

Jack Corbett

PhD Candidate, Crawford School of Economics and Government, Australian National University

Crawford Building, Lennox Crossing, Building #132, The Australian National University, Canberra ACT 0200, Australia

Ph: 61256704

Email: [jack.corbett@anu.edu.au](mailto:jack.corbett@anu.edu.au)

A slightly amended version of this paper is published in the Journal of Pacific History 47(1):  
69-92

## **Abstract**

The phrase ‘two worlds’ is often used to describe the way that political leaders in the Pacific Islands navigate and define their lives, and the different sets of societal norms they are subject to. The capacity to move between ‘worlds’ is often central to their claims to leadership legitimacy and can be one of the reasons why they are ultimately chosen to lead. Through a comparative analysis of their published life histories, I explore the lives of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Pacific’s political leaders by capturing their experience of growing up and out of colonialism, and what they did before they took up political office. I find that they describe being significantly shaped by their relationships with educational and religious institutions, including with particular teachers and mentors, their experiences living and working overseas, and their vocational backgrounds, both religious and professional. I conclude that rather than ‘two worlds’ - often used as a metaphor for a larger historical narrative about modernisation and the passing of a traditional or cultural ways of life<sup>1</sup> – life histories highlight the importance of multiple ‘sites’, ‘spheres’ or ‘worlds’ to our understanding of leaders’ life trajectories.

## **Introduction**

Across the world political leaders who emerge during times of national independence and decolonisation are often remembered with affection, their lives valorised as symbols of change, hope and progress. The political leaders of this generation in the Pacific Islands are no exception. As a generation they are remembered as strong leaders, trailblazers and

---

<sup>1</sup> G White, 'Afterword: Lives and Histories', in P. J Stewart and A Strathern, eds., *Identity Work: constructing Pacific Lives* (Pittsburgh, 2000), 172-189; ‘Two Worlds’ colliding is also a metaphor used in historical studies, for example see A Salmond, *Two Worlds: first meetings between Maori and Europeans 1642-1772* (Auckland, 1991)

pioneers who forged consensus and fostered shared identities. They are also celebrated for being the first: the first to obtain a degree, to occupy prominent positions in the colonial government, and later, for some, the first Prime Ministers and Presidents of their newly independent countries. But who are these figures that shaped the politics of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Pacific and what did they do before entering political office? Ron Crocombe argues that Pacific Islanders have tended not to elect their own to high office, but have disproportionately chosen urbanised, foreign educated and foreign orientated candidates, who were seen to have local legitimacy and who, it was assumed, would be able to understand and leverage the systems that matter beyond the Pacific Islands.<sup>2</sup> In this article I examine and expand on this representation by using the tools of interpretive research to explore comparatively the experience of growing up and out of colonialism, recorded in their life histories, of 37 individual political leaders.<sup>3</sup>

The ‘two worlds’ metaphor is often employed in these life histories to describe how these figures define their lives, and the different sets of societal norms they are subject to. As Geoffrey White contends, this metaphor often forms part of a larger historical narrative about modernisation and the passing of a traditional or cultural ways of life.<sup>4</sup> But which ‘two worlds’ are these leaders referring to? Jonathan Fifi’i, whose life history carries the ‘two worlds’ metaphor in the title, describes these worlds in line with the modernisation narrative:

---

<sup>2</sup> R Crocombe, *The South Pacific* (Suva, Fiji, 2001) , 466

<sup>3</sup> In this respect this article is loosely modelled on a book by D. K Leonard, *African Successes: four public managers of Kenyan rural development* (Berkeley 1991)

<sup>4</sup> G White, 'Afterword: Lives and Histories', in P. J Stewart and A Strathern, eds., *Identity Work: constructing Pacific Lives* (Pittsburgh, 2000), 172-189

*For many years, I had been in between two worlds. I had grown up in our Kwaio custom; then I had become a Christian, and had learned something about Western ways. So I knew both sides...'*<sup>5</sup>

Robert Kiste depicts Dr Macu Salato as being shaped by both Fijian and British mentors and institutions.<sup>6</sup> Worlds can then be both cultural and geographical. For Ignatius Kilage they refer to time:

*I was born a bit too early to go to school but old enough to see and try to understand and keep up with the tremendous changes that are taking place in my beloved Simbu, and all over our country.*<sup>7</sup>

The metaphor can also be extended to include different social systems as illustrated in the following extract from Ratu Sir Lala Sukuna's Lau diary:

*In the early evening Naitasiri representatives called. Went to a public dinner... and then to a dance. Afterwards the Bau people looked in. Went to bed tired out be conforming to the demands of two entirely different social systems.*<sup>8</sup>

For Dame Carol Kidu, it describes her family relationships:

*The cultural transition from a small nuclear Australian family to an enormous extended family in Motu society was by no means a small jump. It was a gigantic leap across a chasm of cultural differences, which I had to learn to negotiate.*<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> J Fifi'i, *From Pig-Theft to Parliament: My Life Between Two Worlds*, R Keesing ed., (Suva, 1989), 124

<sup>6</sup> R Kiste, *He Served: A Biography of Macu Salato* (Suva, 1998), v

<sup>7</sup> A Howard, *Hef Ran Ta (The Morning Star) A Biography of Wilson Inia, Rotuma's First Senator* (Suva, 1994),

1

<sup>8</sup> D Scarr, ed., *Fiji: The Three-legged Stool: selected writings of Ratu Sir Lala Sukuna* (1983), 145

<sup>9</sup> C Kidu, *A remarkable journey* (South Melbourne 2002), 46

In a different vein, Brij Lal portrays A.D. Patel as moving between ‘elite’ and ‘everyday’ worlds:

*... [mixing] well with members of high society, but when he talked with farmers, he sat cross-legged on the floor, eating with his fingers.<sup>10</sup>*

Finally, the metaphor is used by Jean-Marie Tjibaou to articulate the sense of dislocation experienced by Kanaks:

*We are a people between two worlds... we are part of the peoples of the Pacific and not of those of the Mediterranean...<sup>11</sup>*

Drawing from the diversity of dichotomised representations of ‘worlds’ contained in these life histories, I argue that for these political leaders, conception of their ‘worlds’ is much richer and varied than those represented by terms like ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’. In doing so I follow Eric Wittersheim and Bensa and Wittersheim by arguing that recognition of the significance and diversity of these ‘sites’ allows us to move beyond reductionist categorisations that both glorify (or stigmatize) the traditional, and extol (or depreciate) anything that seems new and modern.<sup>12</sup> ‘Worlds’ might include familial origins, time in different educational institutions, the different social and familial networks they navigate, relationships with the people they govern, or an expression of collective identity. Leaders’ ‘worlds’ may be geographical, intellectual, spiritual, cultural and personal. Specifically, echoing the stylised conventions of life history writing, in this article I explore these representations through three ‘sites’ - origins, education and career – inductively identified as broad categories which reflect distinct periods in the personal trajectories of these lives.

---

<sup>10</sup> B V Lal, *A vision for change : A.D. Patel and the politics of Fiji* (Canberra 1997) , 23

<sup>11</sup> H Fraser and J Trotter, eds., *Jean-Marie Tjibaou: Kanaky* (Canberra, 2005) , 64-65

<sup>12</sup> E Wittersheim, 'Melanesian Elities and Modern Politics in New Caledonia and Vanuatu', *State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Discussion Paper*, 3 (1998); A Bensa and E Wittersheim, 'Nationalism and interdependence: The political thought of Jean-Marie Tjibaou', *The Contemporary Pacific*, 10 (1998), 369-90.

