featured articles with titles which were in stark contrast with Faithorn's remarks: 'Black Warrior: Astonishing Exploits of Katue', 'Loyal Papuan Police Boy', and 'Sgt Katue: Papuan Hero'. George Johnston's report is worth quoting at length to appreciate the way in which Katue's actions were depicted to the Australian public and, later, received back in Papua and New Guinea when newspaper clippings began to circulate:

This is the story of Sgt Katue, a squat, broad-shouldered, well-muscled and coal black warrior of a Papuan force. Many of the native troops of this all-native unit [the PIB] have performed magnificently in the Papuan jungles since the Japanese landed 10 weeks ago. But none has a record comparable with that of fierce-faced Sgt Katue, who returned yesterday from more than 2 months

³⁰ George H. Johnston, 'Papuan Sergeant's Private War: Valour of Former Police-Boy', *The Argus*, 10 Oct. 1942, 3.

³¹ Ivan Champion, 'The Bamu-Purari Patrol, 1936', *The Geographical Journal* 96, no. 3 (1940): 203.

³² B.W. Faithorn, Rigo Patrol Report no. 1 of 1942/44, 28 Feb. 1942, 17 Mar. 1942, Central District, vol. 1.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*

patrolling in the mountain jungles. Stitched to the shoulders and sleeves of his stained khaki jacket was a mass of stripes, badges and regimental insignia taken from some of the 26 Japanese soldiers and marines whom Katue shot dead.³⁵

After stressing Katue's courage and efficacy behind enemy lines, as well as his ability to organize both the local population and his own troops against the Japanese soldiers while maintaining their welfare, Johnston's article concluded:

Katue, this loyal and brave Australian, grinned boyishly when I left him today and called after me: 'Me go out again quick time [...] This time me bring back stripes of Japanese general!' And it wouldn't surprise me if he did, because Sgt Katue of Papua is just the chap to do it.³⁶

The story recounted by Johnston was a piece of the mosaic that was building a new Australian image of the Papua New Guinean: that of the loyal native characterized as a 'fuzzy wuzzy angel'.³⁷ Johnston's narrative, inscribed in poorly preserved newspaper cuttings jealously kept by some of my interlocutors, also serves to confirm Kerewo lore about Katue, especially his remark to the journalist that he would take the Japanese general's stripes.

Katue was also regarded with respect by his own community. According to local stories, Katue and the other Kerewo who took part in battles were successful in their raids because they possessed *ebiha* – spirits residing inside their bodies that they acquired during their initiations, which granted supernatural powers such as hiding underground or inside trees, rendering them invisible to enemies.³⁸ As David Hanlon has pointed out, the incommensurability of the supernatural has to be taken seriously.³⁹ For Kerewo people *ebiha* are dangerous beings lying in the forest or waterways, and only the strongest men could master them without dying or receiving permanent harm. Kerewo warriors could be victorious over troops equipped with modern weapons only by resorting to their own sources of power.

The following story was recounted by Dauri Kisu, a Kerewo man who resides in PNG's capital city of Port Moresby where he has been involved, among other things, with the war veterans:

³⁵ Johnston, 'Papuan Sergeant's Private War'.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Hank Nelson, 'From Kanaka to Fuzzy Wuzzy Angel', *Labour History*, no. 35 (1978): 172–88.

³⁸ Among the many possible, a parallel can be found in August Kituai, 'The Involvement of Papua New Guinea Policemen in the Pacific War', in *The Pacific War in Papua New Guinea: Memories and Realities*, ed. Yukio Toyoda and Hank Nelson (Tokyo: Rikkyo University Centre for Asian Area Studies, 2006), 203.

³⁹ David L. Hanlon, 'Sorcery, "Savage Memories", and the Edge of Commensurability for History in the Pacific', in *Pacific Islands History: Journeys and Transformations*, ed. Brij V. Lal (Canberra: The Journal of Pacific History, 1992), 107–28.

