

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.

ANTONY HOOPER

University of New South Wales

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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

of the expanding British presence in the Pacific Islands will find familiar events, ships, trials, quotations, and characters—though the last tend to arrive with rank and name and little background. And it is a little strange in the late 1990s to read of King George (or simply George) of Tonga (rather than Taufa'ahau Tupou IV, even if this was a baptismal choice) and the Sandwich Islands. Despite the introduction, where reference is made to the “familiar tension between metropolitan and peripheral approaches to imperial history, refocused by post-modernist and postcolonial critical theory” (2), this uncomfortable sense of anachronism remains. This is not because the author chooses to stand aside from currently fashionable debates about how “the British deployed class, gender, and race as strategies of power” (3)—indeed, that might be seen as a positive attribute—because of the strongly empirical focus of the study, or because she asserts, quite rightly in my view, that many metropolitan documents have been neglected for too long in the writing of the history of empire in general, and the Pacific Islands in particular.

The unease, such as it is, rests with the central thesis of *Imperial Benevolence*: “I want to show how the British government was drawn into greater involvement in the Pacific through the crafting of a humanitarian mission to protect islanders. Between the eras of culture contact and colonial rule lies the hazy territory of ‘informal empire,’ where the definition of British influence lay in the hands (and pens) of Britain’s most conspicuous representatives: naval officers. We will see that their self-assigned mission drew upon evangelicalism, antislavery sentiment,

and contemporary debate about the nature of race. . . . it is an examination of the navy’s sense of mission in the Pacific islands” (4).

To take the last first, this approach requires the author to demonstrate that the Royal Navy had a sense of mission that was consistent and coherent across time and place. Without difficulty, Samson demonstrates that many officers working on the Australia Station and their superiors in London shared humanitarian ideas and ideals that informed the policy and practice of naval “justice” in the Pacific Islands. But was it a “mission” and did they have the capacity to implement such a mission as de facto British policy? Humanitarianism as an explanation of British imperial policy was common enough until the 1960s but has since lost ground in the light of research into events and influences at the periphery of empire and a greater recognition of the complex processes involved at the center as well as the periphery. This is not to deny the importance of the humanitarian impulse in Victorian Britain, but to question its relative importance alongside a host of other factors.

Here the argument runs into difficulty. While officers of a common background and class might be expected to share values, Samson’s analysis shows that not all officers did; indeed, her discussion of the role of Commodore Goodenough in Fiji in the early 1870s tends to counter the overall argument. But more important is the assumption of a dominant role in policymaking for the navy and, as a consequence, the understating of the roles of other players. While captains and commodores could influence developments through their decisions

and actions, these were within the broader context of British approaches to the Pacific. I deliberately avoid talking of “policy” here, for that is too precise a term for British actions over half a century or more—but more cognizance is needed of the overall concerns of the Foreign Office in terms of international relationships, and of the Colonial Office in respect of responsibilities contemplated or exercised by the British Government. The long arm of influence exercised by the Treasury hardly rates a mention, yet it was a key determinant of the British stance and helps to explain apparent inconsistencies of approach and, at the same time, helps to link the Treaty of Waitangi in New Zealand in 1840 to the cession of Fiji over half a century later. Within a context of remaining on harmonious terms with other Western powers, Britain, strongly influenced by its Treasury, sought to minimize costs and commitments while protecting settlers and indigenous populations from one another. Similarly, the discussion of the expansion of British influence hardly touches on the expansion of commerce, growing investment in the islands, trans-Pacific trade, or the importance of Asian markets. Too often, incidents stand aside from historical context and island-based political and economic considerations.

Imperial Benevolence is primarily concerned with the era from late-eighteenth-century European voyages until the cession of Fiji. There are studies of beachcombers and early settlers, naval officers’ attempts to formulate policy, political centralization in Tonga, the sandalwood trade in the western Pacific, the difficulties

of imposing justice (naval or otherwise) in respect of the Pacific Islands, labor recruiting, the limited extent of “gunboat diplomacy” compared with popular perceptions, and the politics of Fiji leading to cession in the early 1870s. In all, the theme is the role played by the Royal Navy, the integrating role that it played in determining the nature of the British presence, and the restraint it exercised in “punishing” Pacific Islanders for their offenses, real or imagined, against settlers or the Crown.

Imperial Benevolence will prove of interest to many Pacific historians. From an earlier PhD study on the role of the Royal Navy in the Pacific Islands from 1829 to 1859, Jane Samson, now a senior research fellow at the Institute of Commonwealth Studies, London, has extended the range of her research both chronologically and in terms of the sources used. This in itself proves useful by redirecting attention to the value of “imperial” documents in the writing of Pacific Island history. Moreover, there is a role for a revisionist study that reexamines the role of the imperial authority and its agents in imperial expansion. Its value lies in the reminder of the importance of naval authorities in the making of empire, often in ways not anticipated by governments half a world away, and of the importance of the humanitarian ideal in informing the beliefs and actions of the governing classes in Victorian Britain. But there remains a problem in that thematic histories of this kind have a limited capacity to explain, for example, either something as specific as political change in Tonga or something as general as the

expansion of British influence in the Pacific. By concentrating on the theme of the moral high ground adopted by a number of naval officers, the wider relationships may be blurred or diminished. Even so, against interpretations of imperial expansion that ascribe policies and predetermined agendas to nations, politicians, consuls, and merchants (and even naval officers), there is value in a reminder that expansion was a complex business, especially in the shadowland of informal empire that preceded annexations, with seldom a clear set of goals and intentions on either side of the imperial frontier.

BARRIE MACDONALD
Massey University

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Changing Their Minds: Tradition and Politics in Contemporary Fiji and Tonga, by Rory Ewins. Christchurch: Macmillan Brown Centre for Pacific Studies, 1998. ISBN 1-877175-15-3, xxvi + 298 pages, glossary, bibliography, notes, index. NZ\$12.95.

The aims of this book, a revised doctoral thesis by an Australian National University-trained political scientist, are perhaps not wholly achieved. Nevertheless, the study should be of great interest to scholars of the Pacific. Much of the material was derived from a series of interviews the author held with politically active people in Fiji and Tonga in the early to mid-1990s. The presentation of primary sources through long quotes from the interviews is refreshing. Valuable insights arise also from the comparison of the two neighboring countries.

Both these aspects of the author's approach are not always found in contemporary studies. This study thus complements Stephanie Lawson's 1996 study, *Tradition versus Democracy in the South Pacific: Fiji, Tonga, and Western Samoa*, by serving, if incidentally, to flesh out her largely structural account with what elites actually say, thereby portraying vividly the complexity of forces at work when people travel widely and engage in many different fields of influence. The technique results in statements that reflect flux, and change, although the idea that the apprehension of change might not always be reflected in the political behavior of the very people who made the statements appears not to have been considered.

The author has a light, engaging style that makes the book easily accessible to a wide audience. The innovative nature of his enterprise, however, gives rise to difficulties in the achievement of his stated aims. The focus is broad, the primary data limited, and the wider social and political context largely overlooked in the interpretation of the interview materials presented. The discussion of the sources of possible changes in mindsets regarding tradition rather wanders in search of an argument that will link it to politics in any direct way. The author also eschews history as a source of political explanation on the grounds that people's own awareness of it changes over time (xxii). This reader faltered at the author's vaunted confidence in taking an ahistorical position, when following swiftly upon it is the assertion that the Tongan monarchy was established