I conclude by discussing Crocombe's depiction of leaders as 'foreign educated and foreign orientated' in relation to the 'two worlds' metaphor and specifically reference to its utility for later leadership claims. Accordingly, I hope this article will help us to understand the people at the centre of the historical events in that period, while also providing insights that can be applied to the analysis of contemporary politics. As this generation has left an indelible mark on politics of the region, and because they are perceived to have provided strong leadership,<sup>13</sup> their life histories also carry significance for contemporary theorists and policy-makers interested in the capacity and influence of present-day leaders and élites.<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> J Fraenkel, 'Oceania's Political Institutions and Transitions', *State Society and Governance in Melanesia Discussion Paper*, 5 (2010)

<sup>14</sup> See A McLeod, 'Leadership Models in the Pacific', *State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Discussion Papers*, 6 (2008); K. F Sanga, 'Pacific Leadership: hopeful and hoping', *NZAID regional symposium on Pacific Leadership* (University of the South Pacific, Suva, Fiji, 2005); F Hanson and A Oliver, 'What Makes a Leader? Mapping Leadership in Our Region', *Lowy Institute for International Policy*, (2010); A Leftwich, 'Beyond Institutions: Rethinking the Role of Leaders, Elites and Coalitions in the Institutional Formation of Development States and Strategies', *Forum for Development Studies*, 37 (2010), 93-111

## Collective portraits - a methodological framework

Subjects of Political Life History in the Pacific Islands <sup>15</sup>	
<b>Fiji</b>	Ratu Sir Lala Sukuna; Tomasi Vakatora; Major-General Sitiveni Rabuka; Dr Timoci Bavadra; Ratu Sir Penaia Ganilau; Wilson Inia; Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara; A.D. Patel; Dr Macu Salato; Sir Vijay Singh; Ratu Joni Madraiwiwi; and Jai Ram Reddy.
<b>Solomon Islands</b>	Dr Gideon Zoleveke; Sir Frederick Osifelo; Jonathan Fifi'i; Sir Lloyd Maepeza Gina; Sir Peter Kenilorea; and Hilda Kari.
<b>Papua New Guinea</b>	Sir Albert Maori Kiki; Sir Paulias Matane; Sir Michael Somare; Sir Ignatius Kilage; Dame Josephine Abaijah; Sir Anthony Siaguru; and Dame Carol Kidu.
<b>Samoa</b>	Afioga Va'ai Kolone; Misa Telefoni Retzlaff and Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Ta'Isi Efi.
<b>Tonga</b>	Queen Salote Mafile'o Pilolevu Tupou III; and King Taufa'ahau Tupou IV.
<b>Vanuatu</b>	Father Walter Lini; and Reverend Sethy Regenvanu.
<b>Cook Islands</b>	Sir Albert Henry; and Sir Tom Davis, Pa Tuterangi Ariki.
<b>Niue</b>	Sir Robert Rex.
<b>Palau</b>	Roman Tmetuchl.
<b>New Caledonia</b>	Jean-Marie Tjibaou.

Collective portraits provide what Patrick Weller terms an 'amalgam of views, a majority voice constructed by the author as a representation of the spectrum of opinions' expressed across a group of lives.<sup>16</sup> Individually, life histories promise depth. Conversely, I have sought to capture the breadth of this grouping by identifying and interpreting patterns that emerge inductively through a close reading of the entire collection. The comparative method provides insights and patterns unforeseen in a single person narrative. However, the questions and aims remain similar to that of the biographer, providing what David Hanlon calls a 'critical focal

<sup>15</sup> See bibliography for a full reference list

<sup>16</sup> P. Weller, *Australia's Mandarins: the frank & the fearless?* (Australia, 2001), 183

lens' that allows the researcher to engage and reflect on issues as seen by those who lived them, to look beyond theoretical labels and capture the intensity and flavour of the political world.<sup>17</sup>

The use of life histories in interpretive research draws from the logic of narrative inquiry.<sup>18</sup> Specifically, narrative inquiry acknowledges that meaning takes shape in the transitory, multiple, and phenomenal forms of particular lives, and that it does not only reside in the text but in the interaction between the writer's intended meaning and the reader's response.<sup>19</sup> The strength that a narrative logic brings to interpretive research is the emphasis on a context-bound story that simultaneously describes, reflects and reconstructs events that are central to the subjects' view of themselves, thus enabling the reader to gain an 'inside out' view of the world. Consequently, through extracts from their life histories, my intention in this collective portrait is, where possible, to allow these leaders to speak for themselves.

Equally, while the personalised account has strengths, it also has limitations. The term 'life history' is employed here to capture a variety of materials the bulk of which fall into the conventional categories of autobiography and biography, along with edited collections of speeches and writings (in all more than 40 English language sources about 37 individuals). The scope of the sample is primarily dictated by the available published English language sources and as such is biased towards Melanesia and Fiji in particular. In addition, while the

---

<sup>17</sup> D Hanlon, "You Did What, Mr President!?!?" Trying to Write a Biography of Tosiwo Nakayama', in B V Lal and V Luker, eds., *Telling Pacific Lives* (Canberra, 2008), 167

<sup>18</sup> Congruent with the emphasis on reflexivity in interpretive research, my interest in the region comes from having 'grown up' in Fiji during the mid-1990s. I have since undertaken research in Africa and observed politicians from close range whilst working in the Australian Public Service. These experiences inform my interest in this topic but are also pivotal 'sites' in my own life history.

<sup>19</sup> B. Shamir, H Dayan-Horesh and D Adler, 'Leading by Biography: Towards a Life-story Approach to the Study of Leadership', *Leadership*, 1 (2005), 13-29; S Opsina and J Dodge, 'It's About time: Catching Method Up to Meaning - the Usefulness of Narrative Inquiry in Public Administration', *Public Administration Review*, 62 (2005), 143-56; P. J Stewart and A Strathern, 'Introduction: Narratives Speak', in P. J Stewart and A Strathern, eds., *Identity Work: constructing Pacific Lives* (Pittsburgh, 2000), 1 - 27



sample is confined to the published collection, some of these stories were initially recorded as oral histories that have subsequently been ‘written up’ as autobiography.<sup>20</sup>

As a genre, political life histories are often recounted (and refracted) through the lens of a ‘ghost’ writer, editor or biographer. In the Pacific context these people have tended to be academics (predominantly historians and anthropologists) and journalists who have a close connection or identification with their subject.<sup>21</sup> In particular, reflecting my reliance on published sources, this collection is heavily biased towards respected and educated leaders whose histories are cast as the embodiment of virtue: epitomising the way leaders should be. Partially, as Lal outlines, this reflects the ‘great man in history’ tendency of life history, but more commonly the genre of autobiography, and to a lesser extent biography, are critiqued by some scholars for its apparent bias and self-serving nature.<sup>22</sup> This research is not naive to personal agendas, certainly none of these sources seeks to denigrate or otherwise smear their subjects. However, despite the ambiguity with which their subjective or intersubjective nature is received by some political historians, the collection provides a foundation from which to interpret the meanings, beliefs and preferences, articulated to explain key points in their lives.<sup>23</sup>

In the theory of life history writing, autobiography, biography and edited collections of speeches and articles often appear as unique textual types.<sup>24</sup> Certainly the authorial voice differs in each sub-group. However, when looking across this broad sample the variation in story-telling medium becomes less significant as common themes and patterns emerge. So,

---

<sup>20</sup> A M Kiki, the first autobiography by a Pacific political leader, is the most famous example.

<sup>21</sup> Edited collections of speeches and writings tend to be an exception, often edited by supporters.

<sup>22</sup> B V Lal, *In the Eye of the Storm: Jai Ram Reddy and the Politics of Postcolonial Fiji* (Canberra, 2010), xv; See also T Arklay, 'Political Biography: Its Contribution to Political Science', in T Arklay, J Nethercote and J Wanna, eds., *Australian Political Lives* (Canberra, 2006), 13-25

<sup>23</sup> R A W Rhodes, 'Expanding The Repertoire: Theory, Method and Language in Political Biography' in T Arklay, J Nethercote and J Wanna, eds., *Australian Political Lives* (Canberra, 2006), 43-51

<sup>24</sup> For discussion see R Monk, 'Life without theory: Biography as an Exemplar of Philosophical Understanding', *Poetics Today*, 28 (2007), 527-70; B Evans, 'Dr. Johnson's Theory of Biography', *R.E.S.*, 10 (1934), 301-310

we can think of the texts used in this article as points on a continuum. On one end are life stories told in un-aided autobiographies whilst on the other are those crafted from archival and secondary sources. In the middle, where most of these texts reside, is the grey area of authorised biographies and ‘ghost’ written memoirs. Consequently, whilst theory may treat them as opposed types, for the purposes of this study the difference is overstated; particularly as many of the biographers knew their subjects intimately, just as many of the subjects, or their families, intentionally sought out certain ‘ghost’ writers. Furthermore, given the predominance of academic ‘ghost’ writers, editors and biographers, the patterns I have inductively identified can also be interpreted as a cumulative representation of how academia remembers and records personal stories.