Australia and New Zealand were outnumbered. Their first action was at Avara [Awala in Oro Province]. Captain Hitchcock gave the order to the PIB to go first; it was July 23 1942. They were the first to open fire. They won [the battle] and celebrated at Avara with a Kiwai dance. [...] They were gaining strength; they got strength out of the PIB, the army of this nation. The Japanese were already attacking [Imita] Ridge; in a day or so they would reach Port Moresby. [...] The Australians pushed them back only thanks to the PIB.

[...]

About 500 Japanese soldiers were carrying the Japanese marshall. At Gona [village] Katue decided to ambush them, and told so to his unit. It was Iamere who shot [the marshall]. [The Japanese commander] put his hands up and said 'Who is that boy? Come!', and [after asking for his name] he wrote it down in a book and gave it to Iamere. Then Katue shot them all. Katue took the general's uniform and on the same afternoon he was transported by the army Air Force to Australia. The newspaper said 'Katue the "Green Shadow" is in the general's uniform'. But then, when they wrote the story, the Australians hid this fact because they were the colonisers; they celebrated only their own exploits. It was a Papuan who shot the general! [...] After this the Japanese surrendered. They went to the enemy camp with a white flag and said: 'it's over, we don't want to fight against you anymore'. Japan surrendered and they signed [the peace treaty].⁴⁰

Among the narratives I recorded, Dauri's most explicitly links Kerewo to Australian and Papua New Guinean national histories. During his long residence in Port Moresby, where he worked as a magistrate, Dauri has been involved with war veterans and the celebrations of commemoration that have taken place over the years. The reference to the date 23 July is linked to the politics surrounding Papua New Guinea's own celebration of the war, for which 23 July (the date of the PIB's first action) is preferred as a national Remembrance Day over the Australian (and New Zealand) Anzac Day on 25 April, to mark a break in the two national histories after Independence.⁴¹ The use of the expression 'Green Shadow' is metonymic, as in Dauri's account Katue's deeds also stand for the contributions of Papuan soldiers as a whole. In fact, 'Green Shadow' is the English translation of the Japanese term *ryokuin* by which Japanese soldiers used to refer to Papuan soldiers, who they feared and respected.⁴² Dauri's explanation is similar:

⁴⁰ Interview with Dauri Kisu recorded at Samoa village (Gulf Province) on 17 Feb. 2014.

⁴¹ See Hank Nelson, 'Gallipoli, Kokoda and the Making of National Identity', *Journal of Australian Studies* 21, no. 53 (1997): 158; Nelson, 'Kokoda: And Two National Histories', 74–6.

⁴² G.M. Byrnes, *Green Shadows: A War History of the Papuan Infantry Battalion, 1 New Guinea Infantry Battalion, 2 New Guinea Infantry Battalion, 3 New Guinea Infantry Battalion* (Newmarket: G.M. Byrnes, 1989), 1.

A Japanese officer wrote ‘in Papua New Guinea we were fighting with ghosts’. They [the Japanese] couldn’t see our soldiers; they were using their *ebiha*. They would only see a shadow, a green shadow. They were expecting shots coming from the front, but they came from the rear instead.⁴³

Ben Moide also seems to have credited the nickname to Katue’s abilities, as the Papua New Guinean historian Lahui Ako writes:

Katue, for one, showed an ability to penetrate to the rear of the enemy lines on numerous occasions and come back with information. On several occasions, Katue had suddenly appeared in the midst of the dining enemy soldier and started hacking them with his machete. It was this uncanny ability to appear at will among the enemy that promoted this nickname [Green Shadows] among the Japanese.⁴⁴

Dauri’s account describes Iamere, a fellow Kerewo from Dubumba village, as instrumental to Katue’s success. When I asked for clarification of Iamere’s role, the answer reproduced the military hierarchy: ‘Iamere is a private. Katue is a sergeant; he gave the order when they ambushed [the Japanese]. Katue ordered him ‘go and hide there because that man [the general] will come this way; you look at me and, when I say so, you shoot’. According to Dauri, it was Katue’s own *ebiha* that told him of the Japanese movements and who to shoot.

