

He Served: A Biography of Macu Salato, by Robert C Kiste. Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific, 1998. ISBN 982-02-0133-0, xviii + 120 pages, maps, illustrations, photographs, notes, bibliography, index. Paper, F\$10, US\$10.

Macu Salato was born in 1915 into a family of commoner status in the Moala group of Lau, Fiji. He died in Auckland in 1990 after a distinguished career in Fiji's medical services, as mayor of Suva and a member of the Great Council of Chiefs, as acting high commissioner in London, and as secretary general of the South Pacific Commission (now the Secretariat of the Pacific Community). He was an active member of the Anglican Church, and was awarded the CBE in 1973. After his term at the South Pacific Commission he spent time as a Fulbright scholar in residence at the University of Hawai'i, Mānoa, as honorary research fellow at the East-West Center and interim director of that Center's Pacific Islands Development Program.

It was a very considerable career, leading him far from his modest home village not only into the administrative elite of colonial Fiji and niches of the British establishment but also into close contact with academics, ambassadors, and the political leaders of the Pacific region. By then he had also done his time in more humble positions, as a medical practitioner, as a health educator in both Fiji and the Solomon Islands Protectorate, and in many grass-roots welfare organizations. Throughout his life, he continued to move easily between Fijian and

Western contexts. Two things favored him. First, his undoubted intelligence and conscientiousness, which gave him his early opening at the Fiji's Central Medical School—a springboard for the careers of many other distinguished Pacific Islanders of the time. Second, the patronage of his lifelong friend, Ratu Mara, whom he first met at the Lau Provincial School. Mara put many opportunities in his way, and he grasped them all, doing every job with characteristic style and finesse.

Kiste brings these personal qualities out very clearly. “[Salato] is often mentioned as a ‘gentleman of the old school’. He was modest, soft spoken and self-effacing . . . gracious and courteous, he was interested in, thoughtful of, others, and he always encouraged them to make the most of their talents” (vii). Ratu Mara, in his Foreword, echoes these views, mentioning also Salato's deep commitment to his duties. It was Mara who provided the title for this book; when asked by Kiste if any one thing above others should be included in the biography, he replied, “Macu Salato could have worn the motto of the Prince of Wales: Ich dien [I serve]” (108).

It makes a supremely apt title. However, a life devoted so single-mindedly to “service” provides problems for a biographer. Especially when dealing with a public figure as consistently affable as Salato, it can be difficult to bring the subject into sharp focus, or to reach beneath the surface warmth to the inner fires. The problem can be illustrated by comparing Salato with A D Patel, the subject of a recent biography by Brij Lal. Patel arrived in Fiji in 1923, and breathed

the same colonial airs as Salato for forty-six years, until his death in 1969. But while Salato quietly and ably served the system, Patel fought it with a compelling, clearly articulated political philosophy; he was a turbulent, controversial figure, but there is no doubt about the inner fires that fueled his career, and he is a gift to a biographer.

Salato is a more difficult subject. Although he was urged to write his autobiography, and was given opportunities to do so in later life, that was evidently not his *forté*. It is to Kiste's immense credit, then, that he has managed to write as full an account as he has, following through personal papers and the records of the many institutions and public bodies that Salato was involved with. Kiste also had the advantage of knowing Salato and his family personally, and he has fleshed out his own perceptions of the man by interviewing dozens of others, not only in Fiji but also in the wider Pacific region. Kiste has much less to say about Salato's wider kin connections and the way that, given the nature of Fijian society, they impinged on him throughout his life. But the connections might indeed have not been particularly close or intense. Salato's father died when Salato was three, and he had only one sibling who survived to adulthood. He left Matuku for Lau Provincial School when very young, and went on more or less directly to Queen Victoria School on Vitilevu and then to medical school and the social world centered on the educated elites of modern Suva.

Kiste describes this world accurately and sensitively. "The British and Fijian hierarchical systems were

joined at the top, and most of Fiji's educated elite were born to privileged status. As a commoner, Salato was an exception to the rule, but by a quirk of fate and hard work, he gained entry to the colonial order that provided him with the opportunities and upward mobility that would otherwise have been denied to him" (107). This world made Salato. He modeled his speech and his persona on ideals of the English gentleman, as Sukuna and others had done before him. But he remained a commoner, and was denied access to the overseas education that his abilities undoubtedly qualified him for. He served. He was not a bright, consuming flame, but the hardwood backlog whose embers kept things going. Kiste's biography is an affectionate and respectful tribute to the man, as well as a significant contribution to our understanding of some of the undercurrents of modern Pacific Islands history.

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Imperial Benevolence: Making British Authority in the Pacific Islands, by Jane Samson. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1998. ISBN 0-8248-1927-6, xvi + 240 pages, maps, notes, bibliography, index. US\$35.

At first glance, this seems an old-fashioned sort of book—something from an earlier historiographical era, perhaps, where *imperial* and *benevolence* can appear in the same title without a condemnatory subtitle or at least the irony implied by a question mark. In the detail, readers with a knowledge