In addition to the diversity of ‘ghost’ writers, editors and biographers, there is also a great variety in the length of these sources with some accounts little over a few thousand words while others extend beyond hundreds of pages. However, despite this apparent range in quality, these shorter stories can sometimes provide more illuminating accounts than longer narratives; a long text can be ‘shallow’ and a short text ‘deep’, depending on the questions you seek to answer. Consequently, from the perspective of this research, these different texts can be loosely compared with interviews (many in fact contain interviews with their subjects), or perhaps to reflect the influence of ‘ghost’ writers, editors and biographers: translated interviews. Like interviews, some are more useful than others in developing a collective portrait but - in line with the ontological and epistemological conventions of interpretative research - all, in some way, have helped to inform the overall picture that I have sought to illustrate.<sup>25</sup>

---

<sup>25</sup> For a review of the use of interpretative methods see D Yanow, 'Qualitative-Interpretive Methods in Policy Research', in F Fischer, G. J Miller and M. S Sidney, eds., *Handbook of Policy Analysis: Theory, Politics and Methods* (Boca Raton, 2007); M Bevir, 'Public Administration as Storytelling', *Public Administration*, 89 (2011), 183-95

The genre of life history in the Pacific Islands has been critiqued for its apparent 'European' nature. As Hanlon acknowledges, 'Biography can certainly be an alien, intrusive venture into lives whose parameters are defined, even subsumed, by a complex, interlocking network of kin, clan and family. There is the fact to that we are dealing with multiple identities and inter-subjectivities.'<sup>26</sup> Conversely, many of these political leaders, and their families and supporters, have sought out the genre of life history as a contemporary way of remembering. As Regenvanu reflects:

*I realized the risk confronting all of us – of losing the history of one of the most important periods of our life as a people and as a nation.*<sup>27</sup>

In addition, while some of these stories fit within the so called 'European' conventions of life writing, many - particularly the autobiographies - are quite distinctive in both style and structure. In this respect the subjects' choice of medium is part of the 'worlds' story that I seek to illustrate.

Following on from this discussion, the commitments life history makes to conceptions of self has generated significant discussion amongst anthropologists and historians in the Pacific about whether life history, in the form of autobiography and biography, presumes a 'western' understanding of the individual subject.<sup>28</sup> At one extreme, theorists have critiqued the application of a 'western' notion of personhood and argued that this understanding of the individual self is alien to Pacific cultures. At the other extreme, life history can also be seen to offer an illustration of agency that challenges the presentation of Pacific history where

---

<sup>26</sup> D Hanlon, 'You Did What, Mr President!?!?' Trying to Write a Biography of Tosiwo Nakayama', in B Lal and V Luker, eds., *Telling Pacific Lives* (Canberra, 2008), 173-174

<sup>27</sup> S Regenvanu, *Laef blong mi : from village to nation : an autobiography* (Suva, Fiji: Institute of Pacific Studies; Port Vila, Vanuatu : University of the South Pacific, Emalus Campus, 2004), 4

<sup>28</sup> See P J Stewart and A Strathern, 'Introduction: Narratives Speak', in P. J Stewart and A Strathern, eds., *Identity Work: constructing Pacific Lives* (Pittsburgh, 2000), 1-27; P Hempenstall, 'Introduction', in B V Lal and P Hempenstall, eds., *Pacific Lives, Pacific Places: Bursting Boundaries in Pacific History* (Canberra, 2001), 1-9; D Munro, 'Would the Biographers Please Stand up', in B Lal and P Hempenstall, eds., *Pacific Lives, Pacific Places: Bursting Boundaries in Pacific History* (Canberra, 2001), 47-54

people act collectively according to a cultural template.<sup>29</sup> As I am predominantly interested in the experiences of individuals, what Bourdieu might call their 'habitus', this article leans towards the latter interpretation.<sup>30</sup> However, in doing so I also seek to highlight the various structures or 'fields', cultural and otherwise, that impact on notions of self and individual life worlds. Consequently, binaries like 'structure' and 'agency' have limits when looking at how individuals understand and reflect on their lives as the acknowledgement of how structures are imposed and navigated can imply agency, just as agency can be incorrectly conflated with notions of individualism; ignoring expressions of collective agency articulated by this group of leaders, for example, as national and regional identities.

Finally, the definition of the terms 'political' and 'leader' are heavily contested in social science scholarship. For the purposes of this article 'political leader' is used to loosely describe holders of national political office.<sup>31</sup> There are a number of other life histories from the Pacific Islands whose subjects could be considered both 'political' and 'leaders'.<sup>32</sup> However, to provide a degree of homogeneity in what is already a broad sample I have chosen to restrict the scope to national politics. In addition, while primarily a discussion of national political leaders, one of the points that I seek to highlight throughout is the limitations of a strict delineation between categories of leadership in the Pacific; politicians are often simultaneously leaders in a variety of 'spheres' just as religious or community leaders can be politically active. The figures discussed in this article primarily come from a generation who were actively involved in politics around the time of national independence

---

<sup>29</sup> P Hempenstall, 'Sniffing the Person' in B V Lal and P Hempenstall, eds., *Pacific Lives, Pacific Places: Bursting Boundaries in Pacific History* (Canberra, 2001), 34-47

<sup>30</sup> For discussion see K Maton, 'Habitus', in M Grenfell, ed., *Pierre Bourdieu: Key Concepts* (Durham, 2008), 49-67

<sup>31</sup> The main exception here is Gina who despite being the Speaker was not a popularly elected parliamentarian. The Speaker in Solomon Islands is elected by the parliament and also acts as the head of state when the incumbent is overseas, so I have included him under this loose definition.

<sup>32</sup> For examples see A Strathern, *Ongka: A self-account by a New Guinea big-man* (London, 1979); Elota, of Ga'enaafou, *Elota's story: the life and times of a Solomon Islands big man*, R Keesing ed., (1978)

(roughly 1960-1990). The definition is imperfect given the diversity of colonial tenure in the region. Independence was not an issue in Tonga, for example, whilst forms of free association continue in other parts of the Pacific.<sup>33</sup> Figures that fall on the early margins include Sukuna, Patel and Salote who we might define as the 'pre-independence' generation, while others like Kari, Kidu, Madraiwiwi, Misa Telefoni, Rabuka and Reddy might be more accurately characterised as 'post-independence' leaders. All such definitions, however, are limited. We cannot say that Patel, for example, had no impact on Fijian independence, just as some, like Somare, continue to be politically active beyond the turn of the century. Reflecting the broader gender trend in Pacific politics, the collection is dominated by men, with Salote, Kidu, Abaijah and a short reflective piece by Kari the notable exceptions. Many of the subjects have more than one recorded life history, with figures like Salote, Mara and Rabuka the subjects of multiple accounts. For this reason alone the collection may never be 'complete'. The lives of Tosiwo Nakayama<sup>34</sup> and Solomon Mamaloni are currently being written, while others like Amata Kabua, Ieremia Tabai and Hammer de Roburt have yet to be undertaken.<sup>35</sup>

## Origins

More than any other theory about the origins of political status in the Pacific Islands, Marshall Sahlins' big man versus chief typology is the classic attempt to describe the different ways people compete for power.<sup>36</sup> On the basis of Sahlins' work, we might expect 20<sup>th</sup> Century political leaders in Polynesia to be the descendants of chiefs while in Melanesia

---

<sup>33</sup> See S Levine, ed., *Pacific Ways: Government and Politics in the Pacific Islands* (Wellington, 2009)

<sup>34</sup> David Hanlon has published initial findings from his study of Tosiwo Nakayama, they are included in this study, see D Hanlon, "You Did What, Mr President!?!?" Trying to Write a Biography of Tosiwo Nakayama', in B V Lal and V Luker, eds., *Telling Pacific Lives* (Canberra, 2008), 165-177

<sup>35</sup> The collection also does not include those 'lost leaders' – Francis Talasa Aqarao for example - who passed away prematurely but whose achievements and potential is remembered and recorded by their colleagues in their life histories.