Yet, among the majority of Kerewo adults residing along the Kikori River, the version that is considered most authoritative accords significantly more prestige to Iamere; he becomes the war hero who voluntarily stripped himself of his honours. The following transcript is from a longer interview that I conducted with Beamo Pari of Apeawa village, the adoptive son of Iamere:

I am the son of my father, Iamere, who resided with the mother who birthed me. He himself told me this story, the one that I’m telling. ‘Katue did not shoot the king [of the Japanese], it was me, Iamere, who did it. I was only a little boy, still *ohio* [unmarried], and so I said “I am still *ohio*, I don’t have a wife” and I gave the king’s numbers [military insignia] to Katue’. [The king] gave the book only to him [Iamere] and the king’s name was Hitler, the king of Japan. Iamere shot him on the thigh.

He hid with his *ebiha* inside a tree. The *ebiha* told him [Iamere] ‘They are coming from the front; let them through. Then another group will come with two flags, and a man will be riding horses; shoot him in the thigh. If you shoot him all the others will die’. That’s what the *ebiha* told him.

⁴³ Interview with Dauri Kisu, 17 Feb. 2014.

⁴⁴ Ako, *The Ben Moide Story*, 81.

They came, and the head of the convoy passed; then came the contingent in the middle, and the *ebiha* said 'Shoot this one'. As soon as he shot Hitler, the king, in the thigh all the [enemy] soldiers put their guns down and didn't move. 'Who are you? Come out, don't be afraid'; and so Iamere came out [of his hiding place]. The king said 'You shot me, I'll give you my numbers [military insignia]', and so he took off the insignia: his shirt, his hat, all he was wearing.

'Your name?'

'Iamere Banie'

The king himself wrote down the name in a book and gave it to Iamere. [...]

Katue heard the noise of guns but when he arrived everything was over. He [Katue] shot the king in the head.

Iamere, frightened, ran away. Katue came out [of the bush] and reached him.

[Iamere said] '*Nana* [older brother] I am scared'

[Katue replied] 'I shot the king dead'

'Is it true?'

'Yes'

And so Iamere gave Katue the king's shirt and hat.

Katue was dancing at the camp and the white people asked 'Katue, what's happening?'

'I shot the king dead', and so it was only his deeds that were celebrated, not Iamere's. Iamere shot the king. But only Katue's name was celebrated and so they gave him land, at Gabutu. Katue took a Hula wife, and so he resided at Aroma [Central Province], at Gabutu.

The issue of precedence and recognition can also be found in a narrative reported in Ako's biography of Ben Moide that displays striking similarities with the dynamic between Katue and Iamere. Here too we find a private who killed the enemy during an operation, taking the Japanese corporal's sword as trophy, and a superior, an Australian sergeant, taking credit for the successful operation; also in this case it was the higher-ranking officer who was awarded a military medal.⁴⁵ In both Dauri's and Beamo's accounts we see articulated the narrative trope of hierarchical precedence which seems to have circulated among PIB members. While Dauri's version credits the military hierarchy (thus giving prominence to Katue who, after all, is the only Kerewo man to be officially acknowledged), Beamo's version does so according to the Kerewo system of seniority. Iamere is an *ohio*, thus junior to

⁴⁵ Ako, *The Ben Moide Story*, 170–2; 221–2.

Katue, in the Kerewo system of initiation. As a person who has not gone through the necessary rituals to become a *dubu*, a man, Iamere was thus vulnerable to the secret knowledge (associated with sorcery) that Katue acquired during his initiation.

The two narrators also operate in two different social contexts. Dauri had been a magistrate in Port Moresby and still resides there. In the capital he became involved with Papuan war veterans and he felt it was his duty to promote their historical and moral claims, especially after Ben Moide, among the last surviving veterans, died in January 2014, just a month before we recorded the interview during Dauri's visit to Kikori. In contrast, Beamo's version is to be read in light of the local politics of secrecy within which the power and truthfulness of stories are to be understood. To know the real name of a person or a place is to have access to truth and its power. This became apparent to me on many occasions when I discussed this historical episode and its different versions. One interlocutor told me, in front of a large group of people all from the same village, that neither Katue nor Iamere accomplished the memorable deed of killing the Japanese leader (the 'king of Japan'); it was instead a man from their own village who took his life. On this occasion all agreed not to tell me more; they were concerned that if I were told more, my life might be endangered by *givari* (sorcery). Secrecy, as the anthropologist Roy Wagner has suggested, contains in itself the potential for creating and disentangling the constituted order of meaning. To keep secret the 'real' name of the person who killed the 'king of Japan' is to retain control over the story, but at the same time the restricted circulation of the true name risks the truthfulness of one's statement being rejected.⁴⁶ Despite the differences between Dauri's and Beamo's accounts, in the larger scheme of the Kerewo narrative arc of their own place in PNG history, what counts are the common elements, of which the most important is the claim that this action ended the war.

