

Book and Media Reviews

The Contemporary Pacific, Volume 30, Number 2, 549-570
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Tautai: Sāmoa, World History, and the Life of Ta'isi O. F. Nelson, by Patricia O'Brien. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2017. ISBN 978-0-8248-6653-2, xxviii + 399 pages, epilogue, notes, bibliography, index. Cloth, US\$72.00.

Samoan nationalism is put on display with Patricia O'Brien's latest book, *Tautai: Sāmoa, World History, and the Life of Ta'isi*. The historiography of Western Sāmoa, as the first Pacific Island nation to gain independence in 1962 from a colonial power, has been dominated by the events that led to the historic Mau movement, which helped galvanize the Samoan people's vision for self-determination in the 1920s and 1930s. The term *mau* is defined as "opinion," and more specifically, the opinion of the Samoan people. This captivating read is centered on the life of Mau leader Ta'isi O F Nelson and his dedication to Sāmoa's cause during a tumultuous period in Samoan history. O'Brien describes the Mau leader as a *tautai*, a navigator who helped Sāmoa traverse "immense and troubled waters" during Sāmoa's push for independence (306).

What O'Brien has given us is a detailed and intriguing narrative of Sāmoa during the Mau movement against the New Zealand colonial administration. The reader is immersed in Sāmoa's political and colonial history and the commitment of Ta'isi to further Sāmoa's cause at the international level. Naturally, during the colonial era, New Zealand leadership represented Ta'isi in a negative light as an exploiter of his own people and a power-mad capitalist. O'Brien addresses these characteriza-

tions and challenges how the body of work based on Ta'isi "has given us an incomplete picture" of one of Sāmoa's most revered and respected leaders (xxvii). Not only does *Tautai* enlighten readers about the Mau movement and Samoan efforts toward self-determination, but this book also chronicles the evolution of Ta'isi's patriotism, and, for the first time, provides an intimate look into his private world as a father and husband. Family members helped to flesh out "paper sources," including "previously untapped letters and documents and other archival data" (xxviii), allowing O'Brien to reexamine how Ta'isi became a central figure in Samoan history.

At the start of the First World War in 1914, the western Samoan islands transitioned from German to New Zealand colonial occupation. Resistance against colonial rule in Sāmoa also took place against Germany under the leadership of Samoan orator Lauaki Namulau'ulu Mamoe from 1908 to 1909. Lauaki's Mau a Pule resistance movement received support mainly from the island of Savai'i. Later, however, it grew into the national Mau movement, ultimately supported by thousands (165). The Mau had multiple complaints against the New Zealand administrators, but a few principal reasons behind the movement were the lack of representation of native Samoans in leadership positions, the authority of the administrators to banish or deport Samoans and Europeans without a proper trial, and the denial of rights of Samoans to properly put forward their complaints before the New Zealand Parliament or the League of Nations. Ta'isi also challenged any notion of Samoan racial

and cultural inferiority. As a result, the Mau practiced civil disobedience by refusing to pay taxes, participating in peaceful marches, and preparing signed petitions. In addition, the Mau sponsored newspapers in both Sāmoa and New Zealand to help promote the Samoan cause.

In this book, Ta'isi is portrayed as a global man and a refined individual with merging identities and deep connections as a matai (chief), 'afakasi (person of European-Samoan ancestry), businessman, staunch Methodist, national leader, and father. The Mau leader's affiliation with other political figures and his travels throughout the world connected him to an international exchange of opinions and philosophies that spanned seven countries: Sāmoa, New Zealand, Australia, the United Kingdom, the United States, Sweden, and Switzerland (xxviii). The *Samoan Guardian* Mau newspaper tracked the fate of other countries under the League of Nations mandates from Indonesia to India that pushed for self-determination during the 1920s. These movements against colonial regimes prompted the obvious question by the Mau newspaper: "Why not Samoa, too?" (131). As a champion of the Samoan cause, Ta'isi used Western knowledge and ideas from his international relationships to inform the objectives of the Mau. O'Brien shows how processes during the entire Mau movement had deep impacts on Ta'isi's life, politically, socially, and with regard to business. Māori politician Sir Māui Pōmare became a close friend and confidant to Ta'isi. Pōmare encouraged a nonviolent stance (with intellectual roots across the Commonwealth