<sup>36</sup> Marshall D. Sahlins, 'Poor Man, Rich Man, Big-Man, Chief: Political Types in Melanesia and Polynesia', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 5 (1963), 285-303

they would have achieved, rather than ascribed, status.<sup>37</sup> While this collection provides some support to this thesis, even setting aside the various definitions of ‘chief’ and ‘commoner’ across the region, the reality is more convoluted.<sup>38</sup> Figures like Sukuna, Mara, Ganilau, Tupua, Salote, Tupou IV fit this chiefly profile - people of ascribed rank whose ancestry provided them with privileged upbringings, particularly for first born sons, imbuing them with a conscious awareness of their status through separation from commoners and tutelage about appropriate norms of chiefly behaviour.<sup>39</sup> However, others from Melanesia like Gina, Lini, Somare, Tjibaou also assert chiefly status, as does Tmetuchl (although Sahlins did not include Micronesia in his typology), while Polynesian heads of government like Rex and Henry do not. In Fiji, Patel came from a privileged Gujarati background, while Singh and Reddy are described as descending from ‘common’ parentage, as are Vakatora, Salato and Rabuka. How then should we describe the origins of this generation? Crocombe asserts that despite diminishing importance the ‘accident of birth’ and chiefly training remain important markers of political status in the region.<sup>40</sup> In this interpretation the influence of familial engagement in decision-making is not restricted to notions of ascribed status; it can also foster an interest and understanding of political life, as Mara recalls:

*I missed quite a lot of school, because my grandfather used to take me off with him to the Council of Chiefs, in either Suva or Bau... I did not attend the council, but I learned a lot sitting around in the evenings with my elders... it was my first introduction to politics and a marvellous education.*<sup>41</sup>

---

<sup>37</sup> For discussion see A McLeod, 'Literature Review of Leadership Models in the Pacific', *State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Program* (2007)

<sup>38</sup> For discussion see M White and L Lindstrom, 'Introduction: Chiefs Today', in M White and L Lindstrom, eds., *Chiefs Today* (Stanford, 1997) and P Larmour, 'Conclusions: Chiefs and States Today', in G White and L Lindstrom, eds., *Chiefs Today* (Stanford, 1997)

<sup>39</sup> R Crocombe, *The South Pacific* (Suva, Fiji, 2001), 486

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, 486

<sup>41</sup> K Mara, *The Pacific Way* (Honolulu, 1997), 14

Moreover, across this group the pattern of parental occupation bears wider significance than rank. Tongan royalty are, in some respects, an exception to the more general pattern of political leaders being the children of policeman, pastors, teachers and administrators – including those with ascribed rank - a cadre of Islanders working with or for the Colonial government. Status and geographical proximity may have facilitated access to these occupations, but there are enough exceptions to undermine this as a deterministic classification. As Madraiwiwi describes in his reflections on Fijian politics:

*The period of leadership of Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara and Ratu Sir Penaia Ganilau collectively covered the first thirty years of independence. It was common to see this period as the continuation of chiefly leadership. In a sense that was an illusion. For while these two towering figures dwelt at the apex, the pyramid was actually made up of far more educated Fijians of non-chiefly rank... Chiefs wishing to participate in politics must do so on equal terms with others. There is no prior right of leadership, and to that extent democratic norms have taken root.*<sup>42</sup>

A similar point can be made about Crocombe's observation that many of this generation came from part European or Asian backgrounds.<sup>43</sup> While figures like Davis, Henry, Nakayama and Rex provide examples of 'mixed' parentage, this trend does not sustain broad generalisation.

Parents and relatives are also recognised in these accounts as fostering or supporting decisions to seek out a government or mission education. Similar acknowledgment is given to numerous mentors within these volumes. These may have been role models like Ratu Sukuna, for example, who famously cultivated a generation of Fijian leaders, including Ganilau, Mara and Salato; missionaries - the Reverend Goldie features in the narratives of

---

<sup>42</sup> W Tubman, ed., *A Personal Perspective: The Speeches of Joni Madraiwiwi* (Suva, 2008), 40

<sup>43</sup> R Crocombe, *The South Pacific* (Suva, Fiji, 2001), 466

Choiseul men Gina and Zoloveke; anthropologists – the relationship between Fifi'i and the man who edited his autobiography, Roger Keesing, would be enormously important to both of their lives; or members of the colonial administration who helped them gain access to education and later employment. Kiki nominates Albert Speer - he later took his name - who sought out opportunities for him to pursue overseas study while Mara's former friend and patron Dr Verrier was later elected to parliament as an Alliance Party member and held the position of Parliamentary Private Secretary in Mara's government. Consequently, for these political leaders, it is their access to education, fostered in part by countless relatives, friends and mentors, which sets this generation apart.

The other significant contextual influence on the formative years of these lives is war. The First World War interrupted Salote's education in New Zealand whilst Sukuna famously left his studies to fight for the French Foreign Legion in France, an act that brought him recognition and honour. Of greater significance to later political leaders is the displacement experienced during the Second World War by those in western Melanesia and the northern Pacific - where war was the catalyst for a change in the colonial administration.<sup>44</sup> The common pattern is of interrupted schooling, with many graduating in their mid-twenties.

Fifi'i describes talking with African American soldiers who questioned why he accepted the ill-treatment of colonial rule, meetings that provided the impetus for his later involvement in *Maasina Ruru*, a political movement of great significance in the history of Malaita and Solomon Islands:

*[these discussions]... started us thinking; we started to get ideas. We felt angry that we'd been given no power, that we had been treated like rubbish. We had to change*

---

<sup>44</sup> See L Lindstrom and G White, 'Introduction: War Stories', in G White and L Lindstrom, eds., *The Pacific Theatre: Island Representations of World War II* (Honolulu, 1989)



*all that. Whatever trouble we brought on ourselves, we had to stand up to the government.*<sup>45</sup>

Some like Vakatora and Henry spent time in uniform, whilst for younger future leaders war was experienced more immediately by their parents. What is apparent from these accounts is that the Second World War in particular is perceived as a watershed moment in their national and individual histories, a period where old social and political arrangements were challenged, and from the shadow of which the independence generation emerged.<sup>46</sup>

## Education

With some exceptions – notably the Tongan royalty, and those born overseas (Kidu, Patel) – accounts of early childhoods generally recall the routine and ritual of everyday village life. Some, like Tupua and Mara, were groomed at a very early age for leadership, but generally early memories recall an idyllic lifestyle of fishing and hunting with other children. Many recount the first time they met a ‘white person’ or had their first exposure to the ‘outside world’, often through a church-run village school. ‘Two worlds’ is a metaphor that is regularly invoked in these life histories; and this ‘village world’, or what has become a synonym for ‘traditional world’, is one such ‘site’. For many it describes their roots, a location within a particular time and place that they left, often dramatically, although an enduring connection often became central to their later leadership claims. It is from here that many were identified by their teachers and parents as having an aptitude for higher learning. For some, this came as a surprise, Kenilorea recalls being out pig hunting when the MV *Nancy* arrived unheralded:

---

<sup>45</sup> J Fifi'i, *From Pig-Theft to Parliament: My Life Between Two Worlds*, R Keesing ed., (Suva, 1989), 52

<sup>46</sup> B V Lal, *In the Eye of the Storm: Jai Ram Reddy and the Politics of Postcolonial Fiji* (Canberra, 2010), 42

*...Festus Puahanikeni [Bible School teacher] had to decide instantly and at random whom to send... I was instructed without explanation to pack my personal effects and board the waiting government ship for Auki.<sup>47</sup>*

For those who didn't receive scholarships their family and village often financed their education - in the case of chiefs it was often expected. Mirroring the emerging colonial education system, this generation became amongst the first to receive a high school education with institutions like Queen Victoria School (QVS) in Fiji; King George VI School (KGV) in Solomon Islands; Sogeri Secondary School in Papua New Guinea; and Xavier High School on Chuuk often recalled for their strict, disciplinarian boarding school environment where predominantly expatriate teachers prepared students for further tertiary studies. For others, secondary education entailed going overseas. Salote and Sukuna both went to secondary school in New Zealand, as did Davis and Tupua, while Abaijah, Siaguru and Kari went to Australia and Tmetuchl to Guam.

As a group they are generally characterised by their high level of academic achievement. This is predominantly a collection of school prefects and head boys, generally at the top of their respective classes; education had already marked them out as members of the emerging Pacific elite but even amongst their peers most were the standouts. Secondary education provided the platform for further tertiary study overseas but it is from this point that career paths begin to take shape and life defining choices were made. Tertiary education did not always follow directly after secondary schooling. Some, like Somare and Kolone, did not get the opportunity to undertake tertiary study overseas but began teaching, while Matane and Kari entered the public service. Osifelo and Matane later undertook public administration courses in London, the latter subsequently became well known for publishing travel books

---

<sup>47</sup> P Kenilorea, *Tell It As It Is*, C Moore ed., (Taipei, 2008), 49-50

about his trips overseas.<sup>48</sup> Others, like Rex, Kilage and Fifi'i, did not benefit from a high school education but both spent substantial periods away from home: Rex as a seaman, Kilage as a plantation worker in Buka and Fifi'i as Keesing's guest at Santa Cruz University. However, the more common narrative recounts spending large periods outside their respective countries receiving tertiary education or administrative training. New Zealand (Bavadra, Davis, Kenilorea, Lini, Mara, Telefoni, Tupua, Henry, Reddy, Rabuka) was the most common destination, along with London (Abaijah, Patel, Salato, Singh), Oxford (Sukuna, Ganilau, Mara, Vakatora), Suva (Inia, Kiki, Regenvanu, Zoleveke), Philippines (Abaijah, Tmetchul), Hawaii (Nakayama), Sydney (Tupou IV), Lyon and Paris (Tjibaou) and New Delhi (Rabuka).

