

Tautai: Sāmoa, World History, and the Life of Ta'isi O. F. Nelson
Patricia O'Brien. Wellington, Huia Publishers and University of Hawai'i Press, 2017.
399 pp., maps, illus., notes, bibliog.

Safua Akeli Amaama, Centre for Sāmoan Studies. National University of Sāmoa

Tautai documents the life of Ta'isi Olaf Frederick Nelson (1883–1944), the son of Swedish migrant August Nelson and Sinagogo Masoe from Safune Sava'i. The dense biography has 14 chapters which cover the period from 1880s to 1944. As the first extensive biography on Ta'isi to date, according to the book cover, *Tautai* "is a powerful and passionate story that is both personal and one that encircles the globe." Indeed *Tautai* provides a fascinating view of Sāmoa's global history, and key historical figures during a tumultuous time. Throughout the book, the author has articulated a complex and nuanced narrative which brings to life Ta'isi, his family, Sāmoa and its multiple relationships abroad.

Chapter one titled 'Converging Worlds: Sāmoa and Europe Class (1883–1909)' traces the context in which Ta'isi was born. It therefore sets the background to the following chapter on the 'Kaiser or King? German Empire, War, and its Brutal Aftermath (1910–20)'. With German rule Sāmoan resistance continued, and Ta'isi's role in navigating tense relations between colonial government, merchants and the Sāmoan community was significant. Under the League of Nations mandate, New Zealand's early administration of Sāmoa was rife with misrepresentations of ideas about race, which as O'Brien highlights Ta'isi challenged since '[h]e upended racial constructions with his business acumen, success, and his brilliance' (p.57).

In chapter three 'Troublesome Garden of Eden' (1920–23) Ta'isi's strained relationship with Sāmoa's third Administrator, General George Richardson's and the local community reveals tension around prohibition and concern about the stripping of Sāmoan chiefly titles. This rising storm as articulated in chapter four 'A New Era? (1923–25)', reveals that Richardson himself essentially characterised the 'New Zealand and British Empire' (p.85). The hurricane that struck Sāmoa in 1926 parallels the storm which began to emerge with a meeting of the Citizens Committee in Apia's Market Hall. Chapter five 'Before the Storm (1926)' documents the coming together of Sāmoa's diverse community, and Ta'isi's role. During this period as outlined in chapter six, Ta'isi drew strength from his friendships abroad with influential figures such as Sir Maui Pomare.

In chapter seven titled 'He is Not a Sāmoan (1927)' criticism of Ta'isi centred on his legal status, and whether he 'was an exploiter of Sāmoan copra growers' (p.143). The Royal Commission Inquiry report saw the subsequent deportation of Ta'isi, and friends Edwin Gurr and Alfred Smyth to New Zealand. Chapter eight 'Exile and the Road to Geneva (1928)' charts Ta'isi's journey to Geneva, and the political alliances he was able to forge in Australia, Hawai'i and London. However, unlike Richardson, Ta'isi was 'denied the opportunity to appear before the PMC himself' (p.173), and reveals much of the blame was directed towards Ta'isi by the New Zealand government. Alarming for Richardson, Ta'isi's deportation increased support for the Mau including outside of Sāmoa's shores.

The information provided by New Zealand to the Permanent Mandates Commission focused on the economic instability of Sāmoa due to the Mau, more specifically Ta'isi. With the question of 'justice' in chapter nine, Ta'isi sought the highest forum via the Privy Council in London and the

League of Nations; however the weight of blame was immovable. Critics argued that Ta'isi 'was inciting rebellion with the strong inference this included violence' (p.203). Rumours circulated that 'Sāmoans were so easily led...that they did as they were directed' (p.159). This was in spite of Sāmoan petitions and participation in decision-making for the Mau. Moreover, politicians in reference to Ta'isi's commercial enterprises noted that 'trouble' had arisen due to 'the administration's intervention in the copra business' (p.157). Interestingly a crucial report by the public servants in chapter 10 found that 'Richardson' and not Ta'isi was 'the architect of this situation' (p.194), along with the impact of the Great Depression. In a touching photograph, Ta'isi managed to meet with Tupua Tamasese following the latter's release from prison in New Zealand (p.201).

'Sāmoa's Gethsemane (1930)' chapter documents police raids and the Mau women who were targeted by officials. The death of Tupua Tamaesese on 'Black Saturday' in 1929 and later the passing of Sir Pomare cast Ta'isi into despondency. The administration's focus on 'Breaking Mr Nelson in the Great Depression (1931–32)' in chapter 12 reveals the difficult relationships within the family amidst Ta'isi's perseverance. On his return to Sāmoa (1933–34) after exile, far from a peaceful period, Ta'isi once again unexpectedly found himself in the court room. However, his cross-examination of New Zealand officials demonstrated his determination and eloquence. His subsequent sentence, imprisonment and exile brought to the fore once again New Zealand's flawed judicial system. The final chapter 'Sāmoa Evermore (1935–44)' documents Ta'isi's return as a result of the new government under the Labour Party. A goodwill mission was sent to Sāmoa in 1936, bringing a new chapter to the country's history in which included Ta'isi and Sāmoan participation.

Tautai documents 61 years of Sāmoa's history, with a key focus on Ta'isi Olaf Fredrick Nelson. The rich archival sources from Archives New Zealand are complemented by those from the League of Nations Archive in Geneva, National Archives of Sweden, National Archives of United Kingdom and records from the Sāmoa Lands and Titles archives. O'Brien's coverage is vast and this source provides a key reference point for interested scholars, academics, students and family members. The 'Notes' section (pp. 307–67) usefully provides detailed information for further reading, while the historical images enhance the narrative. In this way O'Brien presents a new history on a key figure in Sāmoa's historical landscape since 'Ta'isi O. F. Nelson was a *Tautai*, a navigator. Like his ancestors, he traversed immense and troubled waters. He did not always take the right turn, but his aim was to find a place for his country—with its revered and deep traditions—in the modern world order. It is time to bring Ta'isi's story into the light of the present' (p.306).