The figure of Hitler as the king of Japan is the very personification of the enemy defeated. Although the motif of the (usually unnamed) 'king of Japan' is common in Kerewo accounts, it is sometimes contested. For example, John Aitau, a Kerewo leader from Apeawa village, who served as a soldier during the Bougainville Crisis,⁴⁷ told me that the claim of killing Hitler is born out of an ignorance of history. For John, it was simply a high-ranking officer of the Japanese forces who was killed, but this does not change his opinion that Kerewo people contributed significantly to the ultimate victory of the Allies over their enemies. A parallel can be drawn with Deborah Bird Rose's discussion about the narratives of Northern Territory Aboriginal people about Captain Cook: 'Everything that Aboriginal

⁴⁶ Roy Wagner, 'Ritual as Communication: Order, Meaning, and Secrecy in Melanesian Initiation Rites', *Annual Review of Anthropology* 13 (1984): 143–55.

⁴⁷ Protests against the copper mine at Panguna, then one of the main exports of PNG, escalated into an open conflict between local people in Bougainville Province and the PNG government. The conflict endured from 1988 to 1998, leading to a separatist movement and to a non-binding referendum for independence in December 2019. See Donald Denoon, *Getting Under the Skin: The Bougainville Copper Agreement and the Creation of the Panguna Mine* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2000).

people say was brought by Captain Cook did happen, and it did happen as a result of Cook’s “discovery” and claim for British sovereignty’.⁴⁸ An apparent lack of historical accuracy does not undercut the essential truthfulness of Kerewo oral stories or their moral message: we Kerewo contributed to ending the war, but we have been forgotten.

NARRATIVES IN THEIR POLITICO-ECONOMIC CONTEXT

When my Kerewo informants told the stories about WWII they always stressed that, given their central role in saving the country – and consequently Australia – from the Japanese invasion, they have no signs of development or modernity to show for their place in history. Such discourses were embedded, at the time of my fieldwork, in a larger attempt to ritually restore Kerewo’s centrality in history by promoting what became known as the Peace and Reconciliation ceremony.⁴⁹ Through this ritual Kerewo people intended to atone for their ancestors’ sin of murdering the LMS missionary James Chalmers, and to finally lift up the curse that, according to many, has since prevented ‘development’ from materializing in the Kikori region.

In Kerewo historical consciousness the killing of James Chalmers in 1901 is a watershed event that marks the passage from ‘darkness to light’, well documented in Papua New Guinea.⁵⁰ In the process of moving from a stereotypical ‘cannibal past’ to a ‘modern’ Christian life, the years of the Pacific War stood between the current Christian and ‘pacified’ self and the pre-Christian abilities in warfare (signalled by resorting to the *ebiha*’s powers). As some informants remarked, LMS missionary Ben Butcher – who established his mission at Kikori inspired by Chalmers’s martyrdom – suggested to Queen Victoria that Kerewo men should be deployed in battle as they had demonstrated their prowess by killing Chalmers and his companions in 1901 and by successfully protecting Butcher and his mission from the raids attempted by neighbouring groups. While the specific notion that Butcher suggested using Kerewo people in the war is not very widespread in the Kikori area, its fundamental core – Kerewo’s fame as fearsome warriors, a local version of the British myth of the ‘martial race’ – is indeed widespread, as attested by oral histories I collected as well as archaeological research.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Deborah Bird Rose, ‘Worshipping Captain Cook’, *Social Analysis: The International Journal of Social and Cultural Practice*, no. 34 (1993): 46.