What ties this somewhat eclectic group of people and places together is the impact that this experience had on their lives. Combined with their initial schooling, most had spent more than a decade away from their villages and families. For many these were their formative years, spent in foreign places and countries, amongst people from a range of cultural backgrounds, away from their respective 'homes':

*In the beginning I was homesick. The new environment and my having come from an entirely different world, now very far way, made what might have been a simple homesickness into a desperate longing, overlaying a feeling of utter loneliness... To an island boy New Zealand had some surprises... no coconut trees, in fact not many trees that I could recognise and name. The houses were different... the paved roads... the electricity... What was most surprising of all was saying "hello" to people you passed*

---

<sup>48</sup>See P Matane, *A New Guinean travels through Africa* (Port Moresby, 1971)

*in the street and receiving nothing more than a surprised or sometimes belligerent glare.*<sup>49</sup>

The experience of loneliness and dislocation that Davis recalls is common to several of these accounts. While many moved past these initial feelings of isolation to embrace the opportunities and liberties that living away from home offered, some, like Kiki, describe remaining unsettled. These emotions were often reinforced when returning to their villages for holidays. Regenvanu describes this process as ‘cultural alienation’<sup>50</sup> while Kenilorea recounts feeling humiliated when he returned home unable to speak his native language, the price of his hard won education:

*After a while, I began to hear and understand spoken English and eventually could write the language. Then, after a year or two at KGV, I discovered that I was gradually losing the ability to speak my own language... When I was allowed to go home for my first holiday... I had to face being speechless among my own people and family. It was a frustrating and shameful situation, and that six weeks’ holiday seemed a millennium to me.*<sup>51</sup>

The type of experience varied from place to place, person to person. As Waddell comments in his biography of Tjibaou:

*In both time and place, his experience [studying in Paris] was very different from that of his friend Ratu Mara, who had come from the aristocratic and sheltered Lau*

---

<sup>49</sup> T Davis and Pa Tuterangi Ariki, *Island boy : an autobiography* (Suva, Christchurch, Auckland, 1992), 11

<sup>50</sup> S Regenvanu, *Laef blong mi: from village to natio : an autobiography* (Suva, Fiji : Institute of Pacific Studies; Port Vila, Vanuatu : University of the South Pacific, Emalus Campus, 2004) , 25

<sup>51</sup> P Kenilorea, *Tell It As It Is*, C Moore ed., (Taipei, 2008), 56-57

*Islands and whose European academic experience had been restricted to the cloistered quadrangles of Oxford.*<sup>52</sup>

For Mara and many of his Fijian counterparts, spending time in England reinforced deep linkages with the monarchy, whilst for Tjibaou, Patel, Lini and others, their time overseas further cultivated their emerging views about independence and self-determination. Whether the experience of studying overseas was positive or negative, none remained unchanged. Deryck Scarr describes Sukuna as defying convention on return from Europe, breaking chiefly taboo by patting Mara's head, seeking to play cricket on a Sunday, and talking sex with his sister:

*[He] had become more advanced than his father could have imagined, in small but trying ways for his family.*<sup>53</sup>

Others found the experience just as pivotal in forming their political views:

*The developments that were taking place in the Pacific region during the period of my tertiary education... were to have a significant impact on me. I refer here to political developments; the increasing involvement of indigenous people in the leadership affairs of their countries, leading in several cases to independence... What was clear to me was that Vanuatu lagged behind other Pacific countries in the area of political advancement.*<sup>54</sup>

*There were students from all over the world at Ruskin [Oxford]... Sometimes we would have group discussions over a pint at one of the nearby local pubs. I found*

---

<sup>52</sup> E Waddell, *Jean-Marie Tjibaou, Kanak witness to the world: an intellectual biography* (Honolulu, 2008), 108

<sup>53</sup> D Scarr, *Ratu Sukuna: Soldier, Statesman, Man of Two Worlds* (London, 1980), 59

<sup>54</sup> S Regenvanu, *Laef blong mi : from village to nation : an autobiography* (Suva, Fiji: Institute of Pacific Studies; Port Vila, Vanuatu : University of the South Pacific, Emalus Campus, 2004), 87

*these informal discussions most rewarding and informative, as different students put forward their views on particular subjects... Ruskin was rife with politics...*<sup>55</sup>

Aside from the personal growth and exposure to new ideas, people and places, education provided this group of future political leaders with an intra and inter island network that shaped and influenced their later lives, and the politics of their respective countries. Mara's description of QVS, for example, reads like a rollcall of the 20th Century Fijian political elite, while many others from the 'British Pacific' also fondly recall the friendships made during their QVS days.<sup>56</sup> Some of these relationships reinforced old linkages. Mara also describes rekindling old connections when meeting with Samoan chiefs during his time in New Zealand:

*These friendships have lasted through the years and been very valuable in the establishment and success of our regional organisations, particularly in the early days when we were few in number.*<sup>57</sup>

Aside from fostering the early foundation for national and regional identities, these schools and university campuses provided a space and intellectual forum where the future of Pacific Island countries was hotly debated. They became the breeding ground for expressions of nationalism and political activism. Lini's monthly magazine *Onetalk*, along with later manifestations, evolved to become a political party and later Vanuatu's first national government. Regenvanu recalls being in Suva when:

*I began to hear about Father Walter Lini and his newspaper... along with Kalpokor Kalsakau who had completed his education in Australia... These young men inspired me and I saw them as leaders with whom I could work for the good of our country.*<sup>58</sup>

---

<sup>55</sup> T Vakatora, *From the mangrove swamps* (Fiji, 1988), 27

<sup>56</sup> K Mara, *The Pacific Way* (Honolulu, 1997), 15-17

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, 25

Somare reflects that his year at the Administrative College in Port Moresby was the most important of his life. It included the first meetings of the famous *Bully Beef Club*, in Kiki's house, a body that later evolved into Papua New Guinea's first political party and national government.

*It was then that I met many like-minded men who are still my friends today. Together we began to plan the future of our country... We talked politics all the time. Our teachers encouraged us to take a lively interest in current affairs and to freely discuss the political and economic future of our country... We made Albert's house the breeding ground for politics... We became known as the Bully Beef Club. It was the first political forum we had.*<sup>59</sup>

For Tjibaou and other members of the 'French Pacific' the seminars provided a similar melting pot:

*...a new generation of leaders within the francophone Pacific was to emerge from their student bodies: Francois Burck, Eloi Machoro, and Gabriel Paita in New Caledonia; Gerard Leymang in Vanuatu; and Oscar Temaru in French Polynesia, to name only a few. For the students it was a first step beyond the boundaries of kin and islands into a much larger Oceanian world. They shared a new language, they spoke of national and regional identities, and they engaged in broad-ranging political debate. Several were to become close friends and collaborators for life, activists in New Caledonia and elsewhere in the Pacific...*<sup>60</sup>

---

<sup>58</sup> S Regenvanu, *Laef blong mi: from village to nation: an autobiography* (Suva, Fiji : Institute of Pacific Studies; Port Vila, Vanuatu : University of the South Pacific, Emalus Campus, 2004), 87

<sup>59</sup> M Somare, *Sana: an autobiography of Michael Somare* (Port Moresby, 1975), 45-46

<sup>60</sup> E Waddell, *Jean-Marie Tjibaou, Kanak witness to the world: an intellectual biography* (Honolulu, 2008), 48