and particularly in Gandhi's India) that Ta'isi followed in order to limit bloodshed. Ta'isi also reached out to the New Zealand Labour Party and other advocates that championed the Samoan cause. One of the book's most important points is highlighted in the title of the first chapter, "Converging Worlds." Sāmoa was enmeshed in global currents, and Ta'isi's life reflected that complex world. O'Brien brilliantly divulges how Ta'isi used Western ideologies to deal with a Western institution.

The New Zealand colonial administration viewed Ta'isi negatively, and O'Brien's thorough archival research reexamines assertions that he used the Mau movement to exploit both Samoans and Europeans in order to promote his personal agenda as a businessman. More importantly, *Tautai* allows readers to make up their own minds regarding Ta'isi's life. As to the claim made by the New Zealand administration that Ta'isi was an exploiter of his people for financial gain, O'Brien draws on archival material to refute that statement, noting that the "administration could not substantiate their accusations" (303). Was Ta'isi a power-mad capitalist made so by the lust for commercial dominance? O'Brien points out throughout the book the financial sacrifices that Ta'isi made for Sāmoa and for his family. As a result, Ta'isi was financially ruined in the process, and there was never any proof that he benefited business-wise from his political activism, nor did he aim to. Was Ta'isi a naive idealist? Although he did not topple the New Zealand colonial power as he had hoped, Ta'isi's triumphal efforts are clearly

displayed by O'Brien, and he did set a course for Sāmoa's future. Unfortunately, Ta'isi's commitment to the Mau resulted in exile, jail time, and strain on his personal family life.

Tautai is a wonderful contribution to Pacific Islands resistance and decolonization studies, and more generally to world, Pacific, and Samoan political history. The book is well written and provides a list of key historical figures to follow the chronology of events, as well as a glossary of Samoan terms to guide the reader. A detailed notes section for each chapter is a treasure trove of resources for individuals interested in Samoan history or the Mau movement. Rare photos of Ta'isi's family and of him in action as a political advocate offer a special visual context of the events as they unfolded. Graduate students in Pacific and world history will benefit immensely from this book, as *Tautai* deals with Pacific resistance, politics and government, the League of Nations, and colonialism. The students at the National University of Samoa and the American Samoa Community College especially will find this an invaluable book as an excellent point of reference to Sāmoa–New Zealand colonial history. I particularly like the way O'Brien details the Mau as not merely a Samoan movement but as a collaboration of different ideas and peoples that centered on how to achieve the goal of self-determination. The theme of nonviolence and Ta'isi's alliances and associations with other people resonate throughout the book. *Tautai* exhibits Ta'isi's ability to lead Sāmoa at the national level, but as he was also a respected chief of a powerful family, I wanted to know more

about his kin and village bloodline connections and the politics behind him navigating those alliances. What was the role of his village, Safune, in this movement? Were his Samoan chiefly kin more active in promoting the Mau using traditional oratory?

Overall, this book captures the essence of Sāmoa's struggle in the context of a tectonic movement in world history in which passionate local agents and activists promoting change emerged to contest the injustice, instability, and odiousness of colonial forms of government across the globe. O'Brien deftly shows how Sāmoa held onto its cultural practices but at the same time refined their traditional systems to fit within the changes of the time. To set a country on the course of self-determination, it takes a gifted leader, or in Sāmoa's case, a tautai, to achieve that goal.

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Mele Murals. Documentary film, 106 minutes, color, 2016. Directed by Tadashi Nakamura; produced by Keoni Lee. A coproduction of Oiwī TV, Pacific Islanders in Communication, and Downtown Community Media Center, in association with the Center for Asian American Media.

The Hawaiian renaissance, which expresses the larger decolonization movement taking place in settler states elsewhere in the Pacific, gives voice to a notion of indigeneity that is nested in a concept of cultural autonomy. However, as suggested by the revival of the Hale Mua men's