⁴⁹ Di Rosa, ‘Frustrated Modernity’, chap. 7.

⁵⁰ The killing of the missionary is interpreted in local theological terms as a sign that Kerewo had been chosen by God to be the gateway through which the Gospel could enter the Kikori region. Chalmers died so that Kikori could become Christian. See Frederick Errington and Deborah Gewertz, ‘From Darkness to Light in the George Brown Jubilee: The Invention of Nontradition and the Inscription of a National History in East New Britain’, *American Ethnologist* 21, no. 1 (1994): 104–22.

⁵¹ Oral history and archaeological evidence suggest that Kerewo people’s expansion upward along the Omati and Kikori rivers was cut short when colonial rule intersected this part of the country

At the time of my fieldwork, Kerewo weaved the stories about their forefathers' contribution to the war into a larger narrative arc that, first, depicts Kerewo people as central to the process of 'becoming modern' brought about by colonialism (especially through the evangelisation of the Kikori area)⁵² and, secondly, as marginal both to the post-Independence state, which does not provide services, and to the PNG LNG Project that has failed to bring about concrete signs of modernization in Kikori. The Peace and Reconciliation ceremony mentioned above sought to put Kerewo people, who feel stuck in an almost motionless present, once again on the imagined trajectory of 'development', thus overcoming their marginality. As marginality is a positional concept, it is important to examine in what ways Kerewo people feel marginal.

At a broader scale, Kerewo narratives of WWII address the sense of a broken relationship with Australia and the perception of unfulfilled citizenship lamented by Papua New Guineans of the war and post-war generations, especially those from the former Territory of Papua. As mentioned at the beginning of this article, the Kokoda Track holds a particular place in Australia's history of the Pacific War, entangling the two national histories (to use Hank Nelson's expression). From a Papua New Guinean perspective, Australia's withdrawal from its duty as colonizer to *lukautim mipela* ('look after us' in Tok Pisin) left Kikorians with an incomplete modernity. It is not uncommon in Kikori to hear comments about how 'New Guineans' – epitomized by the figure of Michael Somare – unnecessarily rushed Independence when certain areas of the country were not yet ready, and hear grievances about Papua's status as an Australian Territory and, therefore, part of the Commonwealth of Australia. One of the moral messages of Kerewo WWII narratives is that while Papuans liberated their fellow countrymen's lands from the Japanese invasion and saved Australia,⁵³ they had little agency and control over the terms of PNG's Independence.⁵⁴ The

enforcing 'pacification'; see also Bryce Barker et al., 'Otoia, Ancestral Village of the Kerewo: Modelling the Historical Emergence of Kerewo Regional Polities on the Island of Goaribari, South Coast of Mainland Papua New Guinea', in *Peopled Landscapes: Archaeological and Biogeographic Approaches to Landscapes*, ed. Simon G. Haberle and Bruno David (Canberra, Australia: ANU E Press, 2012), 157–76. For an overview of the 'martial race' ideology see Heather Streets, *Martial Races: The Military, Race and Masculinity in British Imperial Culture, 1857–1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004).

⁵² On the role of conversion to Christianity in the process of appropriating and elaborating notions of what 'to be modern' means, see Peter van der Veer, ed., *Conversion to Modernities: The Globalization of Christianity* (New York: Routledge, 1996); Webb Keane, *Christian Moderns: Freedom and Fetish in the Mission Encounter* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

⁵³ Tellingly, Ako writes that 'it dawned on Ben and the rest of the PIB that the Japanese were truly on the retreat although the *taubadas* [white men] told them that while this was so in this part of the region, they still held dominance in the north; and that it was their responsibility to route them from the north so that they completely finish them off. "To what ends?" Ben asked himself. "This is not my problem; Let the northern tribes help the *taubadas* finish what they want to finish. As far as I'm concerned, my land is free now". *The Ben Moide Story*, 175, italics in original.