Not that tertiary study was the only forum for this type of exchange. An administrative course for senior public officers in the 'British Pacific' at the University of the South Pacific, was another such 'site' attended by a number of future political leaders, including Solomon Islanders Kenilorea and Gina, whilst Osifelo and George Ati Sokomann, later Vanuatu's first President, met at a similar course for British colonial administrators in Torquay, England. Less glamorous, perhaps, is Vakatora's chance meeting with prominent Fijian academic Rusiate Nayacakalou as they worked together as temporary employees of Islington Post Office, engaged, like many of their fellow Islanders, in supplementing their meagre student stipends through casual employment. For many these friendships and networks lasted their lives and were pivotal in their later political careers. Kenilorea fondly recalls sharing his first trip on an aeroplane with Solomon Mamaloni, en route to school in New Zealand.<sup>61</sup> Kenilorea later explains that:

*When my old friend Solo requested that I join him to form a Government, I willingly obliged... I felt compelled to cross the floor... Outsiders looking at Solomon Islands politics often note the unusual combinations of individuals which may seem totally devious and self-seeking. They fail to realise that our reasoning often comes out of our traditional cultures, our long knowledge of each other – and for Solo and me, that meant as far back as when were schoolboys – combined with our love for our nation. Political parties come second.*<sup>62</sup>

Finally, the role of religion and personal faith is central to understanding these formative years. For many their contact with the church was their first exposure to people and ideas beyond their village, often mediated by a parent or relative who was a pastor or lay preacher and often doubled as the village school teacher. Denominations and experiences differ but

---

<sup>61</sup> P Kenilorea, *Tell It As It Is*, C Moore ed., (Taipai, 2008), 97

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, 265-266



common to most, including those from a non-Christian background, is at some point attending Church-run institutions. This exposure became the catalyst for a variety of personal responses to questions of faith and spirituality. For those who later became priests or clergy (Lini, Regenvanu, Tjibaou) this is where they begun their vocation. For others, this environment was the catalyst for a rejection, as Kiki asserts:

*We were forced to attended church and Sunday school, but Christianity never came to mean anything to me... I did not want to become a missionary.*<sup>63</sup>

For Mara, his year at Marist resulted in his conversion from Methodism to Catholicism, a decision that Scarr describes as increasingly important to his inner life.<sup>64</sup> For most, faith remained central to their sense of identity for the rest of their lives. Bain and Baba recall that for Bavadra:

*...his strong Christian faith... was to provide him with a source of indomitable inner strength and conviction to face the testing challenges that lay ahead.*<sup>65</sup>

While Kathleen Hancock describes how after a morning of toil Kolone would spend time reading his bible.<sup>66</sup> For some their faith was a private matter, central to their inner self but one step removed from their later politics. For others, like Lini, there was no such distinction:

*Should the Church play politics? My answer is Yes... The Church is a body which should uphold moral standards of justice. Politics is the way in which moral*

---

<sup>63</sup> A Kiki, *ten thousand years in a lifetime, a New Guinea autobiography* (Melbourne, 1968), 59-61

<sup>64</sup> D Scarr, *Tuimacilai: A Life of Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara* (Adelaide, 2008), 38

<sup>65</sup> A Bain and T Baba, eds., *Bavadra: Prime Minister, Statesman, Man of the People* (Nadi, 1990), ix-x

<sup>66</sup> K Hancock, *Men of Mana: Portraits of three Pacific leaders: Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, Afioga Vas'ai Kolone, Sir Robert Rex* (Wellington: Steele Roberts, 2003), 95

*judgements are effected... In other words, Church and politics are essential for man's existence and one could not do without the other.*<sup>67</sup>

Conversely, Waddell finds that while Tjibaou's personal faith never wavered, he was forced to leave the priesthood to pursue his political aims:

*Because of the Catholic Church's profound ambivalence toward the collective aspirations of the Melanesian inhabitants of New Caledonia, he had no choice but to abandon the priesthood... If the Church had provided him with an education and enriched the notion of service, it had also progressively isolated him from his own people and threatened his very roots.*<sup>68</sup>

Encounters, responses and beliefs vary but for the majority either the acceptance or rejection of Christian precepts and ideals were foundational moments in their personal and political lives. Not that Christianity was the only religion of importance, particularly in Fiji, nor should we ignore that many experienced a continued relationship with indigenous forms of spirituality – between what Tupua might call his Christian (Catholic) reference and his indigenous Samoan reference<sup>69</sup> - but Christianity is the most observable pattern. To underscore this influence, particularly in Vanuatu where the vagaries of condominium government meant that the churches played a central role in achieving independence, this reflection by Regenvanu outlines the extent of this impact:

*...had it not been for what the churches did, this country would not have had the handful of educated indigenous people at the crucial stage to direct the country in its course towards political independence. Many of the leaders of the first political*

---

<sup>67</sup> W Lini, *Beyond pandemonium : from the New Hebrides to Vanuatu* (Wellington 1980) , 19

<sup>68</sup> E Waddell, *Jean-Marie Tjibaou, Kanak witness to the world: an intellectual biography* (Honolulu, 2008), 71

<sup>69</sup> T Suaalii-Sauni, ed., *In search of fragrance : Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Ta'isi and the Samoan indigenous reference* (Samoa, 2009) , 6

*parties were ordained pastors or priests... Even those who did not train to be ordained... were products of early church education. Indeed, all Ni-Vanuatu of the independence generation received their basic primary and, in many cases, secondary education in church-run institutions.*<sup>70</sup>

## **Career**

To complement the centrality of contextual, parental and educational influences on political leaders, we also need to acknowledge and better understand their work histories. Politics, relative to other occupations like the civil service, is partially defined by the absence of careerism. While many of the subjects in this sample spent decades in political office it is also true that all had alternate careers – the two examples from the Tongan monarchy aside. While in many cases their political potential was identified early and groomed, most began life under colonial regimes as lawyers, administrators, doctors, soldiers, clergy, business persons and, most commonly, teachers. However, as Crocombe observes, this pattern is altered somewhat by the localisation policies of the late colonial period that resulted in many pursuing positions in public administration.<sup>71</sup> As administrators, the other hallmark of this generation is rapid promotion. A combination of natural talent and educational qualifications made many the obvious candidates for senior administrative roles. For some, rank played a part, certainly positions in native or Fijian affairs were considered the domain of chiefs, but we can intimate that for many what set them apart from their contemporaries was their work ethic and intelligence, combined with the need for colonial administrators to identify and nurture talent in the face of impending decolonisation and the rapid retirement of colonial officials.

---

<sup>70</sup> S Regenvanu, *Laef blong mi : from village to nation : an autobiography* (Suva, Fiji: Institute of Pacific Studies; Port Vila, Vanuatu : University of the South Pacific, Emalus Campus, 2004), 171-172

<sup>71</sup> R Crocombe, *The South Pacific* (Suva, Fiji, 2001) , 466

While in the late-colonial period many enjoyed rapid promotion, racist and paternalistic colonial policies also left an indelible mark, informing their political views:

*Solomon Islanders, the young people nowadays, wouldn't believe what it was like – the colonial caste system, with the white people all segregated up on the hill, with their hotel and their club... We Solomon Islanders were at the very bottom of the heap.*<sup>72</sup>

*I soon discovered that the administration considered us to be irresponsible and treated us like children... The paternalistic attitude of the administration was somewhat one-sided, however. While we were told many times that we were like children and that others knew what was best for us, we were not being looked after like children.*<sup>73</sup>

Even amongst educated indigenous Fijians, who more than most had a strong sense of connection and loyalty to the Crown, the bitterness of racism was apparent. Sukuna was famously denied the opportunity to fight in the British Army during the First World War, whilst Salato was later deprived of a commission in the Navy as his Central Medical School qualification as a Native Medical Practitioner did not meet the eligibility requirements. Racism carried the double burden of social dislocation. Kenilorea recalls that even in the late colonial years:

*...your worth was judged either by the colour of your skin, the job you held, your upbringing, and the number of letters after your name. There was a*

---

<sup>72</sup> J Fifi'i, *From Pig-Theft to Parliament: My Life Between Two Worlds*, R Keesing ed., (Suva, 1989), 34

<sup>73</sup> A Kiki, *ten thousand years in a lifetime, a New Guinea autobiography* (Melbourne, 1968) , 91-92

*Cambridge/Oxford clique amongst the British officers who had made their careers out of 'governing natives', that we locals could never enter.*<sup>74</sup>

In addition, while:

*Some British officials considered me inconsiderate and ill-mannered because I easily shared many of their cultural nuances. Equally, some of my own people accused me, falsely, of being "black-white man", because I appeared to relate easily to foreigners.*<sup>75</sup>

Not that these attitudes were confined to the colonial administration, Regenvanu and Tjibaou recall similar experiences within the Church. Fresh from her schooling in Australia, Abaijah recounts being politely informed after attending a service in Port Moresby that:

*"...we don't encourage natives to come to this church."*<sup>76</sup>

This was an experience she found particularly baffling given she had been welcomed at services in Australia. Consequently, while this group, perhaps more than any previous generation, had obtained some benefits from colonial rule through scholarships and educational opportunities, many also experienced firsthand the bitterness of segregation and prevailing notions of racialised superiority. For some these experiences became their cause, motivating their later political engagement. Others worked harder, anxious to gain respect. While others still bided their time, reading the tides of history, determined to prove their previous colonial masters wrong when they took the reins. Despite the injustices, experience in the colonial administration was not without its benefits, as Kenilorea concludes:

---

<sup>74</sup> P Kenilorea, *Tell It As It Is*, C Moore ed., (Taipai, 2008), 160-161

<sup>75</sup> Ibid, 160-161

<sup>76</sup> J Abaijah, *A Thousand Coloured Dreams: The Story of a Young Girl growing up in Papua* (Melbourne, 1991), 45

*My experiences in several areas of the nation as a District Officer and Commissioner were also crucial in building my understanding of what was needed and how it could be accomplished and coordinated at the level of government and administration. These things gave me tremendous strength when I made decisions as Prime Minister or in my other Cabinet positions...*<sup>77</sup>

So far I have painted a picture of pre-political careers dominated by positions in public and church administration. While this pattern is apparent, it is not a rule, and if anything the diversity of career paths becomes more apparent amongst post-independence leaders. Davis left his post as Medical Officer in the Cook Islands to spend more than twenty years in various research positions in America. Henry also left to further provide for his family, he had previously published the newspaper *Te Akatauiria* when he wasn't teaching; in New Zealand he worked as a bus driver. Doctors Bavadra and Salato spent time in Solomon Islands, while Ganilau and Rabuka served with the military on active duty overseas. Many had extensive business interests, Mara and Kolone had plantations that they ran in conjunction to their later political positions, Rex owned a store, Tmetchul's business interests included everything from construction and real estate to banking and even a power plant. Some, like Inia and Henry, were involved in co-operative ventures whilst Vakatora variously experimented with a catering business and a bicycle shop.

The nature of their primary occupation, however, masks their other associations and interests. We can also think of this group as great joiners and initiators:

*During the ten years 1963-1973, I served on a number of boards and committees in addition to my civil service job. I was Chairman of the Labour Advisory Board, the Board of Management of the Suva Youth Centre, and the Visiting Committee of Suva*

---

<sup>77</sup> P Kenilorea, *Tell It As It Is*, C Moore ed., (Taipai, 2008), 291

*Gaol and Naboro Prison. I was a member of the Fiji Electricity Authority, the FNPF Board, the Executive Committee of the Fiji Rugby Union, the Board of Air Pacific, Polynesian Airlines, the Manpower Resources Council, the Civil Service Grading Committee and the Committee of the Fiji Public Service Association.*<sup>78</sup>

This account of Vakatora's associations is amongst the most extensive documented in these life histories but others are in a similar vein. Bavadra was an Executive Member of the Fiji Medical Association, Chairman of the Fiji National Food and Nutrition Committee and President of the Fiji Public Servants Association. He was also a committed unionist, a movement that both Henry and Kiki were variously associated with. A.D. Patel was President of the Indian Association of Fiji. He was also President of the Indian Chamber of Commerce, patron of the Gujarat Mandal and General Manager of the schools run by the then India Sanmarga Ikya Sangam, the cultural organisation of South Indians. Hilda Kari was President of Solomon Islands National Council of Women – a cause she explains stemmed from her personal experience with gender discrimination as a public servant<sup>79</sup> - whilst Tjibaou was the key influence behind the Melanesia 2000 festival. Many were also heavily involved in sporting bodies. Ganilau played rugby for Fiji and was later the President of the Fiji Rugby Union, whilst Osifelo was President of the Solomon Islands Amateur Sports Association. Others were involved in the Church, often as lay preachers. These interests highlight the different 'spheres' or 'worlds' within which politicians operate. Their affiliation with these types of associations is central to understanding why they eventually became involved in politics: it is not just that their education and work experience made them the obvious and most qualified candidates for political office, but that it made them the obvious candidates for any number of positions. Their involvement in these bodies, combined with their drive and

---

<sup>78</sup> T Vakatora, *From the mangrove swamps* (Fiji, 1988), 35

<sup>79</sup> H Kari, 'Go for what you can achieve', in A A Pollard and M Waring, eds., *Being the first: storis blong oloketa mere lo Solomon Aelan* (Honiara, 2009), 68

ability, gave them a public profile and reputation. Consequently, like their contemporaries around the world, we can think of the legislature as an extension of their social, political and commercial networks; another body for them to join.

Finally, I cannot conclude this section without also referring to marriage. Marriage is perhaps one of the oldest, and universal, means of securing political power and certainly there are examples, such as Salote's, of unions described as 'dynastic' in this collection. Royal weddings aside, marriages took many forms including those that followed village conventions and others that were symptomatic of their generation and circumstance. Regenvanu married his teacher, Abaijah's 'Dr Dina' was her teacher and later employer, while Davis and Reddy both married their first wives whilst studying overseas. Despite the great variety in the circumstances, marriage played an important role in shaping many of their later career choices. For example, Lal argues that one of the factors in Patel's decision to migrate to Fiji was the potential scandal his marriage to an English divorcee would cause in India.<sup>80</sup> Hanlon observes that the connections of Nakayama's wife were crucial in his later political career, while Kidu acknowledges, albeit in different circumstances, that she was primarily elected as her husband 'Buri's' widow.<sup>81</sup> Spouses can be thought of as influential political players, in addition to their more commonly acknowledged function of providing important emotional support and sage advice. On the other hand, extra-marital affairs can be the cause of political scandal, as in the case of Rabuka.<sup>82</sup> Certainly, however, in most cases, the sacrifices made by the spouses of these leaders should not be underestimated. They are, in many ways, the silent force that underpins the celebrated public personas, and while their presence is often overlooked in life histories, the glimpses offered highlight their significance

---

<sup>80</sup> B. V Lal, *A vision for change : A.D. Patel and the politics of Fiji* (Canberra, 2010) , 29

<sup>81</sup> D Hanlon, "You Did What, Mr President!?!?" Trying to Write a Biography of Tosiwo Nakayama', in B Lal and V Luker, eds., *Telling Pacific Lives* (Canberra, 2008), 165-177; C Kidu, *A remarkable journey* (South Melbourne 2002), 161

<sup>82</sup> J Sharpham, *Rabuka of Fiji* (Rockhampton, 2000) , 266-267



in shaping and moulding the direction of these illustrious lives. As Lal remarks of Reddy's second wife Chandra:

*She is a women of great strength of character, an astute observer of the political scene and a good judge of people. She remains Reddy's inner sanctum, his sanctuary from the ravages of public life, fiercely loyal and totally devoted; and like so many Indo-Fijian women of her time and cultural background, has put her husband's career ahead of her own.*<sup>83</sup>

## Conclusion

In this article I have sought to provide a collective portrait of how a generation of political leaders experienced growing up and out of colonialism by exploring how their careers were shaped by various 'sites', broadly identified as origins, education and career, and how they navigated different 'spheres' or 'worlds'. As evidenced by its prominence in these life histories, the 'two worlds' metaphor forms part of a widely accepted lexicon to describe how these leaders experienced living in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Pacific and, as Crocombe highlights, the capacity and familiarity with which political leaders move between different 'worlds' or 'spheres' is how they often articulate the legitimacy of their leadership claims, and one of the reasons why their constituents chose them to lead.<sup>84</sup> Their mobility then can be interpreted as a political advantage just as Crocombe's 'foreign orientated' representation can eschew our understanding of the organic links that exist between leaders and the communities they represent, with geographic associations often part of later leadership claims.<sup>85</sup> Accordingly, one of the things that I have sought to demonstrate in this article is the limits of reductive and static dichotomised representations of traditional and modern 'worlds'. These terms may have

---

<sup>83</sup> B V Lal, *In the Eye of the Storm: Jai Ram Reddy and the Politics of Postcolonial Fiji* (Canberra, 2010), 65

<sup>84</sup> R Crocombe, *The South Pacific* (Suva, Fiji, 2001), 466

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid*, 466

utility to those seeking to privilege either the traditional or modern view but they are of limited use when seeking to gain an insight into the formative influences and experiences of the Pacific's 20<sup>th</sup> Century political leaders. As the following extract by Misa Telefoni illustrates, inevitably, once we look at their lives in more detail, we are compelled to investigate the different 'sites' and the influence of different 'spheres' or 'worlds' on notions of agency and career:

*My own answer to the question, "Who are you?", depends on the environment I am in when you ask me the question...*

*When I am one of the delegates to the Annual Methodist Conference, I answer the question: Who are you? "I am a Methodist."*

*If I am attending Parliament, or a Cabinet meeting... "I am Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance."*

*If I am attending the AGM of the Society of Accountants... "I am a certified Public Accountant, (CPA)."*

*If I appear at the AGM of the Law Society... "I am a Lawyer, an attorney at law."*

*If I attend a meeting in my village of Falelatai... "I am Misa, a matai (chief) from Falelatai."*

*...there are so many answers... you may [also] be a husband, a father, a grandfather, all these family roles are just as important elements of who you are...*

*You are all of these "I ams," yet you are never exclusively one or the other, you are always a combination of all of them...*

*If you ask me, What is your most important “I am.” My answer would be, “I am Samoan.” Why? Because being Samoan defines my psyche, the values I hold dear.*<sup>86</sup>

This extract summarises the alternative interpretation I have offered to investigate how many political leaders navigate and construct their multiple identities.<sup>87</sup> From this perspective, ‘sites’ may not be unique to certain ‘worlds’ but rather illustrate the connections between them, while terms like ‘ethnicity’, ‘rank’, ‘tradition’ and ideas like the ‘accident of birth’ can mask our perceptions of Pacific political elites and their expressions of multiple selves. Consequently, understanding the multiplicity of ‘sites’, ‘spheres’ or ‘worlds’, and how they are navigated, is central to comprehending these individuals, their later political careers, and the political coalitions they formed. There are patterns, as Crocombe asserts and I have explored, that point to the importance of origins, overseas education – which also partially reflects an inherent bias in the collection - and work experience, particularly in public administration.<sup>88</sup> However, these are not rules. Rather, it is the interaction between these multiple ‘sites’ and identities these leaders adopt and cultivate that expands our understanding of their life trajectories.

---

<sup>86</sup> M Telefoni Retzlaff, *To Thine Own Self Be True* (2006), 176-178

<sup>87</sup> G White, 'Afterword: Lives and Histories', in P. J Stewart and A Strathern, eds., *Identity Work: constructing Pacific Lives* (Pittsburgh, 2000) , 172-189

<sup>88</sup> R Crocombe, *The South Pacific* (Suva, Fiji, 2001) , 466

## Bibliography of Life Histories

### *Fiji*

D Scarr, *Ratu Sukuna: Soldier, Statesman, Man of Two Worlds* (London, 1980)

D Scarr, ed., *Fiji: The Three-legged Stool: selected writings of Ratu Sir Lala Sukuna* (1983)

T R Vakatora, *From the mangrove swamps* (Fiji, 1988)

D Eddie and S Ritova, *Rabuka, no other way* (Sydney, 1988)

A Bain and T Baba, eds., *Bavadra: Prime Minister, Statesman, Man of the People* (Nadi, 1990)

D Tarte, *Turaga: The Life and Times and Chiefly Authority of Ratu Sir Penaia Ganilau* (Suva, 1993)

A Howard, *Hef Ran Ta (The Morning Star) A Biography of Wilson Inia, Rotuma's First Senator* (Suva, 1994)

K Mara, *The Pacific Way* (Honolulu, 1997)

B V Lal, *A vision for change: A.D. Patel and the politics of Fiji* (Canberra 1997)

R Kiste, *He Served: A Biography of Macu Salato* (Suva, 1998)

J Sharpham, *Rabuka of Fiji* (Rockhampton, 2000)

[Mara] K Hancock, *Men of Mana: Portraits of three Pacific leaders: Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, Afioga Vas'ai Kolone, Sir Robert Rex* (Wellington: Steele Roberts, 2003)

V R Singh, *Speaking Out*, V Kumar ed., (Australia, 2006)

W Tubman, ed., *A Personal Perspective: The Speeches of Joni Madraiwiwi* (Suva, 2008)

D Scarr, *Tuimacilai: A Life of Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara* (Adelaide, 2008)

B V Lal, *In the Eye of the Storm: Jai Ram Reddy and the Politics of Postcolonial Fiji* (Canberra, 2010)

### *Solomon Islands*

G A P Zoleveke, *Zoleveke, a man from Choiseul: an autobiography*, J Crick ed., (Suva, 1980)

F Osifelo, *Kanaka Boy: An Autobiography* (Suva, 1985)

J Fifi'i, *From Pig-Theft to Parliament: My Life Between Two Worlds*, R Keesing ed., (Suva, 1989)

L M Gina, *Journeys in a small canoe: the life and times of a Solomon Islander*, J. A. Bennett with K. L Russell eds., (Canberra, 2003)

P Kenilorea, *Tell It As It Is*, C Moore ed., (Taipei, 2008)

H Kari, 'Go for what you can achieve', in A A Pollard and M Waring, eds., *Being the first: storis blong oloketa mere lo Solomon Aelan* (Honiara, 2009)

#### *Papua New Guinea*

A M Kiki, *ten thousand years in a lifetime, a New Guinea autobiography*, U Beier ed., (Melbourne, 1968).

P Matane, *My childhood in New Guinea* (London and New York, 1972).

M T Somare, *Sana: an autobiography of Michael Somare* (Port Moresby, 1975)

I Kilage, *My Mother Calls Me Yaltep* (Port Moresby, Between 1975 and 1981)

J Abaijah, *A Thousand Coloured Dreams: The Story of a Young Girl growing up in Papua* (Melbourne, 1991)

P Matane, *To Serve With Love* (Mt Waverley, Victoria, 1992)

A Siaguru, *In-House in Papua New Guinea with Anthony Siaguru: The Great Game in PNG* (Canberra, 2001)

C Kidu, *A remarkable journey* (South Melbourne 2002)

#### *Samoa*

[Kolone] K Hancock, *Men of Mana: Portraits of three Pacific leaders: Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, Afioga Vas'ai Kolone, Sir Robert Rex* (Wellington: Steele Roberts, 2003)

M Telefoni Retzlaff, *To Thine Own Self Be True* (2006)

Tamasa'ilau Suaalii-Sauni... et al eds., *In search of fragrance: Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Ta'isi and the Samoan indigenous reference* (Samoa, 2009)

#### *Tonga*

H Luke, *Queen Salote and her Kingdom* (London, 1954)

K Bain, *The Friendly Islanders: A story of Queen Salote and her people* (London, 1967)

Amanaki Taulahi, *His Majesty King Taufa'ahau Tupou IV of the Kingdom of Tonga: A Biography* (Suva, 1979)

K Bain, *The new friendly islanders: the Tonga of King Taufa'ahau Tupou IV* (London, 1993)

E Wood-Ellem, *Queen Salote of Tonga: the story of an era, 1900-1965* (Auckland, 1999)

M Hixon, *Salote: queen of paradise* (Dunedin, 2000)

E Wood-Ellem, ed., *Songs and poems of Queen Salote* (Nuku'alofa, 2004)

*Vanuatu*

W Lini, *Beyond pandemonium: from the New Hebrides to Vanuatu* (Wellington 1980)

S J Regenvanu, *Laef blong mi: from village to nation: an autobiography* (Suva, Fiji: Institute of Pacific Studies; Port Vila, Vanuatu: University of the South Pacific, Emalus Campus, 2004)

*Cook Islands*

T Davis and L Davis, *Doctor to the Islands* (London, 1955)

K Hancock, *Sir Albert Henry, his life and times* (Auckland, 1979)

T Davis, Pa Tuterangi Ariki, *Island boy: an autobiography* (Suva, Christchurch, Auckland, 1992)

*Nuie*

[Rex] K Hancock, *Men of Mana: Portraits of three Pacific leaders: Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, Afioga Vas 'ai Kolone, Sir Robert Rex* (Wellington: Steele Roberts, 2003)

*Palau*

Donald R Shuster, *Roman Tmetuchl: A Palauan Visionary* (2002)

*New Caledonia*

H Fraser and J Trotter, eds., *Jean-Marie Tjibaou: Kanaky* (Canberra, 2005)

E Waddell, *Jean-Marie Tjibaou, Kanak witness to the world: an intellectual biography* (Honolulu, 2008)