⁵⁴ Though a protagonist of that phase of PNG history, Albert Maori Kiki was from the nearby Purari District, also a precinct of the LMS, which played a pivotal role in Kerewo experience of

sense of loss of primacy is also articulated in relation to another ethnic macro-category, that of 'Highlanders', who did not fight during the war, and yet in Port Moresby – a place where Kerewo people have kin connections as a result of post-war migration – they hold a quasi-monopoly on the 'public' transport system, including buses (PMVs) and taxis. The Highlanders are seen to enjoy a degree of business success from which Kerewo feel they are excluded. In the current demographic shift taking place in the Kikori area, with the settlement of migrants from the Southern Highlands in search of a new market for their produce, Kikorians have expressed anxiety that they may become a minority, economically if not demographically, in Kikori town. Significantly, such a conflictual relation is articulated through accusations of allegedly reckless driving in Kikori town, as I observed many times during my fieldwork.

In the case of Kerewo people, Noah Riseman's question – 'defending whose country?'⁵⁵ – goes beyond the simple colonial master/servant dichotomy and extends to the issue of socio-economic citizenship in Papua New Guinea. The frustration at being marginal to once familiar places is best captured by a close Kerewo friend of mine: 'if it wasn't for us they [New Guineans and Highlanders] would be eating Japanese leftovers!' For Kerewo people their colonial past becomes a means to chart current social relations and make sense of the socio-economic disparities within the country and, for lack of a better term, globally.

CONCLUSION

In this article I have privileged Kerewo stories of WWII that are not produced by witnesses or passed down along family lines, with the exception of Beamo's story of Iamere, which I used to explain why Kerewo living in Kikori give prominence to his version of the story. I could have included the accounts by Kerewo of how the personnel of the Australian New Guinea Administrative Unit (ANGAU), which replaced the civil administration of the colony during the conflict, rounded up villagers checking for signs of growing beards or armpit hair to be sure that only boys who were considered old enough were recruited as labourers or carriers; or some of their more personal memories that demonstrated the inequality and exclusion typical of the colonial period.⁵⁶ Rather, in this article I have endeavoured to show what a change of perspective, away from 'the witness', can bring to our understanding of oral narratives and their social role at the time of their enunciation. What comes

colonialism, see <https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/kiki-sir-albert-maori-28143> (accessed 6 Sept. 2021).

⁵⁵ Noah Riseman, *Defending Whose Country?: Indigenous Soldiers in the Pacific War* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2012).

⁵⁶ I found the story that Ahi Auma of Babaguna village told me particularly instructive. He told how his father, a former cook at the mission station, had escorted the missionary and his wife to Port Moresby when the increasing likelihood of Papua becoming a theatre of military operations meant civilian personnel were ordered to leave the territory, only to then walk back to Kikori.

to the forefront is the broader moral and political contextualisation of the narratives that our interlocutors present us with. As Wieviorka wrote:

Personal, individual memories, confined within closed, family-like groups, had been generated from the moment the events took place. But these memories were not part of the cultural mainstream and had little political meaning. [...] Testimony would have to become relevant beyond its personal meanings. Its importance would have to be recognized by society.⁵⁷

But, which society? The question of scale, in the case at hand, appears to be crucial.

As Hank Nelson has pointed out, a multitude of local histories about the war have remained local and never contributed to a shared national narrative.⁵⁸ In Kikori there is little quarrel over one version or another of the story as long as the main moral message of the injustices experienced by Kerewo people – being socio-economically marginal despite their ancestors' contribution to the country – is acknowledged. As already noted, marginality is a positional category. Issues of internal national cohesion do frame these stories as well, highlighting the better economic opportunities that 'New Guineans' and 'Highlanders' seem to enjoy (as seen from the Kikori area). There is yet another level, though, that should be taken into account – the international one. Articulated in terms of 'development', the modernity that Kerewo people and other Papua New Guineans speak of is depicted as inclusion in the global world of consumption.⁵⁹ The former colonial power continues to act as a gatekeeper to the international stage, and the very process of turning the Kokoda Track and Owen Stanley Ranges into a World Heritage site, albeit according to Australia's own historical agenda, establishes the contours of inclusion in and exclusion from financial and infrastructural investments not only between provinces, as the case of Kerewo people suggests, but also within the same province, as Victoria Stead has shown.⁶⁰ The war itself created some of the material conditions for

⁵⁷ Wieviorka, *The Era of the Witness*, 55.

⁵⁸ Hank Nelson, 'Introduction', in Toyoda and Nelson, *The Pacific War in Papua New Guinea*, 3. This is a key difference with the historiography on the Holocaust, which has served to reinforce a sense of Jewish identity at a transnational level.

⁵⁹ The link between modernity, consumption, and global and national citizenship features often in scholarship on Melanesia. See, for example, Deborah Gewertz and Frederick Errington, 'On PepsiCo and Piety in a Papua New Guinea "Modernity"', *American Ethnologist* 23, no. 3 (1996): 476–93; Nicholas Thomas, 'Nations' Endings: From Citizenship to Shopping?', in *Narratives of Nation in the South Pacific*, ed. Ton Otto and Nicholas Thomas (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1997), 211–19; Robert J. Foster, *Materializing the Nation: Commodities, Consumption, and Media in Papua New Guinea* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002); John Cox, 'Prosperity, Nation and Consumption: Fast Money Schemes in Papua New Guinea', in *Managing Modernity in the Western Pacific*, ed. Mary Patterson and Martha Macintyre (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2011), 172–200.

⁶⁰ Victoria Stead, 'Violent Histories and the Ambivalences of Recognition in Postcolonial Papua New Guinea', *Postcolonial Studies* 20, no. 1 (2017): 68–85; Victoria Stead, 'History as Resource:

uneven development or, at least, unequal opportunities to obtain 'development'.⁶¹ As Lin Poyer has persuasively argued, WWII forced both sides of the colonial situation to rethink and re-evaluate their relationship with each other, opening up a space to renegotiate the relation between Indigenous people and the postcolonial state.⁶² The Kerewo case supports Poyer's statement that,

the war is [not] irrelevant to indigenous identity as an effective political concept. The relationship is not one of strict historical causality, but refers both to ideas of 'self-determination' and other changes in the international order at the end of the war, and to local impacts of wartime experiences.⁶³

Further attention needs to be given to the larger frame of the political economy of storytelling and its working at different scales. I argue that the political nature of the process of history-making should feature in our analyses, and doing so requires at least some appreciation of the ethnographic context in order to grasp what is at stake for all the parties involved. The moral message of the stories is a tool that people (Indigenous or not) use to address present-day concerns. Acknowledging the existence of Indigenous versions of a certain past, though obviously important, is not sufficient. Exposing the uneven material as well as symbolic power relations in which stories are presented is only a first, but necessary, step towards what should be an ongoing process of self-determination. Making such power relations visible enables communities to judge whether to renegotiate, sever, or persevere with existing relations and evaluate the conditions under which it is possible to manoeuvre.

Moral Reckonings with Place and with the Wartime Past in Oro Province, Papua New Guinea', *Anthropological Forum* 28, no. 1 (2018): 16–31. Very similar dynamics occur in the Solomon Islands where communities residing in former battlefields could tap into the tourism industry to participate in the cash economy. Anne Annie Kwai, *Solomon Islanders in World War II: An Indigenous Perspective* (Canberra: ANU Press, 2017), 90.

⁶¹ For instance, writing about the Solomon Islands, Kwai notes that 'This military infrastructure [...] formed the basis for economic development and reconstruction of economic activities in the former protectorate', but 'the long-term consequences of centralising development on Guadalcanal' were 'a surge in rural-urban migration and the appearance of related social problems', which eventually exploded in the 1998 'tensions'. Kwai, *Solomon Islanders in World War II*, 89.

⁶² Lin Poyer, 'World War II and the Development of Global Indigenous Identities', *Identities* 24, no. 4 (2017): 417–35.

⁶³ Poyer, 'World War II and the Development of Global Indigenous Identities', 419. After all, many so-called 'cargo cults' throughout Melanesia exhibited some of the characteristics of independence movements after WWII. Although this is not the whole story behind such phenomena, it is something not to be overlooked.